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May 5th, 2021

A Promised Wilderness: Colonial Encounters and Landscape in the Late Medieval Baltic

A dissertation presented
by
Patrick Meehan
to
The Department of History
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in the subject of
History

Harvard University
Cambridge, Massachusetts
May 2021

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Dissertation Advisor: Daniel Lord Smail Patrick Meehan

A Promised Wilderness: Colonial Encounters and Landscape in the Late Medieval Baltic

Abstract

This dissertation explores the German colonization of northeastern Europe between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries, taking the Baltic region of Prussia as a case study. It focuses primarily on the Teutonic Order, a state-like crusading institution that extended its lordship over the region by the early fourteenth century. Historians have long framed the conquest and settlement of the medieval Baltic as an early attestation of European colonialism. Prussia's medieval archives were used through the end of the Second World War to furnish evidence for politically charged questions about race, settlement, and territoriality. Today, however, the Baltic is an understudied region among medievalists, let alone scholars of colonialism. I draw on interpretive frameworks from postcolonial studies, anthropology, and geography in order to approach this material in new ways. The result is a study at the intersection of colonial history, Indigenous history, and environmental history.

In its historical narratives and documentary records, the Teutonic Order articulated a distinctive version of a commonly held myth among settler societies: namely, that the colonization of Prussia's "wild" landscape and the violent subjection of its Indigenous population together constituted a scripturally sanctioned mandate to settle a new Christian Promised Land. I have summarized this myth as the idea of the "Promised Wilderness," which shapes the structure of the dissertation. Chapter two draws on three major historical chronicles of Prussia's conquest and colonization to argue that members of the Order internalized this discourse, imagining themselves—and the settlers under their lordship—as God's chosen people.

The remaining chapters turn from narrative texts to the archival record in order to explore how discourse informed the practices of administration and rule. Chapters three and four first consider survey procedures and the negotiation of property boundaries in the context of fourteenth-century settlement and land reform. Chapters five and six then move to the eastern "wilderness" frontier region that was contested by the Teutonic Order and its Lithuanian neighbors, focusing on a collection of navigational texts that Teutonic officials produced in collaboration with Indigenous Baltic and Slavic guides. Both within Prussia and at its peripheries, new forms of knowledge and power precipitated from the encounters among colonizers, settlers, Indigenous people, and the Baltic landscape itself.

As a whole, this dissertation offers a new approach to studying the epistemological and material structures of colonialism in a medieval society. It demonstrates how these medieval European structures can be understood not as points of origin for their modern counterparts, but as analogous forms that enrich and broaden our understanding of deeper patterns in the global history of colonialism.

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Abbreviations

GStA PK	Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin
OF	*Ordensfolianten*
OBA	*Ordensbriefarchiv*
OHG	Old High German
MHG	Middle High German
FNHG	Early New High German
NHG	New High German
SSRP	*Scriptores rerum prussicarum*
CDW	*Codex diplomaticus Warmiensis*

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through a text with him, and I have been constantly amazed and inspired by his uncanny ability to extract information from even the most limited evidence. I hope that I have done due diligence in applying the skills he has taught me. Jonathan Lyon has been a dependable and immensely generous mentor over the years, always quick to share his extensive knowledge on all things German, from twelfth-century chronicles to email etiquette. Although he became involved later in the project, his criticism has been invaluable in pushing me to refine my arguments and the language I use to make them. I am delighted to have had the opportunity to learn from Amy Remensnyder's characteristically learned and stimulating feedback on yet another thesis. I do not think she intended to set me on the esoteric path of becoming a medieval historian when she generously praised a paper that I wrote on conversion during my freshman year at Brown; yet here we are. It has been a particular joy to get to know her better as a scholar and as a friend over the years. Finally, I cannot begin to express how grateful I am to Dan Smail for his seemingly boundless generosity, wisdom, and brilliance. He expressed his faith in this project and in me when he sensed that I had lost my own; and he prodded me to work harder and think more attentively when he knew that I needed a nudge. As a scholar, he is a rigorously methodical thinker; I have tried to emulate his ability to maneuver smoothly across vastly diverse scales of analysis, sources of information, and bodies of literature. He shapes every page of this dissertation. He is also a wonderfully kind person and, along with Kathleen Smail, a most generous host.

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PREFACE: *REISEN*

Northeastern Europe usually lies somewhere along the edge of our imagined Middle Ages. Jogaila and Vytautas do not typically appear alongside Charlemagne, Barbarossa, or Basil II in our ideas of medieval empire. Crusaders sought to take back the Holy Land, where Jerusalem marked the center of the Christian world. We prefer to imagine the multifaith networks of merchants and pilgrims plying crystal Mediterranean waters, leaving rougher seas and chillier climes to the Vikings or the soberer German Hanse. Camelot seems more real to us than Marienburg, the massive red-brick castle in the southern Baltic land of Prussia (now Malbork, in Poland). Never mind that Western knights and nobles themselves spent exorbitant sums to journey to this exotic destination, from which they could participate in a "Prussian crusade," or, as they called it in the fourteenth century, a *Reise*. It is with my own (thoroughly peaceful, and rather less expensive) journey to Malbork that I would like to begin.[1]

[1] A note on names. Place names entail an especially vexing history in Northeastern Europe. Medieval German settlers themselves encountered a rich array of Baltic and Slavic toponyms, which they variably kept, replaced, or translated, all the while adding new German-named towns to the mix. Since then, these place names have repeatedly changed based on the priorities of whoever claimed power in the region, from early modern Polish and Prussian (that is to say, German) monarchs, to twentieth-century Nazis, Soviets, and post-Cold War states. I have endeavored to remain as close as possible to my sources (which are written in German and Latin) when describing both medieval place names and personal names in this dissertation. This is a matter of convenience and consistency, both for myself as a scholar, and for readers, who may wish to consult my sources. I am not motivated by any linguistic, political, or national preference. When referring to *modern* people and places, I have used whichever version is most common in English usage. Here, for example, I have referred to Jogaila (Jogiełło in Polish), Marienburg for the castle as it existed in the Middle Ages, and Malbork for the castle as I visited it in 2016.

When I was in the beginning stages of my research for this project, I decided to escape the archive where I was working in Berlin to take a short trip to Poland. I wanted to visit the place where so many of these documents had originated or passed through, and from which the Teutonic Order—a medieval crusading institution that conquered and colonized much of the Baltic during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries—had ruled its Prussian territories. And so I found myself on a train to Gdańsk, armed with six individual tickets to cover the journey there and back. When I settled into my seat, I was delighted to find that I would be sharing my compartment not with noisy teenagers or suits on half-apologetically muted business calls, but with four pleasantly proper older ladies and another woman around my age. Two of the women, it turned out, were Germans traveling together from somewhere near Stuttgart for a seaside sojourn on the Baltic coast; the second pair was a Polish woman traveling with her American daughter; and the fifth was another Polish woman who, it would turn out, lived in Germany but was on her way to visit family in Gdańsk.

As the journey went on, one of my travel companions became interested in finding out what on earth I was doing there. The three German-speakers listened politely as I attempted, in my sorry German, to explain the subject of my inchoate dissertation research on the Teutonic Order, and that I would be staying in Gdańsk. The German women nodded in some vague recognition of the subject, but the Polish woman from Gdańsk animatedly began to tell me (and, for that matter, the entire compartment) all about the *böse Ritter* who had conquered the city in the Middle Ages. These "wicked knights" had burned it and slaughtered many of the Polish inhabitants, she said as she excitedly put on her hat as a virtual tour guide. She then described a litany of sites to visit, punctuating facts about each with an exclamation: *Interessant, nicht?* When she reached the end of the tour (and we had, in fact, reached our destination), she parted with one final suggestion: "If

you need directions, or have questions, don't ask in German; ask in English." This piece of advice was, for the most part, a practical one—I was more likely to find English-speakers than German-speakers. But it also echoed the sentiment with which she had begun her narrative. It was wicked German knights who had once burned this city down. This was my first direct encounter with the vivid modern memory of a colonial history that, as I was beginning to discover, was more interesting and more complicated than its relegation to the peripheries of medieval studies seemed to imply.

In Gdańsk, I visited the sites she had suggested. I saw the "Artushof," where medieval knights and merchants would gather, and the shining "Neptune fountain" in front of it. I climbed the precarious stairs up the tower of St. Mary's Church. From here, I strained (in vain) to see the Lenin Shipyard, where the Solidarity movement had first gained momentum in the daring bid to overthrow Soviet rule. Histories of resistance and contested sovereignty, it seemed, were all around me. Then I took the train to Malbork.

Construction on the medieval castle of Marienburg began in the early 1280s, when the Teutonic Order had put down a sixth (and, it would turn out, final) Indigenous Prussian uprising against its lordship. At the time, the Order was still primarily based in the crusader city of Acre. When Acre fell to Mamluk forces in 1291, however, its officials moved briefly to Venice. Following the conquest of Danzig and the region of Pomerelia (eastern Pomerania) in 1309, which my travel companion had mentioned at the outset of her tour, the Order permanently relocated its headquarters to the sprawling fortress dedicated to its patroness, the Virgin Mary. Walking through Marienburg thus puts you face-to-face with each facet of Teutonic history. Its complex of walls was built to withstand the most brutal of sieges. You can visit the chancery—the heart of its administrative bureaucracy, and the hub of a sophisticated postal network that could deliver

Figure 1. An uncomfortable gargoyle points the way to the toilets in the Dansker tower at Marienburg (Malbork, Poland). Author Photo.

messages across the entirety of its Prussian holdings in a matter of days. Vast cellars stored the provisions it collected not only from the estates in its direct vicinity, but from all across the region. Nobles from all over Europe feasted in its multiple banquet halls as "guests" come to participate in a seasonal *Reise*: a winter banquet hall, complete with heating vents distributed along the floor; and a summer hall, where tall windows fill the space with sunlight, illuminating the chivalrous frescoes and sculpted verdure festooning its walls. Its chapels and chapter house point to the higher purpose of the operation, while a comically carved gargoyle points to the *Dansker* tower, where banqueters could find the public toilets (**Figure 1**). *Interessant, nicht?*

Figure 2. Capital detail from the infirmary at Marienburg, depicting a battle scene between the Teutonic Knights and the Prussians. The banner and shield are emblazoned with the Order's insignia, and were likely painted black and white. Author photo.

It is easy to get caught up in the grandeur of the Teutonic Order's castle. This was, after all, the point of it. Peering more closely at the details of a certain capital column, however, I was jolted back to my senses (**Figure 2**). What I found was a scene that I recognized as a common iconographic motif for depicting the battles of the thirteenth-century Prussian crusades. It was, in other words, an image of Christian knights slaughtering pagan Prussians. Once I realized this, I also realized that this same motif was all over the place. It announced to medieval visitors that Prussia was a hard-won prize. It also invited them to see their own *Reise* as an episode in this longer history of conquest. And finally, it reminded them that once they went back home, the Order was going to be keeping their lands safe from the tide of pagans beyond the frontier.

But what, I wondered, did this mean to those in the Order's service—mostly, but not exclusively, those lower-ranking laymen engaged in the manifold tasks of keeping the massive

Figure 3. Marienburg, from across the Nogat. Author photo.

castle running—who were, themselves, Prussian? Did they see their ancestors here? Or did they no longer identify with the barbaric pagans whose murder these stones memorialized?

Marienburg is located on the Nogat, a branch of the Vistula river typically understood to be the border between the lands of Pomerania to the west and Prussia to the east. So when you cross the Nogat to gaze on the fortress in its entirety, you are, in a sense, looking into the land of Prussia from its very western edge (**Figure 3**). Like the details carved into the column capital, this massively imposing structure makes an eminently clear statement of domination. The Teutonic Knights who built this castle ruled the land they had conquered. They provisioned it from the rivers, woods, and farms around it, and it served as a depot for the taxes paid by subjects across the region in recognition of their lordship. They had made this northern Wilderness into its Promised Land. Here, they gathered the fruits of its harvest.

Thinking on these things as I passed back through the castle grounds, I was struck at the irony of how some of the tour guides employed at Malbork were dressed in the black-crossed white pallium of the Teutonic Order. This symbol had not only once represented domination over

Indigenous Baltic people; it had also been repurposed in the early twentieth century to encode German imperial designs in Eastern Europe, either as a form of *völkisch* heroism or else as a new eruption of perennial German aggression. It was safe, I supposed, for the Polish tour guides to do this now. They had done much to restore the castle after World War II, and had largely incorporated it as a symbol of their own national heritage. These crusader-clad tour guides were no more proponents of violence than the children running around with fake swords. But what of the Indigenous Prussian people, whose assimilation into German settler society precluded them from this national reclamation of the pre-national medieval past? How strange would it have seemed to a Prussian in the early 1280s that these Christian conquerors would come to call *themselves*, by the early fifteenth century and for centuries afterwards, "Prussian"?

In this dissertation, I have begun to unpack questions like these by focusing on the colonial structures of settler society in Prussia, Northeastern Europe's "Promised Wilderness."

INTRODUCTION

I. Medieval Expansion and Modern Colonialism

Accounts of Europe's colonial heritage commonly begin with a well-known story. At the end of the fifteenth century, this story goes, Europe set sail. Across the sea it found exotic goods, strange peoples, and rich soil in which to plant roots on "new" continents. For its part, Europe brought new forms of life and death to foreign shores. Contact with Indigenous populations quickly gave way to conflict and exploitation, even as it prompted European thinkers to reconceptualize their definitions of humanity. So the little continent expanded across the globe, and the modern world took shape with the West self-assuredly, if rather ironically, at its center.

The postcolonial critiques that have dismantled this triumphalist Western story are also well known; and in a sense, this dissertation constitutes one such critique. Yet, even as the global history of colonialism has itself expanded to encompass a much richer body of people, places, and perspectives, the Middle Ages have typically figured as little more than a preface, however inclusive the telling. Colonialism did not just make the modern world, it would seem; it is itself an exclusively modern phenomenon. Some might admit, of course, that colonialism had been invented along more provincial Mediterranean shorelines, by Greeks and Romans with sweet tongues and sharper swords. Whatever had happened in the intervening millennium between Rome's fall and its enlightened restoration, however, belongs to an entirely different story. Even some prominent scholars of the Middle Ages have insisted that the medieval past remain at the

peripheries of colonial history. Gabrielle Spiegel, for one, has flatly denied the applicability of colonialism and postcolonial frameworks to the Middle Ages on the grounds of historical anachronism and the "indiscriminate melding of otherwise often incompatible theories drawn from a wide variety of available fields."[1] Most medievalists have generally obliged. (There is plenty to do, after all, with a millennium's worth of material.)[2]

Leaving aside, for a moment, this strained relationship between medieval Europe and the post-medieval world, any study of expansion must reckon more or less openly with the problem that any cohesive concept of "Europe" is itself unstable. Even geography cannot quite define it alone, if it can be defined at all.[3] Especially given the largely atomized nature of medieval societies and institutions, what does it mean to talk of medieval Europe, let alone its expansion? Robert Bartlett took this problem as the premise of his influential study of European expansion.[4] Bartlett developed a model to explain how a homogeneous Latin-Christian culture burst from its Carolingian shell in the tenth century, aggressively outgrowing its boundaries under demographic and social pressures until, by 1350, core and periphery blurred into the interconnected whole that we now call Europe. Bartlett schematized this process as the entangled enterprise of three principal

[1] Gabrielle Spiegel, "Épater les médiévistes," review of *The Shock of Medievalism*, by Kathleen Biddick, *History and Theory* 39, no. 2 (2000): 249. For two contemporary examples of studies suggesting that the Middle Ages *can* contribute meaningfully to postcolonial studies, cf. Kathleen Davis, "National Writing in the Ninth Century: A Reminder for Postcolonial Thinking about the Nation," *The Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 28 (1998): 611–37; Carolyn Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval: Sexualities and Communities, Pre- and Postmodern* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), esp. 15-19.

[2] For two especially thought-provoking essays on colonialism and the relationship between modernity and the medieval past, from the perspective of a historian and a literary scholar, see Carol Symes, "When We Talk about Modernity," *American Historical Review* 116, no. 3 (2011): 715–26; Nadia R. Altschul, "Postcolonialism and the Study of the Middle Ages," *History Compass* 6, no. 2 (2008): 588–606.

[3] Cf. Martin W. Lewis and Kären E. Wigen, *The Myth of Continents: A Critique of Metageography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

[4] Robert Bartlett, *The Making of Europe: Conquest, Colonization and Cultural Change, 950-1350* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993).

groups: churchmen, whose efforts to realize universal adherence to Latin Christian rites reflected the mission of an increasingly powerful papacy; aristocrats, whose aggressive pursuit of dynastic lordship found expression in castles, crusades, and cavalry charges; and peasants, whose hunger for rights and property motivated waves of migration to cultivate places previously unsettled, or else settled by the wrong people. Aristocratic conquests forcefully made way for the establishment of new bishoprics and monastic houses—ecclesiastical institutions that Bartlett understands as the structural base of a homogenized Latin Christian society. New lords, both secular and ecclesiastical, enticed knightly vassals with extensive fiefs, the working of which largely fell to immigrant peasants drawn by the promise of relatively expansive privileges, low rents, and future prosperity.

Colonization thus occupies a significant portion of Bartlett's attention, from the assarting of trees and brush for the clearance of new arable in the twelfth century to the mass cultivation and marketing of cereal crops to feed growing Western cities in the thirteenth. Bartlett's study is particularly notable for its deconstruction of settlement as a process borne out by extensive networks of people strung across and beyond the continent. With careful scrutiny of certain characteristic details (and, as critics have been quick to point out, the sagacious elision of others), it highlighted certain key features that new Christian settlements shared both within Europe's interior and at its otherwise distinct peripheries.[5] It is this replication of structural units according to a relatively homogeneous set of blueprints—a process he likens to cellular reproduction—that defines Bartlett's model of medieval colonialism.[6] It is also how he distinguishes medieval patterns

[5] For one prominent example of this critique, see Chris Wickham, "Making Europes," review of *The Making of Europe: Conquest, Colonization and Cultural Change 950-1350*, by Robert Bartlett, *New Left Review* 208 (1994), esp. 141-42.

[6] Bartlett, *The Making of Europe*, 5, 306.

of European expansion from modern ones.[7] Almost thirty years later, this distinction should give us pause. Without discounting the significance of Bartlett's choice to put medieval and modern colonialism in conversation at all, his narrow definition of the latter paradigm contrasts with his sweeping synthesis of the former. Moreover, the tenuous "connecting thread" with which he joins the two—whereby "the conquerors of Mexico knew the problem of the Mudejars; [and] the planters of Virginia had already been planters of Ireland"—hardly sustains the provocative assertion that "the mental habits and institutions of European racism and colonialism were born in the medieval world."[8]

Bartlett sees modern colonialism primarily through the lens of Immanuel Wallerstein's formulation of world-systems theory, in which a colonizing "core" subjugates its colonized "peripheries."[9] The result is an asymmetrical power relationship in which the exploited colonies are held at a clear and deliberately maintained disadvantage. His argument that medieval priests, aristocrats, merchants, and peasants conspired to produce copies of their homelands at Europe's edges, rather than to subjugate these edges as economically underdeveloped dependencies, thus stands as a counterpoint and an alternative. All the same, Bartlett admits his own inability to escape the gravity of core and periphery as analytic categories. This is not to say, of course, that he ignores asymmetrical power dynamics. Frontier encounters sparked new religious, racial, and linguistic

[7] Bartlett, 306–14.

[8] Bartlett, 313.

[9] Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System* (New York: Academic Press, 1974). Wallerstein's first chapter (pp. 14-65) is indeed titled "Medieval Prelude." World-systems theories hold, more generally, that multifarious inter-regional relations—not nations or states—should constitute the subjects of globally oriented social sciences. Cf. Janet Abu-Lughod's theory that the ascendancy of the West after the thirteenth century occurred not by some special set of European traits, but because of the concomitant "fall" in China, to which Europe was connected by through extensive trade networks: Janet L. Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony: The World System A.D. 1250-1350* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

tensions, such that processes of homogenization ironically catalyzed the deepening of differences—a long-recognized characteristic of high medieval society, especially from the thirteenth century.[10] In contrast to R.I. Moore's thesis that medieval states sanctioned violence against defined outgroups in order to reinforce the unity of new, dominant notions of community and power (his "persecuting society"), however, Bartlett's model is decisively more horizontal, de-emphasizing the "political masterminding" of the new monarchies.[11] Instead, social tensions appear to be inherent in the blueprints themselves. These tensions replicated, moreover, not through the designs of monarchs and their agents, but as a scattered and autochthonous product of local power relations. So even as Bartlett expresses suspicion of universalizing clerical motives and condemns the rapacious impulses of the knightly aristocracy, his distinction of medieval colonialism from the excesses of its modern descendants unintentionally reinforces a paradigm that deems the Middle Ages less relevant *because* its peoples are less evidently responsible for the glaring disparities of the twentieth- and twenty-first-century world. Herein lies one principal advantage (*pace* Spiegel) of drawing on colonial historiography and postcolonial theory: not only do they offer frameworks for understanding medieval societies in new ways, but they also serve, as literary scholar Nadia Altschul has observed, as "a go-between which can communicate the relevance of the Middle Ages in the language of current intellectual capital."[12]

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[10] Nora Berend, *At the Gate of Christendom: Jews, Muslims, and "Pagans" in Medieval Hungary, c. 1000-c. 1300* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001); David Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence: Persecution of Minorities in the Middle Ages* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996). For a different take on medieval religious alterity, which studies Jewishness and anti-Jewishness as Christian constructs rather than focusing on Jews themselves as historical actors, see Sara Lipton, *Dark Mirror: The Medieval Origins of Anti-Jewish Iconography* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2014).

[11] R. I. Moore, *The Formation of a Persecuting Society: Power and Deviance in Western Europe, 950-1250* (New York: Blackwell, 1987); Bartlett, *The Making of Europe*, 309.

[12] Altschul, "Postcolonialism and the Study of the Middle Ages," 594. The reception of Geraldine Heng's recent work on medieval concepts of race illustrates Altschul's point, although Heng engages more with critical race theory than

I do not assess the value or relevance of this dissertation's medieval subject—namely, the thirteenth- and fourteenth-century colonization of the Baltic—based on ethical criteria. My aim is not to argue that colonialism in the Middle Ages operated through power dynamics that were better or worse, more or less exploitative than the imperialism of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Western states that postcolonial critics have fixed under their condemnatory gaze. This is not to say that the discussion of medieval colonialism does not raise issues of ethics or social justice; it does. It is impossible to read of Christian crusaders' revelry in the murder of Baltic pagans or to examine the charters of Western settlers without seeing the reflection of Indigenous populations massacred, displaced, or otherwise transformed at the command of modern empires. But it is nonetheless imperative to investigate the medieval past on its own terms, as historians like Bartlett have done.

My objective in this introduction is to outline my approach to the history of the medieval Baltic as a history of colonialism. It begins with a survey of the long German historiography on the Teutonic Order and the lands beyond the Vistula. From at least the eighteenth century until the mid-twentieth century, German historians understood this as a colonial history, although they did not always agree on what this meant. Zooming out from this regional focus, we will then turn to the broader scholarship on medieval frontiers, focusing in particular on the curious affinity between the frameworks of the American Western historiography and the study of Europe's peripheries. The vivid spectrum of encounters that medievalists have brought to light in these kinetic zones of contact and conflict will lead us into the world of postcolonial scholars, who have developed nuanced theories for thinking through the entanglement of colonizers with Indigenous

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postcolonial theory: Geraldine Heng, *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018), esp. 15-24.

people and the lands they inhabit. I will conclude with a discussion of the particularities of settler-colonial societies, focusing on the utility of landscape as an interpretive framework for seeing Teutonic Prussia both on a global and diachronic scale and as something distinctively medieval.

II. *Ostsiedlung*, *Ostforschung*, *Deutschorden*: the Teutonic Order in Eastern Europe

Wicked Knights: Early Teutonic Historiography

To understand the late medieval Baltic, it is important to recognize, first, that the idea that it carries a colonial history is hardly new.[13] When my travel companion on the train to Gdańsk referred to the "wicked knights" of the Teutonic Order, she did not mean it as an anti-German epithet. But whether she meant to or not, she was drawing on a deeply embedded discourse in which Germans stand as the persistent (and ever repelled) aggressors against Slavic and Baltic sovereignty. Take, for example, the 1938 film *Alexander Nevsky*, in which Soviet director Sergei Eisenstein's dramatized the conflict between the Teutonic Knights and the city of Novgorod during the early 1240s. Beginning with the crusaders' vicious sack of the city of Pskov, the film heroizes the resistance of the eponymous Prince Alexander and his army of Novgorod's common people against the aggressive designs of the Knights. It culminates with the defeat of the invaders on the frozen surface of Lake Peipus (Chudskoe) and the recapture of Pskov, freezing the advance of the would-be conquerors and holding their survivors for ransom. The timely political messaging of the film is hardly subtle: Russia's resilient people (and severe landscape) could resist any onslaught

[13] A number of comprehensive surveys of the Teutonic Order's post-medieval historiography are available in both English and German. I draw here especially on Hartmut Boockmann, *Ostpreußen und Westpreußen*, Deutsche Geschichte im Osten Europas (Berlin: Siedler, 1992), 27–74; Michael Burleigh, "The Knights, Nationalists, and the Historians: Images of Medieval Prussia from the Enlightenment until 1945," *European History Quarterly* 17 (1987): 35–55; Michael Burleigh, *Germany Turns Eastwards: A Study of Ostforschung in the Third Reich* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988); Sven Ekdahl, "Crusades and Colonisation in the Baltic: A Historiographic Analysis," *Rocznik Instytutu Polsko-Skandynawskiego* XIX (2004): 1–42.

of Teutonic invaders, against all odds. These villainous Knights are likewise subject to politicized caricature—arrogant, bloodthirsty, fanatical, and German.[14]

Eisenstein was not the only influential figure to popularize the conflict-laden medieval history of the Teutonic Order as a venue for dramatizing the nationalist and racialized conflicts raging in Eastern Europe from the late nineteenth century through the Second World War.[15] *The Teutonic Knights*, a similarly anti-German novel by the Polish writer Henryk Sienkiewicz originally serialized between 1897 and 1900 (on the heels of his work set in Nero's Rome, *Quo Vadis*), retained enormous popularity even after the war.[16] More than twenty editions were published between the end of World War II and 1960, when its film adaptation by Aleksander Ford attracted millions of Polish viewers. Historical fiction about the Knights also captivated popular imagination in the German world, although the genre's popularity did not linger in the postwar years as readily as it did in Poland. In novels, paintings, film, and politics, the Knights were regularly conjured as champions of German racial superiority whose civilizing influence on Slavic and Baltic populations amply excused the aggression of Eastern conquests.

German attitudes towards the Knights were not always so positive, however. The Lutheran historians of eighteenth-century Prussia tended to eye the Knights with the suspicion they reserved for all Catholic crusaders from Jerusalem to the Baltic and on to the New World. Johann Gottfried Herder, for one, likened the forced conversion and violently imposed lordship of German

[14] The history of the film's circulation reflects the sensitivity of its political messaging. It disappeared from Soviet and Western screens in 1939, following the signing of a pact of non-aggression between Hitler and Stalin, but quickly reappeared following the Nazi invasion of Russia in 1941.

[15] For an overview of Polish attitudes towards the Knights, see Jerzy Sereczyk, "Die Wandlungen des Bildes vom Deutschen Orden als politischer, ideologischer und gesellschaftlicher Faktor im polnischen Identitätsbewußtsein des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts," in *Vergangenheit und Gegenwart der Ritterorden: die Rezeption der Idee und die Wirklichkeit*, ed. Roman Czaja and Zenon Hubert Nowak (Toruń: Uniwersytet Mikołaja Kopernika, 2001), 55–64.

[16] Burleigh, "Images of Medieval Prussia," 35–37.

conquerors in Prussia to the atrocities of Spanish conquistadors. Herder subscribed to a viewpoint common among Enlightenment thinkers, that history unfolded through a sequence of developmental stages, each of which was no more or less valuable than another. Without denying that Europeans were more advanced along this development track than the peoples they conquered (whether Prussian, Mongol, or Cherokee), Herder and his likeminded contemporaries expressed sympathy for the loss of epochal diversity that their extermination or cultural assimilation entailed.[17] Writing shortly after Herder, Ludwig von Baczko and August von Kotzebue echoed his distaste for Catholic conquests. Baczko accused the Order of murdering the majority of Prussia's native population, and Kotzebue mourned the decimation and enslavement of courageous populations not only in Prussia under the fist of the Order, but in the New World at the hands of Pizarro and Cortès.[18]

By prioritizing the moralizing agenda of their Enlightened ethos over any serious source criticism, Herder and his fellow Prussian historians produced works that projected generously imagined narratives of the medieval past from their sources, or—as Eisenstein and others would do nearly a century and a half later—fictionalized them altogether. Writing in the wake of the French Revolution, Johann Nikolaus Becker married biting political commentary with the Enlightenment sentimentality of Herder in his salacious reappraisal of Winrich von Kniprode's tenure as Grandmaster (r. 1351-1382), which he claimed to derive from a newly discovered

[17] Johann Gottfried Herder, *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit* (Karlsruhe: C.G. Schmieder, 1790); Burleigh, "Images of Medieval Prussia," 37–38.

[18] Ekdahl, "Crusades and Colonisation in the Baltic," 12; August von Kotzebue, *Preußens ältere Geschichte*, 4 vols. (Riga: Carl Johann Gottfried Hartmann, 1808). Ludwig von Baczko, *Geschichte Preußens*, 6 vols. (Königsberg: Gottlieb Leberecht Hartung, 1792-1800).

chronicle penned by the famous Grandmaster's chaplain.[19] That Becker's secret history of Kniprode was a complete fiction did not prevent its widespread acceptance as a legitimate work of scholarship that influenced both Kotzebue and Baczko. Kotzebue, in turn, flourished as a premier dramatist and satirist. His theatrical denunciation of liberal nationalist ideas ultimately ended in his demise, spurring an outraged theology student to murder him in 1819.

Medieval Prussia and the German Nation, 1800-1945

The reputation of the Teutonic Order among German intellectuals came under revision in the nineteenth century, as sources for its study became more readily available as a project of national interest. Following the French Revolution, states across Europe reevaluated their relationship with the administrative documents they possessed. The value of records dated before 1500 no longer hinged on their administrative utility, but on the information they held for the empirical study of the past. Newly granted access to archives such as Königsberg's not only allowed individual scholars to study original sources first-hand, but also inspired the foundation of research institutions like the *Monumenta Germaniae Historica* (MGH), often complete with an academic press. Although dedicated to the collection, critical study, and publication of medieval records, such enterprises facilitated scholarly pursuits not purely for their own sake, but in service of grander political objectives, which took on increasingly nationalist overtones. Card-carrying members of the MGH, for example, believed their endeavor would evidence the greatness and extent of the German empire during the Middle Ages.[20] Once-condemnatory views of the Teutonic

[19] Boockmann, *Ostpreußen und Westpreußen*, 34–35; Johann Nikolaus Becker, *Versuch einer Geschichte der Hochmeister in Preußen seit Winrichs von Kniprode bis auf die Gründung des Erbherzogtums* (Berlin: C.G. Schöne, 1798).

[20] Herbert Grundmann, *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, 1819-1969* (Munich: Monumenta Germaniae Historica, 1969), 1–4; Boockmann, *Ostpreußen und Westpreußen*, 35; Carla Heelan, "Origin and Antitype: Medievalism in Nineteenth-Century Germany, 1806-1914" (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2016), 16–17, 60–62.

Order accordingly softened in the glow of romanticized nationalism. Teutonic castles, once emblems of oppression, became symbols of the fatherland; and the Order itself acquired a new identity as a heroic German institution that spearheaded a critical chapter in national history, unfettered by the monarchism of other Western powers.[21]

New methods of historical source criticism could thus come into uneasy tension with both the moralizing vision of Herder, on the one hand, and the sensationalizing approach of Becker on the other. They found expression in Johannes Voigt, director of the archive in Königsberg and a professor of medieval history at the university, who positioned his self-avowedly neutral interpretation of Teutonic sources as a replacement of his polarized predecessors'.[22] Where his predecessors had held that the past and its actors were subject to their own (Enlightened) judgment, Voigt generally refrained from such moralizing. He did not seek to redeem the reputations of his medieval subjects; but he did believe that they should not be held to modern ethical standards. In his monumental *History of Prussia*, published in nine volumes between 1827 and 1839, Voigt openly articulated a determination to judge the Order solely in accordance with the archival sources that bore closest witness to their actions.[23] His evaluation of the Order was, as a result, mixed. Whatever sensitivity he admitted to the plight of Prussia's native peoples, he eschewed the sentimentalism of historians like Herder, refusing to demonize the Order as a horde of fanatics. At the same time, he refrained from heroizing figures like Winrich von Kniprode, recognizing that their accomplishments—though impressive—came at high human cost.

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[21] Boockmann, *Ostpreußen und Westpreußen*, 36–41.

[22] Boockmann, 39–41.

[23] Johannes Voigt, *Geschichte Preußens: von den ältesten Zeiten bis zum Untergange der Herrschaft des Deutschen Ordens*, 9 vols. (Königsberg: Gebrüder Bornträger, 1827).

Although Voigt's prolific work represented a new benchmark in the historiography of Prussia and the Teutonic Order, the divergence of his practiced neutrality from the nationalist agendas of his contemporaries lessened its influence. Before 1860, in any case, his subjects remained largely peripheral to medieval German history as it was being formulated by its chief practitioners. Prussia and the Order fell, for example, outside the purview of the MGH, whose interest lay chiefly in the collection of documents witnessing the apogee of German imperial power in the early and high Middle Ages. Instead, Prussian scholars took up the task of assembling the contents of regional archives in edited series, beginning in 1861 with the first volume of the *Scriptores rerum prussicarum* (SSRP), which focused on key narrative texts like Peter of Dusburg's fourteenth-century *Chronicon terrae Prussiae*, its near-contemporary German verse translation by Nicolaus von Jeroschin, and various shorter annals.[24] Twenty years later came the first collection to apply the principles of Mabillon and the Maurists to the editing of Prussia's documentary record, published as the first volume of the *Preußisches Urkundenbuch*.[25] But although the curation of Prussia's medieval history in edited sourcebooks remained a largely regional occupation through the 1850s, political shifts in Central and Eastern Europe made way for Prussia's entrée into the more mainstream world of German intellectuals. Of particular importance was the gradual diminishment of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth that had begun in the previous century—ideologically, as the chaos of its constitution (Frederick I famously opined that the kingdom was "caught in eternal anarchy"), conservatism of its clergy, and

[24] Discussion of these key works will follow in chapter one, pp. 99-103.

[25] Rudolf Phillippi and Carl Peter Wölky, eds., *Preußisches Urkundenbuch*, vol. 1 (Königsberg: Hartungsche Verlagsbruderei, 1882).

opportunism of its aristocracy became the object of continental ridicule; and territorially, as land-hungry neighbors conspired in its piecemeal annexation to feed their growing empires.[26]

As the Prussian state grew increasingly convinced of the legitimacy of such cultural imperialism against its inferior Slavic neighbors, its medieval past became subject for reappraisal. German nationalists seized the opportunity to project their ideas onto a medieval canvas, projecting a totalizing perspective that excused, if not exalted, the colonial violence of the Teutonic Order as the price for bearing civilization to a resistantly barbaric East: not just the migration of people, but the transmission of *Kultur*, both by the swords of the Order and the ploughs of the *Volk*. This settlement of the East (*Ostsiedlung*) thus represented an alternative mode of imperialism to the dynastic power of German kings and emperors, who grew weaker as their western neighbors grew stronger. In contrast to the tenuous power notionally held over a fractious empire, the Order could be portrayed not only as the champion of German *Kultur* in the East, but as the forebear of the political entity that would survive—first as ducal territory, then as a kingdom—under the rule of the Protestant Hohenzollern from the secularization of the Knights in 1525 through the unification of Germany in 1871. At a time when Napoleon's conquests brought a cloud of uncertainty to the future of the Prussian state, the bureaucrat and historian Barthold Niebuhr [24-25], for example, sought stability in its medieval past.[27] Niebuhr remarked that the Teutonic Knights' conquests had purified the region through violence, replacing its Indigenous people with a "pure German" (*reindeutsch*) population and clearing the way for the rise of a German state.[28]

[26] Burleigh, "Images of Medieval Prussia," 38.

[27] Heelan, "Origin and Antitype," 24–25.

[28] Heelan, 33–34.

By far the most influential proponent of this nationalist historiography was Heinrich von Treitschke, whose 1862 essay, "Das deutsche Ordensland Preußen," set the tone of politically engaged German scholarship for nearly a century: "No other text," Hartmut Boockmann asserted, "has shaped the imagination of Prussia's medieval history for the length of an entire century as this one has."[29] Treitschke diverged sharply from Voigt's measured intent to craft historical narrative from the thorough investigation of historical sources and to evaluate past actors by their own contemporary standards. Not only did he apply a new set of nationalist norms to the judgment of the past, openly reveling in the Order's spilling of foreign blood; he also drew heavily on the work of Becker, which Voigt had long discredited. The German people, he believed, were the rightful inheritors of the East, and the pillars of German civilization—the sword, heavy plough, and stone architecture—should be seen as great gifts to the soft, benighted Slavs. Treitschke's series of prestigious university posts offered a convenient podium to garner public esteem for his decidedly unscholarly work. Almost completely deaf, he mesmerized audiences with a roaring voice that triggered tears from his faulty ducts: a spectacle that channeled the emotional intensity of his polemic. Thus, through a strange constellation of academic connections, physical handicaps, and fashionable political sympathies, Treitschke singlehandedly vaulted the Teutonic Order to a place of prominence in the emerging historiography of the German nation. Lacking the scholarly scruples of Voigt or the provincial Prussian historians building on his legacy (like the editors of SSRP), Treitschke forged a neat chain linking the medieval past to the present day by eliding seven centuries into a narrative of territorial continuity. The Hohenzollern state of Prussia, his essay asserted, had its roots in the colonial enterprise of the Teutonic Knights. Armed with a medieval

[29] *Ostpreußen und Westpreußen*, 41–44, here 41; Heinrich von Treitschke, "Das deutsche Ordensland Preußen," *Preußische Jahrbücher* 10 (1862): 95–152.

past, the Prussian state could more confidently claim both its territorial rights in the East and its cultural continuity with the West. The hard work of preparing the way for German civilization had, in fact, already been done.[30]

Treitschke recast the history of the Order as the history of Prussia, and so of Germany. His melodramatic approach to its historiography, moreover, identified the Order as a subject of popular interest. Alongside new literary and academic societies, with their own museums, institutes, and presses, various non-academic publications began to push the relevance of Prussia's medieval history further outside learned circles. Brochures, magazines, newspapers, dramatizations, songs, and poems vaunted the crusaders as German heroes, while visual arts and urban monuments inscribed their romanticized images into public consciousness. The unification of Germany in 1871 as a reforged empire only intensified interest in Prussia's medieval history, which populist groups rehashed as a precedent for nationalist, and increasingly racist, agendas. Among these were women's groups (*Frauenvereine*) that sought to realize ideals of racial superiority through the grooming of "modern women" to fulfill patriotic roles as virtuous wives and mothers in overseas colonies, where German men risked racial pollution through their exposure to wanton foreign women. Käthe Schirmacher, the founder of one such women's league and a prolific propagandist, drew on Treitschke in a section of her 1923 tract, *Unsere Ostmark*, in which she claimed that the Teutonic Knights, along with their austere female settler companions, had undertaken the perennially righteous task of shielding the West from a Slavic "flood."[31] Her obsessive dehumanization of Slavs (Poles, in particular) and "semi-Slavs," along with her taste for graphic

[30] Burleigh, "Images of Medieval Prussia," 40–43.

[31] Burleigh, 45; Käthe Schirmacher, *Unsere Ostmark: eine Studie* (Hannover: E. Letsch, 1923).

violence (like evisceration), exemplify the Order's malleability as a historical reference for the racist project of German imperialism in Europe and abroad.

The political resonance of Teutonic historiography influenced its professional scholarly practice as well, in alternate tension and cooperation with the critical methods spearheaded by institutions like the MGH. On the one hand, most influential historians recognized the disciplinary standards that Treitschke and his populist disciples flouted. On the other, the disastrous impact of the Treaty of Versailles across all aspects of life in the Weimar years spurred even the most stolid scholars to join the politicians' call for the restoration of German dignity, to which the rise of Bolshevism and the resurgence of Poland posed an existential threat.[32] Scholarly and political interests intersected most notably in the assertion that the extensive territory forcibly ceded to Poland after the First World War was rightfully German, whether by nature or by labor. To support their rival claims about the nature and location of historic boundaries, both German and Polish scholars turned feverishly to the verification or falsification of medieval documents—inquiries ripe for conflict, given the problematic nature of the Order's scattered thirteenth-century record.[33] Patterns of colonization, settlement, and demography likewise attracted newfound academic interest. In dialectic tension, historians on each side of the German-Polish border developed intricate methods for estimating population sizes and tracking the movement of peoples across Eastern Europe, which naturally entailed vexing questions about the composition of various ethnic groups, regional law codes, and local agrarian economies.[34] Archaeologists like Gustav Kossinna

[32] Udo Arnold, "Der Deutsche Orden im deutschen Bewußtsein des 20. Jh.," in *Vergangenheit und Gegenwart der Ritterorden. Die Rezeption der Idee und die Wirklichkeit*, ed. Roman Czaja and Zenon Hubert Nowak (Toruń: Uniwersytet Mikołaja Kopernika, 2001), 42.

[33] Boockmann, *Ostpreußen und Westpreußen*, 48–54.

[34] Erich Keyser, for example, emphasized biological difference as the basis of racial supremacy theories and thus promoted the study of eastern peoples' biological composition in "Die Erforschung der Bevölkerungsgeschichte des deutschen Ostens," in *Deutsche Ostforschung: Ergebnisse und Aufgaben seit dem ersten Weltkrieg*, ed. Hermann

also joined the discussion with new methods of "Settlement Archaeology," by which they (falsely) claimed that certain material forms, such as Corded Ware pottery, could serve as a proxy for mapping German cultural roots.[35] Since the distribution of Corded Ware across Eastern Europe indicated, by this faulty logic, the historic roots of the German people beyond the Eastern frontier, German nationalists were quick to champion it. However sincere or superficial their sympathy with nationalist politics, German scholars consequently became ensnared in a delicate political web of their own making when the Nazi party assumed dictatorial power in 1933. Their complex entanglements with contemporary politics permanently tainted the legacy of their work, and of Teutonic historiography as a whole.[36]

The Nazis, for their part, readily adopted the propagandistic potential of the Order's mythos and symbols. In *Mein Kampf*, Hitler himself rehashed the widespread belief that territory belonging rightfully to Germany would have to be reclaimed from the Soviet Union and from Poland, citing the Teutonic Order's colonization of the East as a legitimizing and inspirational historical precedent for contemporary action.[37] Hitler saw the Knights as merciless, principled warriors wholly dedicated to their mission of Germanizing Eastern Europe, and so found in them an already popular archetype for the ideal Nazi soldier. In the mid-1930s, for example, he had so-called *Ordensburgen* constructed as training centers for young party members that would foster a sense of community akin to the martial fraternity imagined to have bound the Teutonic brothers, whose

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Aubin, Otto Brunner, and Johannes Papritz (Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1942), 90–104. See Burleigh, *Germany Turns Eastwards*, 239–41; Ekdahl, "Crusades and Colonisation in the Baltic," 16.

[35] David Reich, *Who We Are and How We Got Here: Ancient DNA and the New Science of the Human Past* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2018), 109–14.

[36] Burleigh, *Germany Turns Eastwards*, 155–249; Boockmann, *Ostpreußen und Westpreußen*, 54–59.

[37] Burleigh, "Images of Medieval Prussia," 46.

Catholic monastic vows were conveniently retrofitted to suit the Nazis' own ideals of ascetic manhood in service of the state.[38] Romanticized, nationalized images of the Knights became a recurrent theme in Nazi propaganda. In 1934, Alfred Rosenberg, the Nazi ideologue in charge of the party's newspaper, used the castle of Marienburg as a spectacular stage for a speech in which he urged the nation to apply the principles of the Teutonic Knights (that is to say, the principles of the Nazi party) to the present. Here he drew on the familiar image of the Order as a bulwark against the barbaric East and heroizing the Order's first Grandmaster, Hermann von Salza, as a visionary *Führer* dedicated to the extension of German *Lebensraum*. The almost identical design of the *Mutterkreuz* (a prestigious medal awarded to mothers of four or more children) to the *Deutschordenskreuz* (a powerful emblem of the Teutonic Order) likewise illustrates the Nazis' strange cooption of the medieval religious order, building on nearly a century's accretion of historiographically sanctioned affinities between the Order and nationalist ideologies of racial purity, natural selection, and the sanctity of German "Blood and Soil" (*Blut und Boden*).[39]

The End of the German East, 1945-1989

At the end of the Second World War, a new political map radically redefined the nature of East and West in Europe, with a divided Germany at its center. Like their German counterparts in earlier decades, Polish historians turned to the later medieval history of northeastern Europe to justify Poland's acquisition of new territory, including East Prussia. Poles had been here first, they argued, pushing the origins of a Polish feudal state to the sixth century, and framing the period of medieval German colonization as an aberrant (but necessary) stage in the region's development—a timeline

[38] Arnold, "Der Deutsche Orden im deutschen Bewußtsein des 20. Jahrhundert," 43–44.

[39] Boockmann, *Ostpreußen und Westpreußen*, 58.

suited, more or less, to the Marxist views that shaped Polish universities with increasing insistence throughout the 1940s and 50s. As the continuing popularity of historical novels like Henryk Sienkiewicz's *Teutonic Knights* attests, however, socialist patriotism was not enough to curb Polish nationalism, which retained a degree of fiercely anti-German sentiment. Inasmuch as Poles were proven to be the region's rightful inhabitants, Germans were its perennial invaders—a pattern that recent history illustrated with particular horror.[40] For the first time in centuries, Polish nationalists could again revel in the defeat of the Knights at Tannenberg/Grunwald in 1410 as a shining moment of triumph over German imperialism.[41]

German nationalism likewise relinquished its grip over academic *Ostforschung* only gradually. In East Germany, scholarship on the Order and Prussia virtually disappeared because it was no longer relevant to the totalizing ideological goals of the communist DDR. It continued in the West German republic, however, where the government exerted far less pressure on universities. An odd generational gap resulted in West Germany, since many of the foremost senior scholars had spent the majority of their careers as accessories to (or, at least, in measured obeisance to) nationalist regimes. The newly founded Herder-Rat Institut in Marburg, for example, assembled scholars to collaborate in the multidisciplinary advancement of *Ostforschung* along lines engrained thirty years earlier, even if it openly repudiated the nationalist agendas formulated in the shadow of the Versailles Treaty. Hartmut Boockmann has suggested that leading historians like Hermann Aubin and Walter Hubatsch proposed expanding the geographic and chronological scope of *Ostforschung* as a way of craftily rebranding a traditional nationalist story about Germany

[40] Boockmann, 67–69.

[41] Sven Ekdahl, "Tannenberg/Grunwald: ein politisches Symbol in Deutschland und Polen," *Journal of Baltic Studies* 22 (1991): 271–324.

as a "European" narrative with Germany at its center. Their influence persisted as late as 1963, when the historian Walter Schlesinger presented a paper at a Herder-Rat conference arguing that Aubin's program of research at the institute allowed the toxic persistence of old ways. The institute ultimately blocked the publication of Schlesinger's critique, its censorship revealing that the end of the war had not effected a complete break with the past after all.[42]

It was only from the mid-1960s that a new generation of scholars succeeded in departing more radically from traditional *Ostforschung* frameworks. Unlike their post-war contemporaries, the revisionist historians of the 60s and 70s refused to whitewash the racist, jingoist associations that the Order had accrued since the early nineteenth century. This did not entail the Order's banishment as a subject of scholarly interest. On the contrary, it recognized that the foundation for a new, supranational historiography must include an unequivocal repudiation of Nazism—a stance that, in turn, necessitated a moral condemnation of the Teutonic Order as an oppressive institution representative neither of modern Germans nor modern Catholics.[43] The new historians also saw the political and methodological importance of closer relationships with Polish colleagues, since the pursuit of new research agendas would require not only the rejection of national narratives on each side of the border, but also dialogue among experts and mutual access to archives (both of which became much more feasible as stabler border laws came into effect in 1970). From each extreme—the Order's defenders and its critics—emerged a more neutral historiography that intentionally depoliticized its inquiries, if never quite fully. Much work, for example, went into the highly technical reassessment of the Order's administrative and institutional structures, from

[42] Boockmann, *Ostpreußen und Westpreußen*, 70–73.

[43] Ekdahl, "Crusades and Colonisation in the Baltic," 23.

their origins in the Holy Land to their development across Europe.[44] Studies reassessing law codes and social groups in Prussia and Livonia, moreover, recognized northeastern Europe's diversity independent of the tethers of national teleologies.[45] New economic histories (no doubt channeling the capitalist triumphalism of European free trade) departed from the rural agrarian focus that had once constituted the basis both of *Strukturgeschichtliche* settlement studies and of Marxist history, turning attention to the circulation of wealth through the Order's political economy and through extensive networks of merchants plying their trade all across Europe.[46]

In fact, as the twilight and dissolution of the USSR again radically reconfigured the geopolitics of East and West in the 1980s and 90s, *Ostforschung* and Teutonic historiography embraced the history of the East not as an essentialist narrative of Germans and Slavs, but as a broader European story—a perspective that the Herder-Rat Institut had rather insincerely proposed decades earlier.[47] The Teutonic Order was not a uniquely German institution so much as it was one iteration of a European crusading phenomenon; the territory under its administration was not a uniquely German state, but a diverse, multiethnic society with strong political, economic, and

[44] See, for example, Gerard Labuda, "Die Urkunden über die Anfänge des Deutschen Ordens im Kulmerland und in Preußen in den Jahren 1226-1235," in *Die Geistlichen Ritterorden Europas*, ed. Josef Fleckenstein (Sigmaringen: Thorbecke, 1980), 299–316; Gerard Labuda, "Über die angeblichen und vermuteten Fälschungen des Deutschen Ordens in Preußen," in *Fälschungen im Mittelalter: internationaler Kongress der Monumenta Germaniae Historica, München, 16.-19. September 1986*, ed. Monumenta Germaniae Historica, vol. 4, 6 vols., Schriften der Monumenta Germaniae Historica 33 (Hannover: Hahnsche Buchhandlung, 1988), 499–522.

[45] Guido Kisch, *Studien zur Rechts- und Sozialgeschichte des Deutschordenslandes* (Sigmaringen: J. Thorbecke, 1973); Reinhard Wenskus, "Der Deutsche Orden und die nichtdeutsche Bevölkerung des Preußenlandes mit besonderer Berücksichtigung der Siedlung," in *Ausgewählte Aufsätze zum frühen und preußischen Mittelalter: Festgabe zu seinem siebzigsten Geburtstag*, ed. Hans Patze (Sigmaringen: J. Thorbecke, 1986), 353–74. Wenskus's important study has also been translated into English: Reinhard Wenskus, "The Teutonic Order and the Non-German Population of Prussia," in *The North-Eastern Frontiers of Medieval Europe*, ed. Alan V. Murray, trans. Martina Häcker (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2014), 307–27.

[46] See, for example, the contributions of eleven prominent historians from a 1996 conference on this theme in Zenon Hubert Nowak, ed., *Die preußischen Hansestädte und ihre Stellung im Nord- und Ostseeraum des Mittelalters* (Toruń: Uniwersytet Mikołaja Kopernika, 1998).

[47] Burleigh, *Germany Turns Eastwards*, 314–17; Boockmann, *Ostpreußen und Westpreußen*, 71–74.

cultural ties across Western and Eastern Europe. To be sure, former Soviet republics like the Baltic states of Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia found a venue in medieval historiography to express their newfound identities as nations freed once more from foreign occupation. In Germany, however, the collapse of the Berlin Wall forced scholars to reevaluate the "East" as a meaningful category. The reunification of Germany and the dissolution of the USSR rendered the term *Ostdeutschland* obsolete in a world where such an "East Germany" no longer existed—whether as the communist DDR, as the eastern reaches of a German empire, or as the territory of a Prussian state stretching from Berlin to Königsberg. Continuing to use the term *Ostdeutschland* was, consequently, anachronistic. It could also be dangerous: to claim that cities in other countries belonged to *Ostdeutschland* would carry (intentionally or not) the political message that modern boundaries were subject to change. Reflecting on the problem in his survey of Prussian history, Hartmut Boockmann problematized the invocation of *Ostdeutschland* as an insidious form of historical denial:

> [The term] hides the fact that there is no longer an East Germany by inventing a new East Germany in contradiction to geography and in contradiction to history. Even if the term "East Germany" were meant without historical reference, it nonetheless unavoidably encompasses a historical sense, expresses a historical statement, and normalizes this statement. It hides the catastrophes of the more recent German past.[48]

The simultaneous dissolution and union of East and West thus opened up new directions for the medieval historiography of Prussia and the Teutonic Order, and scholarship of the last thirty years has accordingly diversified. At the same time, relinquishing the sense of cultural affinity with the former German East and intentionally diminishing its historical relevance to modern Germany has

[48] "Sie verdeckt, daß es Ostdeutschland nicht mehr gibt, indem sie ein neues Ostdeutschland erfindet—gegen die Geographie und gegen die Geschichte. Auch wenn das Wort Ostdeutschland ohne historischen Bezug gemeint ist, umschließt es doch unvermeidlich einen historischen Sinn, macht es eine historische Aussage, und diese Aussage harmonisiert. Sie verdeckt die Katasrophen der jüngeren deutschen Vergangenheit." Boockmann, *Ostpreußen und Westpreußen*, 14.

once again relegated it to a less prominent place in Germany, both in the academy and in popular imagination.

Stewardship of the Order's memory and monuments in Prussia has largely passed, instead, to Poland. As we noted in our virtual tour of Mary's red-brick fortress at the beginning of this chapter, Malbork's exhibits recognize its German origins, but present the castle as an emblem of national heritage and resilience—a prize that had been conquered, lost, reacquired, and at last painstakingly restored. Without condoning the appropriation of the Order or its castles as a national symbol on either side of the Oder-Neisse border, it is nonetheless hard to imagine a more effective means of repudiating the racialized German triumphalism that Treitschke proselytized a century and a half ago. At the same time, we should take Boockmann's timely warning to heart that in forgetting the more recent past, the complexities of the more distant past might likewise fall into the curated amnesia of another national narrative.

III. Beyond the "Frontier"

Throughout the tortuous German-language historiography of the Teutonic Order and the East, one assumption remained constant until the mid-twentieth century: the conquest, settlement, and occupation of parts of Eastern Europe jointly constituted a form of German colonialism rooted in the Middle Ages and extending to the present. For the Enlightenment scholars of the eighteenth century, the violence that bloodstained Catholic crusaders perpetrated against innocent non-Christian peoples demanded total condemnation. For the nationalist historians of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the migration of Western settlers into the Teutonic Order's newly conquered territory began to fulfill a racialized prophecy of German superiority that fueled modern imperialism. Despite their differences, scholars at each interpretive pole shared a

general vocabulary that called medieval knights, clerics, and settlers *colonists*, and their activities in Northeastern Europe, *colonization*.

Walter Schlesinger was one of the first postwar historians to question the suitability of colonial terminology to the study of Eastern Europe. Six years before the Herder-Rat Institut in Marburg refused to publish his essay criticizing its outmoded research agenda, Schlesinger had written an article arguing that the vocabulary of colonialism had outgrown its initially innocuous usage in German scholarship.[49] Schlesinger (whose experience on the Eastern front from 1940-1945 had instilled in him a particular loathing for German imperialism) was reacting, in part, to the triumphalist associations the terminology had acquired under the Weimar and Nazi governments. Eastern expansionism (*die Ostbewegung*, *der Zug nach dem Osten*) had revealed itself not as an achievement of the Middle Ages, but as a stop along the long, tragic path (*Irrweg*) to the atrocities of the twentieth century, by way of Luther, Frederick the Great, Bismarck, and Hitler.[50] Here Schlesinger evoked a tradition in which German scholars understood their history to follow a distinctively ill-fated and difficult-to-explain path (*Sonderweg*) from other Western nations.[51] Its historiographic result, in this case, was that "colonialism"—a term once more or less synonymous with the process of settlement—was now unavoidably charged with nationalist socialist pretensions. Eastern neighbors would, and should, take offense to the use of such a term,

[49] Walter Schlesinger, "Die geschichtliche Stellung der mittelalterlichen deutschen Ostbewegung," *Historische Zeitschrift* 183 (1957): 517–42.

[50] "Oder ist etwa der 'Zug nach dem Osten,' von dem Karl Hampe 1920 als von der 'kolonisatorischen Großtat der des deutschen Volkes im Mittelalter' sprach, ein Irrweg der deutschen Geschichte gewesen…jenem konstruierten Irrweg vergleichbar, der angeblich von Luther über Friedrich den Großen und Bismarck zu Adolf Hitler führte? Begann das Unrecht nicht erst im 20., sondern bereits im 10. Jahrhundert oder noch früher?" Schlesinger, 519.

[51] David Blackbourn and Geoff Eley, *The Peculiarities of German History: Bourgeois Society and Politics in Nineteenth-Century Germany* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984).

which not only implied subordination to Western powers generally, but had also took on pejorative meanings in more local contexts.[52]

Schlesinger's call to divest from the language of colonialism was not limited to its twentieth-century political dimensions. He also argued that, as an analytical framework, it did not fit the more technical particularities of the region's medieval history. German settlement in the East meant neither the occupation of empty land nor the eradication or complete disenfranchisement of Indigenous peoples, which Schlesinger identified as primary traits of European colonialism. Medieval migrations instead precipitated a blending of diverse social and economic forms throughout East-Central Europe. It is worth pausing to consider the implications of this distinction. Although an avowed iconoclast bent on stirring up the turgid waters of German *Ostforschung*, Schlesinger did not exaggerate his rejection of nationalist ideology by minimizing or ignoring the impact of German customs on the East. Adopting German law, for example, induced profound transformations in *Lebensform*, because the particular legal, economic, and political configuration of a settlement as outlined in German law entailed an accordingly particular configuration of social relations.[53] Historians working in an older tradition of settlement history, such as Walter Kuhn, made much the same argument as the fundamental basis of *Strukturgeschichte*: settlement patterns—reconstructed from the quantitative and qualitative details transmitted in the archival and archaeological record—serve as recoverable proxies for

[52] Schlesinger uses an example from Czech, citing the pejorative sense given to the word "Kolonist" by Tomáš Masaryk, the first president of Czechoslovakia. Schlesinger, "Die geschichtliche Stellung der mittelalterlichen deutschen Ostbewegung," 520.

[53] Schlesinger, 533.

extrapolating social historical analyses.[54] Schlesinger's interpretation of the medieval past again reflected his contemporary political sensibilities. His article ends with the lamentation that Germany's wars had robbed Europe of its center, which had emerged out of the mass migrations of the Middle Ages. Where once there had been bustling crossroads connecting Eastern and Western Europe now stood a wall dividing Europe and "running straight through the middle of Germany."[55]

Schlesinger's identification of Germany's historical place as Europe's center thus continued to ascribe significance to German migrations, but he emphasized that this movement was neither inevitable nor unidirectional. Western customs were not imposed by foreign conquerors. Instead, he observed, they arose as the organic precipitate of a diffuse mixture of feudal lords and local elites of varying German, Slavic, and Baltic backgrounds.[56] Eastern Europeans, especially in regions like Bohemia and Poland where state structures developed independently of Western influence, were not the passive recipients of Western civilization.[57] In sum, Schlesinger argued that because Eastern and Central Europe lacked a dependent relationship on the West, the medieval *Ostsiedlung* consequently failed to resemble the colonialism of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. "A balanced analysis will only be possible," he concluded,

[54] For a collection of Kuhn's work on this subject, see Walter Kuhn, *Vergleichende Untersuchungen zur mittelalterlichen Ostsiedlung* (Cologne: Böhlau, 1973). On Kuhn's nationalist interests, especially in his youth during the 1920s, see Burleigh, *Germany Turns Eastwards*, 105–8.

[55] Schlesinger, "Die geschichtliche Stellung der mittelalterlichen deutschen Ostbewegung," 542.

[56] In contrast to the similar model that Bartlett would propose for the "making of Europe," Schlesinger (pp. 521-22) asserted that the role of the church had been overestimated.

[57] Schlesinger, "Die geschichtliche Stellung der mittelalterlichen deutschen Ostbewegung," 532–33.

"once we consider the eastward movement of Germans in relation to the westward movement of Slavs and place the medieval *Ostsiedlung* within this more fitting framework."[58]

As we have seen, historians like Bartlett, Gabrielle Spiegel, and Sven Ekdahl echoed Schlesinger's formulation in the 1990s and early 2000s, even as they used different language by adapting Wallerstein's core-periphery model or invoking new critical theories. Their verdict has largely stuck: a colonial lens will produce a distorted vision of medieval Europe, they warn, because medieval Europeans lacked the means to orchestrate the exploitation of foreign lands with expediency or scale of post-medieval empires.[59] Medieval Europeans, in other words, were not modern Europeans. Again we encounter the rather circular problem with which we began: we can never speak of *medieval* colonialism, so long as our definitions of colonialism remain limited to modernity.

Six years after Schlesinger urged his colleagues to abandon colonialism as a framework for medieval history, the geographer Hans Mortensen published a curious three-page essay in the *Zeitschrift für Ostforschung* suggesting an alternative direction for future scholarship.[60] Reflecting on the decades of research he and his wife Gertrud, a historian who worked both independently and in collaboration with her husband, had undertaken into the "extent, composition, and physical appearance of the medieval wilderness in the northeastern region of Central Europe," Mortensen suggested that these lost medieval landscapes were startlingly comparable to the "primeval

[58] "Man wird überhaupt zu einem gerecht abgewogenen Urteil nur dann kommen können, wenn man die deutsche Ostbewegung im Zusammenhange mit der slawischen Westbewegung betrachtet und die mittelaterliche Ostsiedlung in diesen Rahmen sinnvoll einordnet." Schlesinger, 522.

[59] Ekdahl, "Crusades and Colonisation in the Baltic," 9–10.

[60] Hans Mortensen, "Zum Landschaftsbild des mittelalterlichen Urwaldes im nordöstlichen Mitteleuropa," *Zeitschrift für Ostforschung* 12 (1963): 97–99.

temperate forests of North and South America and Siberia."[61] He explained that this connection had recently come to life through his coincidental encounter with a nineteenth-century woodcut in a history of the railroads, which depicted a prospecting party cutting through the deep woods of the American West (**Figure 4**). Juxtaposing the image with a verse composed by the fourteenth-century crusader Peter Suchenwirt describing a crusading expedition's journey through the treacherously swampy woodlands of Lithuania, Mortensen concluded that:

> The text of Peter Suchenwirt's poem and T. Hildebrand's [woodcut] image correspond perfectly, despite the intervening period of over 500 years; taken together, they offer an exceptional model for how we must imagine the primeval forests of northeastern Europe during the Middle Ages and what meaning that its 'wilderness'…must have had in war and in peace.[62]

Mortensen's comparison of the medieval "wilderness" to the American West primarily operates on two levels. Most directly, it draws a parallel between the temperate forest landscapes in each region. The Mortensens' fascination with the geography of northeastern Europe stemmed from its medieval German nomenclature as the "Wilderness" (*wildnis*), or "Great Wilderness" (*große wildnis*). Hans Mortensen in particular seems to have been convinced that there was something in the topography of this "wilderness" that not only shaped human behavior (some of his work suggests a sort of ecological determinism), but that also emanated a distinctive cultural aura. Thus, the second, subtler parallel here between the American pioneer and the German crusader. Although Mortensen took care to avoid too direct a comparison, the implication is clear: if northeastern Europe was Germany's analog of the American West, the crusader was its frontiersman.

[61] Mortensen, 97–98. For a more detailed discussion of Hans and Gertrud Mortensen's work, especially on the Wilderness of northeastern Europe, see chapter five.

[62] Mortensen, 99.

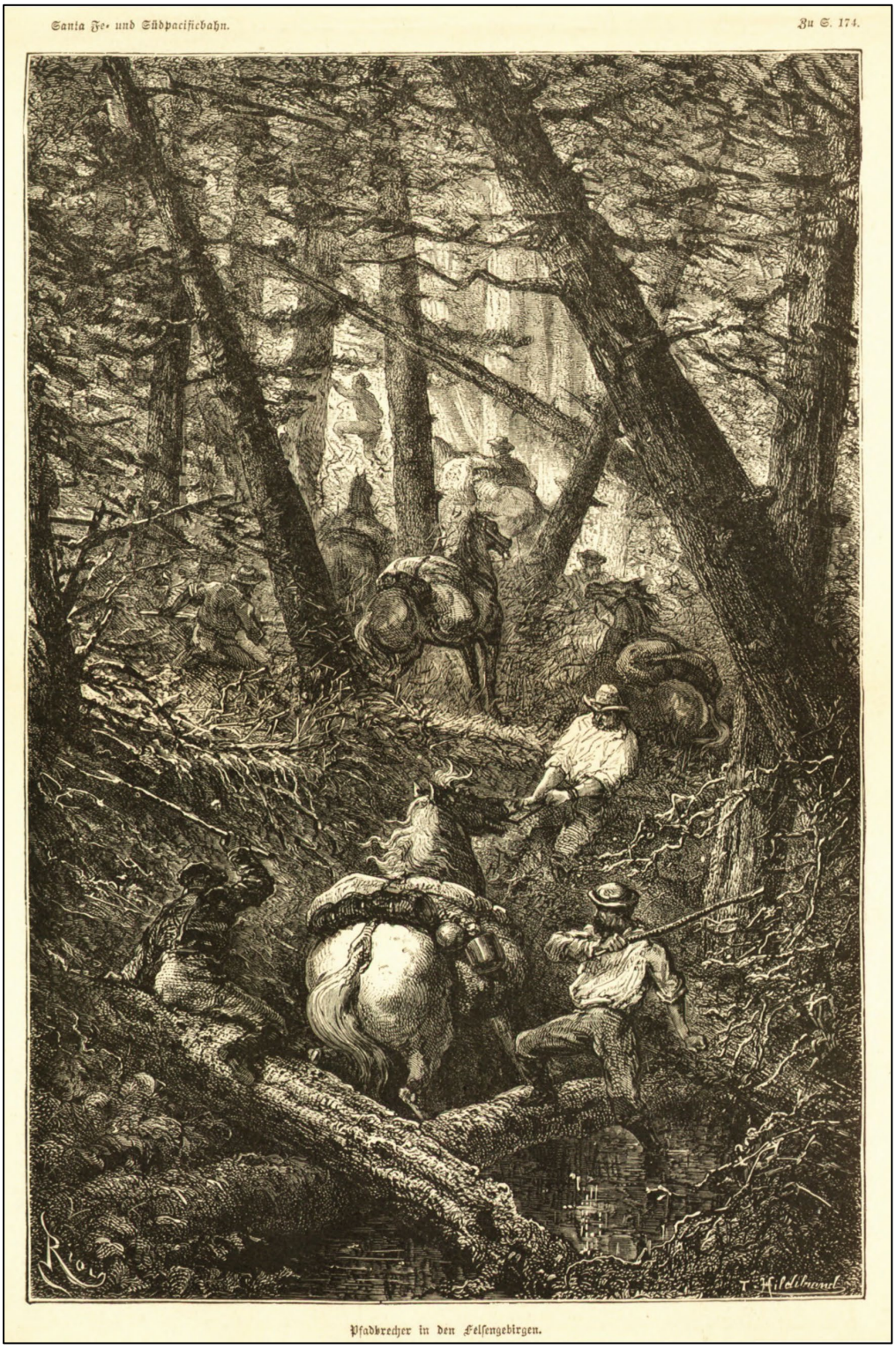

Figure 4. A prospecting party. In another German scholar's Romanticized rendering of the American West, geographer Hans Mortesen saw the Wilderness landscape of the Eastern Baltic. Woodcut by T. Hildebrand in Robert von Schlagintweit, Die Santa Fe- und Südpacificbahn in Nordamerika (Cologne: E. H. Mayer, 1884), plate accompanying p. 174.

Even if Mortensen had at any point held sincere Nazi sympathies (possible, but by no means certain), it is doubtful that he meant to impart an overly nationalistic message in his essay.[63] Both he and his wife had earned a reputation in their respective fields as meticulous researchers with an unsurpassed command of the archival sources and scholarly literature on settlement (in Polish as well as German), on which their two-volume collaboration remains authoritative, albeit not uncontroversial.[64] Still, even this most comprehensive work betrays, at times, a curious preoccupation with the quasi-spiritual connection between settlers and the land. They argued, for example, that the most crucial precondition for the Indigenous adoption of German law was the "ground-" or "place-based psychology" (*bodengebundenes Denken*) underlying it; whereas native Prussians conceptualized wealth as a product of people, for Germans it was a product of land. The transition from one legal template to another thus entailed not only the reorganization of local economies, but a deeper cognitive transformation.[65]

Given his conviction that human psychology and the physical landscape were so entwined, it is not surprising that Mortensen felt a certain kinship with the pioneer mythos of the American West—a common, if not unironic, sentiment among German scholars even before the end of the war, as David Blackbourn has shown.[66] The American historian Frederick Jackson Turner had

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[63] The Mortensens' work was driven, at least in part, by the national conviction that Germany had territorial rights beyond the Memel. See Burleigh, *Germany Turns Eastwards*, 128–31, 248. Cf. Bernhart Jähnig's more sympathetic suggestion that the Mortensens were caught between the politically charged nature of their scholarly pursuits and the ideological demands of a Nazified publication sector: "Litauische Einwanderung nach Preußen im 16. Jahrhundert. Ein Bericht zum 'dritten Band' von Hans und Gertrud Mortensen," in *Zur Siedlungs-, Bevölkerungs- und Kirchengeschichte Preußens*, ed. Udo Arnold (Lüneburg: Institut Nordostdeutsches Kulturwerk, 1999), 75–95.

[64] Hans Mortensen and Gertrud Mortensen, *Die Besiedlung des nordöstlichen Ostpreußens bis zum Beginn des 17. Jahrhunderts*, 2 vols. (Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1937).

[65] "Dieses an den Boden und nicht an den Menschen gebundene Denken war zwar nicht die einzige, aber sicher die wichtigste Voraussetzung der Durchführung des deutschen Rechtes." Mortensen and Mortensen, 73.

[66] David Blackbourn, *The Conquest of Nature: Water, Landscape, and the Making of Modern Germany* (New York: Norton, 2006), 293–309.

articulated this connection as the foundation of his paradigmatic theory of the Western frontier, which Mortensen was undoubtedly drawing on.[67] For Turner, the supposed wide-openness of the West fostered a spirit of self-reliant optimism that he took to be the defining characteristic of American history. The Western frontier had served as an outlet, he claimed, for a hydraulic drive to expand outwards. Dammed up, the expansionist tide could endanger the established lands east of the Mississippi. But released to the frontier and beyond in a flood of pioneer settlement, transforming the West and nourishing the bodies and souls of the whole country. What is striking is that Mortensen appears to have been unaware that five years before he wrote his reflection on the landscape of Europe's *Eastern* frontier, an American medievalist, Archibald Lewis, had published his own application of Turner's frontier thesis to thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Europe. Observing that "Western Europe followed an almost classical frontier development" after the year 1000, Lewis argued that an entire spectrum of late medieval developments, from Gothic cathedrals and romance literature to centralized governments and emancipated serfs, proceeded from the engine of outward expansion that defines frontier societies.[68] The closing of the medieval frontier by 1350, conversely, precipitated the deep and widespread crises that Lewis held to be characteristic of the late Middle Ages. Mortensen and Lewis were both drawn to the Turnerian frontier as a diachronic framework for understanding the history of medieval expansion. Mortensen, for his part, carried on a long legacy in German scholarship, popular literature, and nationalist discourse in which the pioneer represented a recurring historical type, whose patterns

[67] Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," in *The Frontier in American History* (New York: H. Holt & Co., 1920), 1–38.

[68] Archibald Ross Lewis, "The Closing of the Medieval Frontier, 1250-1350" Speculum, no. 33 (1958): 475. Lewis was inspired by Walter Prescott Webb's own application of frontier theory to Western European history from 1500 onwards, in which he argued that the closing of the Western frontier—broadly understood—in 1900, after a four-century boom introduced new stresses to modern institutions. See Walter Prescott Webb, *The Great Frontier* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1952).

of thought and action derived from heroized (or, at least, exoticized) encounters both with the "wild" frontier landscape and, more or less explicitly, with the wild people who dwelt there.[69] For Lewis, on the other hand, Turner's theory of the distinctive frontier society explained the large-scale ebb and flow of creative energy during the high and later Middle Ages, which produced such great achievements in the eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth centuries (when Europe's frontiers were open) before flatlining by the fourteenth (once the frontier had closed).

Concepts of the frontier have retained a place of prominence in medieval studies.[70] Discussions about medieval frontiers have typically taken two forms, typically independent of one another.[71] The first type focuses on the formation of political boundaries, especially those of states. As the above survey of German *Ostforschung* amply demonstrates, defining the borders of medieval political entities has been attributed direct relevance to the drawing and redrawing of modern geopolitical maps, particularly under the nationalist governments of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Scholars of more recent decades, in contrast, have emphasized the imprecision, fluidity, or outright absence of medieval political boundaries as a hallmark of medieval Europe—a "world without edges," distinct from the hardened territoriality of early

[69] On the German fascination with the American West from Turner's first formulation of his frontier thesis in 1893 to the end of the Second World War, see Blackbourn, *The Conquest of Nature: Water, Landscape, and the Making of Modern Germany*, 293–303.

[70] For one useful overview of the influence of American historiography on medieval frontier concepts, see Andrzej Janeczek, "Frontiers and Borderlands in Medieval Europe: Introductory Remarks," in *Frontiers and Borderlands*, ed. Andrzej Janeczek (Warsaw: Fundacja Centrum Badań Historycznych, 2011), 5–14. For an overview of the frontier question from an American historian's perspective, see William L. Urban, "The Frontier Thesis and the Baltic Crusade," in *Crusade and Conversion on the Baltic Frontier*, ed. Alan V. Murray (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2001), 45–71.

[71] Nora Berend, "Preface," in *Medieval Frontiers: Concepts and Practices*, ed. David Abulafia and Nora Berend (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2002), X–XV.

modern states.[72] A second, different type of discussion relates to the distinctive societies that arise at the interstices of cultural, rather than political, zones. Scholarship on capaciously defined "cultural" or "human" frontiers thus retains something of a Turnerian spirit, even as it generally purports to reject the imperialist pretensions of his frontier theory, embracing instead the paradigms of multiculturalism and hybridity popularized in the 1990s and early 2000s. Not unlike the Mortensens, these historians emphasized the special nature of cultural frontiers as liminal spaces, where "the encounters between different cultures and religions"—and, we might add, places—"altered the mental horizons of those who were involved, and of those who read reports of these encounters."[73] In a seminal volume on the subject, David Abulafia has suggested that the frontier should be understood "not simply as a place but as a set of attitudes, conditions and relationships: neighbouring societies which retained differences in customs, language, and ethnic identity, sometimes interacting closely with one another, sometimes failing to do so, for reasons which are often hard to explain."[74] Abulafia's capacious definition encapsulates the irony of the frontier's methodological utility across time and space: it is, namely, the frontier's *resistance* to ontological precision that lends it its characteristic plasticity as a category of historical analysis.

Nora Berend has identified a different, although related, reason for the frontier's longevity in medieval historiography, even after historians of the American West have widely adopted new

[72] David Abulafia, "Introduction: Seven Types of Ambiguity, c.1100- c.1500," in *Medieval Frontiers: Concepts and Practices*, ed. David Abulafia and Nora Berend (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2002), 11; Daniel Power and Naomi Standen, eds., *Frontiers in Question: Eurasian Borderlands, 700-1700* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999).

[73] Abulafia, "Seven Types of Ambiguity," 2002, 24. For a range of studies on encounters with medieval landscapes, see John Howe and Michael Wolfe, eds., *Inventing Medieval Landscapes: Senses of Place in Western Europe* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2002).

[74] Abulafia, "Seven Types of Ambiguity," 2002, 34.

paradigms for studying cross-cultural encounters.[75] As physical spaces and as cultural thresholds, medieval frontiers very often primarily represent religious difference, especially the divisions between Christians and non-Christians. Implicit here, Berend argues, is the idea that "Christians" constitute a coherent social group inhabiting the physically analogous space of "Christendom."[76] This concept of a spiritually and territorially unified assembly of the faithful is itself medieval, moreover: deeply rooted in the ecclesiastical theories of Late Antique theology; specially formulated to assert the universalist worldview of twelfth- and thirteenth-century popes; and repurposed in the rhetorical flourishes of enterprising monarchs intent on proclaiming themselves the protectors of Christendom's frontiers. The identification of Europe with Christendom, and thus of European frontiers as embattled Christian frontiers, became deeply embedded in the political imagination of states like Hungary, Poland, and Spain, and ultimately resurfaced in the nationalist movements of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Eastern European states like Hungary and Poland, for example, explained that their weaker economies and unstable political structures had arisen from their efforts to defend the ungrateful West. Recycling the rhetoric of medieval kings like Béla IV of Hungary, they asserted that if had they allowed Mongol, Ottoman, or Moorish invaders through the "gate of Christendom," Europe would have been overrun.[77]

[75] One especially significant critique is Patricia Nelson Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West* (New York: Norton, 1987). An influential Indigenous model for reframing American Western history beyond problematic progress narratives has been Pekka Hämäläinen, *The Comanche Empire* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008). For one effort "to disentangle frontiers from borderlands to rescue the virtues of each construct" at a critical moment in the field, Jeremy Adelman and Stephen Aron, "From Borderlands to Borders: Empires, Nation-States, and the Peoples in between in North American History," *The American Historical Review* 104 (1999): 814–41.

[76] Nora Berend, "Frontiers of Christendom: The Endurance of Medieval and Modern Constructs," in *Das Sein der Dauer*, ed. Andreas Speer and David Wirmer (New York: De Gruyter, 2008), 27–40.

[77] Berend, *At the Gate of Christendom*, 163–71.

Given the centrality of religion to the frontier paradigm in medieval studies, it is no surprise that the xenophobic fallout from the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 prompted scholars to emphasize the cultural pluralism of medieval frontiers all the more prominently.[78] As citizens and leaders in both Europe and the United States mobilized the rhetoric of crusade in calls to defend against Muslim invasion, the associated concepts of medieval expansion and Christian universalism revealed themselves as deeply entrenched elements in a teleological narrative of Western dominance. The seemingly inescapable gravity of this narrative underlies the insistence of historians like Bartlett that medieval colonialism (insofar as it existed at all) differed fundamentally from the colonialism of modernity. A colonial framework would only seem to validate the impolitic implications of Europe's expansion (or "making"): namely, that Western Europe shaped the world in its image, beginning (and perhaps ending, from the standpoint of the early 90s) with Eastern Europe, whose historical agency appears contingent on its capacity to act like the West, independently of the West. Objections that Bartlett misrepresented local particularities or misconstrued them to fit his totalizing model seem to mask a deeper anxiety: how can we speak of "Europe" or "Christendom" at all, when the ghosts of nationalism and the demons of exceptionalism crowd so thickly?[79]

Yet even as medieval historians have chipped away at studies like Bartlett's, few would deny the reality that Europe, as a cultural, economic, and territorial entity, rapidly expanded in the later Middle Ages at the expense of peoples identified as its others—usually, but not always, along religious lines. Bartlett himself, for example, adopted the core-periphery model from world-

[78] On the discourses of holy war and martyrdom that proliferated after the attacks and during the ensuing American war in Iraq, see Philippe Buc, *Holy War, Martyrdom, and Terror: Christianity, Violence, and the West* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 11–12, 45–66.

[79] David Abulafia, for example, has criticized Bartlett's application of Northern European patterns to the Mediterranean in "Seven Types of Ambiguity," 2002, 2.

systems theory to describe the exportation of cultural patterns out from the Carolingian kernel of West-Central Europe, even as he fretted over the applicability of core-periphery power dynamics to European settlement patterns. And, building on the traditions of Mediterranean history as well as crusades history, Abulafia has framed his research on the Canary Islands as a case study for the exportation of medieval methods of colonization to the early modern Atlantic.[80] The crux of the issue, then, is that the paradigms of expansion and frontiers are really just periphrastic ways of talking about colonialism. Moreover, the historiographic roots of these frameworks are anything but neutral. I do not mean to diminish the critical contributions that historians like Berend have made to advancing our understanding of the complex contact zones along medieval Europe's cultural and political fault lines. Nor do I wish to advocate for the eradication of terms like "expansion" or "frontier" from our conceptual vocabulary; I use them myself throughout this dissertation. My point is that they are perhaps more heuristically useful than analytically incisive. If we are already talking about colonialism, why not avail ourselves more readily of the rich interpretive opportunities of postcolonial scholarship, rather than clinging to rickety neo-Turnerian frameworks?

The methodological goal of this study is, accordingly, to disengage from this historiographic gridlock through a fundamental shift away from seeing colonialism as a modern Western narrative, to seeing it as a system that patterns human encounters in distinctive, historically situated ways. I see this dissertation on Teutonic Prussia, in other words, not as an early episode in the narrative of the West, but rather as an early case study, based on the rich *textual*

[80] David Abulafia, "Neolithic Meets Medieval: First Encounters in the Canary Islands," in *Medieval Frontiers: Concepts and Practices*, ed. David Abulafia and Nora Berend (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2002), 255–78; Charles Verlinden, *The Beginnings of Modern Colonization: Eleven Essays with an Introduction* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1970); Giles Constable, "The Historiography of the Crusades," in *The Crusades from the Perspective of Byzantium and the Muslim World*, ed. Angeliki Laiou and Roy Mottahedeh (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2001), 1–22.

evidence produced by the Teutonic Order as a state-like entity, that expands our large-scale understanding of human encounters with foreign people and landscapes, as well as the particular systems of knowledge and asymmetries of power that these encounters precipitated. It is for this reason that I have chosen, for the purposes of this dissertation, not to compare Prussia *directly* to other medieval frontier regions like Hungary and Iberia—an approach that studies like Bartlett's have already proven productive. Instead, I compare it *analogically* to colonial contexts outside Europe and outside the Middle Ages, drawing on anthropological and postcolonial frameworks in order to contribute to a broader discussion in which medieval Europe has long been underrepresented.

IV. Framing Colonial Encounters in the Medieval Baltic

Dismantling the European Progress Narrative

Medieval historians' own resistance to talking about colonialism permits a developmental narrative that enshrines the uniqueness of modernity, which it takes for granted as a stable and coherent analytical category. In asserting what the Middle Ages were *not*, in other words, historians of both modernity and premodernity conspire in affirming what modernity *is*. The result is the continued conceptual subordination of medieval history as an underdeveloped (and thus less valuable) prop to the full-fledged history of modernity. As Carol Symes has put it, "to take on the role of medievalist is consequently—and all unwillingly—to become a minor colonial official whose job depends on maintaining the subaltern status of the population under scrutiny."[81] The Middle Ages and medieval people, in other words, are themselves the subjects of a recursive

[81] Symes, "When We Talk about Modernity," 717. On the idea of the Middle Ages itself as a colony, cf. John Dagenais and Margaret Rich Greer, "Decolonizing the Middle Ages: Introduction," in "Decolonizing the Middle Ages," ed. John Dagenais and Margaret Rich Greer, special issue, *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 3 (2000): 431–48.

colonial metanarrative that equates modernity with progress.[82] Frederick Cooper has similarly observed that even the postcolonial critique of modernity has insidiously wrought the preservation of a "Europe-centered narrative of progress…as a defining characteristic of European history to which all others must respond."[83]

Although surveying the field of German *Ostforschung* reveals that progress narratives about the medieval Western settlement of Eastern Europe stretch back at least to the mid-nineteenth century, the fixation on modernity-as-progress in more recent historiography emerged from mid-century theories about the "modernization" of newly sovereign non-Western states. Social scientists of the 1950s and 1960s looked on with interest as the overseas empires of European powers fitfully disintegrated. They afforded particular attention to supposedly backwards regions like Sub-Saharan Africa, where they observed newly established governments' "adaptation" of urban, industrial structures identified as Western. This transition from "tribal traditions" to "modern statehood" thus entailed a number of related developments, "from subsistence to market economies, from subject to participant political culture, from ascriptive status systems to achievement status systems, from extended to nuclear kinship, from religious to secular ideology."[84] Since these features constituted a coherent "package" at each pole of the developmental binary, one change should signify the co-occurrence of another. Advocates of modernization (both as a sociological theory and an administrative agenda) shared the patronizing

[82] Daniel Lord Smail, "In the Grip of Sacred History," *The American Historical Review* 110, no. 5 (December 2005): 1337–61; Paul Freedman and Gabrielle Spiegel, "Medievalisms Old and New: The Rediscovery of Alterity in North American Medieval Studies," *The American Historical Review* 103 (1998): 677–704; Altschul, "Postcolonialism and the Study of the Middle Ages."

[83] Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 6.

[84] Cooper, 38–40, here 40.

belief that Western modernity would allow nascent governments to achieve self-determination, absent the guidance of their former colonizers. On the other hand, outspoken critics like Aimé Césaire and Frantz Fanon asserted that it promised not liberation but continued subjection.[85] Common to both approaches, however, was the assumption that a cortège of Manichean binaries—core/periphery, colonizer/subject, active/passive, and so on—existed as fundamental structures of colonialism.[86]

This assumption became all the more entrenched in the 1970s as historians and economists further abstracted colonial structures from their historical particularities. They turned increasingly to Marxian theories about the disempowering alienation of producers from the means of production as a functionalist explanation that economic forces underlay the actions of capitalist colonial powers.[87] This idea—that asymmetrical economic relationships underlay the structures of modern colonialism—has thus problematized the application of postcolonial frameworks to the study of Eastern settlement in particular, and to the study of the Middle Ages more generally. We have already seen this articulated in the critiques of Schlesinger and Spiegel. Schlesinger, on the one hand, rejected the implication that Eastern Europe, if it had been colonized by Westerners, had somehow lost the capacity to determine its own history—that it was, instead, merely dependent on a more developed Western Europe. To call the settlement of Eastern Europe colonial was to risk perpetuating German nationalist discourses. From Spiegel's perspective, on the other hand, to

[85] Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, trans. Joan Pinkham (New York: MR, 1972); Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1968); Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Grove Press, 1967).

[86] Cooper, *Colonialism in Question*, 40–42; Michael Dietler, *Archaeologies of Colonialism: Consumption, Entanglement, and Violence in Ancient Mediterranean France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 48–50.

[87] Cooper, *Colonialism in Question*, 44–45.

speak of any form of medieval colonialism is to risk anachronism. Postcolonial theories derive from the study of modern colonialism, and thus cannot apply to a pre-national, pre-capitalist world.[88]

Edward Said's field-defining work on Orientalism only deepened the binarism inherent to modernization theory, even as it turned away from economic determinism to hegemonic cultural discourses.[89] Said argued that Western European discourses on the "Orient" did not reflect the actual historical coloniality of the Middle East, but rather constituted a negative, othering projection of the West itself.[90] Binary asymmetries emerged not only from economic dependencies, but from the cognitive structures underlying human action. Colonialism did not just take physical forms, but epistemological forms as well. Reactions to Said countered that colonial categories are neither static nor isolated, but constantly reproduced in dialectic tension. Most notably, Homi Bhabha described a concept of "hybridization" as a strategically deployed process of cultural adoption, by which subaltern people submit to colonial authority and adopt colonial ideologies on their own terms. Distinct from "creolization," which generally refers to the organic movement towards inevitable fusion, "hybridization" describes a mindset of active subjectivity—of living within the framework of colonial authority by adapting it to local conditions—more than a process of mixing, although it recognizes that the encounter itself changes all parties involved.[91]

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[88] Schlesinger, "Die geschichtliche Stellung der mittelalterlichen deutschen Ostbewegung," 520; Gabrielle Spiegel, "Épater les médiévistes," *History and Theory* 39, no. 2 (2000): 249.

[89] Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Harper, 1978). Said was indebted to Antonio Gramsci's theory that certain cultural forms come to predominate over others ("hegemony") not through force, but consent. Ibid., 6-7.

[90] Said theorized that Orientalists participated in the reflexive construction of Western identity by articulating what it was *not* (that is, the East). Here he drew on the structuralist principles of Saussure, by which signs can only be interpreted negatively, in opposition to other disparate elements in a set. Said, 207.

[91] Homi K. Bhabha, "Signs Taken for Wonders: Questions of Ambivalence and Authority under a Tree Outside Delhi, May 1817," in *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), esp. 112-15; Dietler, *Archaeologies of*

The invigoration of postcolonial studies in the 1980s and 1990s, however, had a similarly ambiguous effect to earlier postcolonial critiques of modernization. On the one hand, they inaugurated the proliferation of frameworks for the more nuanced analysis of encounters. But on the other, they reinforced a narrative that essentialized modern colonialism as a unique precipitate of historical forces incompatible with any other period. To borrow Symes's metaphor, postcolonial studies pushed premodernity further into the margins of academic discourse.

Over the past two decades, however, scholars have questioned whether the application of these theoretical frameworks must be limited to the study of nineteenth- and twentieth-century empires. Literary scholars in particular quickly took to the task of applying postcolonial theories to the analysis of medieval texts (perhaps unsurprising, given the centrality of literary criticism to the development of the field, starting with Said), with varying success, stoking doubts about the admixture of the medieval and the modern in addition to offering new directions of inquiry.[92] But social scientists too have grown bolder in the assertion that postcolonial frameworks can illuminate premodern encounters. In the 1950s and 1960s, some historically minded scholars had sought to extricate past colonial encounters from the polarizing binaries of modernization theory and its nascent postcolonial critique.[93] Their studies diminished the totalizing power commonly attributed to colonial empires, instead seeing periods of colonial rule as relatively short-lived interruptions

Colonialism, 50–53; Ann Stoler, "Rethinking Colonial Categories: European Communities and the Boundaries of Rule," in *Colonialism and Culture*, ed. Nicholas Dirks (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992), 319–52.

[92] See, for example, Simon Gaunt's review essay, "Can the Middle Ages Be Postcolonial?," *Comparative Literature* 61, no. 2 (2009): 160–76. Focusing in particular on the collection of studies in Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's edited volume *The Postcolonial Middle Ages* and Geraldine Heng's *Empire of Magic*, Gaunt tempers his enthusiasm for the possibilities of "postcolonial medieval studies" (172) with warnings about the potential for rehashing narratives of national (especially English) exceptionalism. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, ed., *The Postcolonial Middle Ages* (New York: Palgrave, 2000); Geraldine Heng, *Empire of Magic: Medieval Romance and the Politics of Cultural Fantasy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003).

[93] Cooper, *Colonialism in Question*, 43–44.

in a longer history of pre- and postcolonial sovereignty. (The similarity to contemporary Polish historiography, which dismissed periods of German rule in Prussia as interruptions in the arc of Polish national rule, is striking here.) Thus, although the new metanarrative served an important goal in the politics of decolonization by normalizing Indigenous sovereignty, it exerted a teleological gravity not unlike that of its West-centric counterparts.

The political and intellectual rupture of decolonization also prompted a methodological crisis in the field of anthropology.[94] Its practitioners were forced to recognize the complicity of their discipline in the insidious substantiation of racist categories. Christian missionaries, for example, had played a formative role in the development of ethnographic methodologies, which accordingly preserved certain primitivizing assumptions about the colonial observer (rational, Western, and Christian) vis-à-vis the Indigenous subject. (Symes, as we have seen, makes much the same point that practitioners of medieval history must take care to avoid primitivizing assumptions about medieval subjects.)[95] Such radical self-criticism begat an "epistemological hypochondria," or "anxiety…that the philosophical bases, intellectual objectives, and analytic methods of the discipline are indefensible."[96] New generations of anthropologists sought to reinterpret old ethnographic sources, which they came to see not simply as problematic stumbling blocks, but as products themselves of dynamic encounters between Westerners and Indigenous people.[97] Anthropological studies thus serve as especially stimulating models for historians intent

[94] Talal Asad, ed., *Anthropology & the Colonial Encounter* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1973).

[95] Symes, "When We Talk about Modernity," 717–19.

[96] Jean Comaroff and John L. Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution*, vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), xiii.

[97] Cooper, *Colonialism in Question*, 46–47; Comaroff and Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution*. Cooper observes (54) that "the most thought-provoking dimension of the 'new' scholarship on colonial situations, in relation to the 'old,' is the way it calls into question the position of the observer, not simply in terms of social biases but in terms of

on breaking the "grip" of colonial chronologies, to adapt a phrase of Daniel Lord Smail's.[98] Carefully analyzed, the overlapping contours of historical encounters reveal colonialism not as a narrative about the West, but as an array of behavioral patterns shaped simultaneously by the local particularities of place and the macrostructures of power. Following colonial theorist Jürgen Osterhammel, this dissertation treats colonialism as "a *system* of domination," emphasizing patterns across seemingly disparate scales rather than narrative continuity.[99] Archaeologist Michael Dietler's definition of colonialism—"an active, historically contingent process of creative appropriation, manipulation, and transformation played out by individuals and social groups with a variety of competing interests and strategies of action embedded in political relations, cultural perceptions, and cosmologies"—also embraces complexity and contingency, although it still emphasizes process.[100] Freed from the teleological tethers of Western modernity, premodern encounters become not just appropriate subjects, but *necessary* subjects of colonial histories, even if we must still be careful to avoid reifying the primitivizing categories that ensnared early anthropologists. The Epipaleolithic and Neolithic migrations—of hunter-gathers (about 14,000 years ago), of agriculturalists first from Anatolia (between 8,800 and 4,500 years ago), then from the Eurasian steppes (about 5,000 years ago)—that repeatedly transformed Europe constitute

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the ways in which forms of knowledge and conceptions of change are themselves shaped by a history of which imperialism is a central element."

[98] Smail, "In the Grip of Sacred History"; Daniel Lord Smail, *On Deep History and the Brain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 12–39. By "sacred history," Smail refers to the Judeo-Christian historiographic contrivance by which historical trajectories are assumed to have a distinct beginning that is, relative to longer chronologies like geological time, in the not too distant past. Usually this follows a Great Flood, or else some other rupture that causes human civilization to have to be built up again.

[99] Jürgen Osterhammel, *Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview*, trans. Shelley L. Frisch (Princeton, NJ: M. Wiener, 2005), 4; Dietler, *Archaeologies of Colonialism*, 16. Osterhammel distinguishes here between colonialism, which is a structure or system, from colonization, which he defines as "a *process* of territorial acquisition."

[100] *Archaeologies of Colonialism*, 10. Ironically, the Middle Ages are absent from Dietler's study, in which he links antique and early modern forms of colonialism as if through a vacuum.

colonial histories millennia before the survival of textual sources.[101] So too does the circulation of goods and people that shaped the Iron Age Mediterranean, centuries before the Romans coined the vocabulary of domination that continues to colonize modern concepts of empire.[102] Medieval colonial encounters are neither irrelevant to these early stories nor a later chapter; in both their particularities to time and place and their commonalities with other times and places, they offer insights into human behavior on a bigger scale, without claiming to predict it.

Anthropology and the Structures of Colonialism

Since the 1980s, anthropologists have devised a number of non-binary frameworks that balance the versatility demanded by theory with the wide-ranging particularities of the global encounters they study. Greg Dening, for example, suggested "islands and beaches" as "a metaphor for the different ways in which human beings construct their worlds and for the boundaries that they construct between them," islands being what "men and women make by the reality they attribute to their categories, their roles, their institutions" and beaches what "they put around them with their definitions of 'we' and 'they'."[103] Dening drew on the theories of Victor Turner and Mary Douglas to argue that boundaries are ever-changing, non-dimensional thresholds that represent the imagined transition between states of being.[104] Noticing the propensity of state-nonstate encounters to generate violence, Richard Ferguson and Neil Whitehead proposed the concept of

[101] Reich, *Who We Are and How We Got Here: Ancient DNA and the New Science of the Human Past*, 99–122; Dietler, *Archaeologies of Colonialism*.

[102] On the articulation of imperialism in the late Roman Republic and early Empire, see Emma Dench, *Empire and Political Cultures in the Roman World* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 18–46.

[103] Greg Dening, *Islands and Beaches: Discourse on a Silent Land* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1980), 3.

[104] "Boundaries in our lives are never permanent…Beaches are beginnings and endings, but the islands in their circumference are always changing." Dening, 157–58, here 158.

the "tribal zone," or the "area continuously affected by the proximity of a state, but not under state administration," within which "the wider consequence of the presence of the state is the radical transformation of extant sociopolitical formations, often resulting in 'tribalization,' or the genesis of new tribes."[105] Like Bhabha's concept of hybridization, the tribal zone accounts for the ambiguity inherent in violent state-nonstate contact, which can prompt changes in Indigenous structures not as the product of exogenous force per se or of the "enigmatic" scripts often attributed to Indigenous peoples, but as reflexive and pragmatic strategies developed in response to invasion.[106] It also dispels the idea that tribal people are inherently violent, arguing instead "not that all state expansion generates Indigenous warfare, but that Indigenous warfare in proximity to an expanding state is probably related to that intrusion."[107] This attribution of Indigenous agency makes the tribal zone an attractive framework for analyzing medieval encounters with the nonstate peoples of northeastern Europe, even if Ferguson and Whitehead do not completely succeed in salvaging the word "tribal" from the chauvinistic paradigms of early anthropology.[108]

Nicholas Thomas has devoted particular energy to understanding the ambiguities of colonial contact within their particular historical and material contexts.[109] Drawing on his research

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[105] R. Brian Ferguson and Neil L. Whitehead, "The Violent Edge of Empire," in *War in the Tribal Zone: Expanding States and Indigenous Warfare*, ed. R. Brian Ferguson and Neil L. Whitehead (Sante Fe, NM: SAR Press, 1992), 3.

[106] Ferguson and Whitehead, 4.

[107] Ferguson and Whitehead, 27.

[108] Ferguson and Whitehead largely sidestep the thorny issue of defining the "tribe," which carries racial and evolutionary connotations. They appear to follow Jonathan Haas's classification of the tribe as "a bounded network of communities united by social and political ties and generally sharing the same language, ideology, and material culture. The communities in a tribe are economically autonomous and there is no centralized political hierarchy." Jonathan Haas, "Warfare and Tribalization in the Prehistoric Southwest," in *The Anthropology of War*, ed. Jonathan Haas (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 172. Quoted in Ferguson and Whitehead, "The Violent Edge of Empire," 3n1.

[109] See, for example, Nicholas Thomas, *Colonialism's Culture: Anthropology, Travel and Government* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994).

on exchanges between Westerners and Pacific Islanders in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Thomas figures colonial encounters as ongoing historical dialectics of mutual exchange and dependency, or "entanglement."[110] Framing the appropriation of artifacts, practices, and ideas as the prerogative of each entangled group entails a dynamic symmetry, without disregarding imbalances of power. (It is, in fact, this acute power imbalance that makes entanglement a more applicable framework for studying medieval encounters than Richard White's comparable "middle ground," which implies more willingness to adapt Indigenous customs than medieval Christians appear to have shown in the Baltic.)[111] Creative "recontextualization," through which part or all of an artifact's original identity is superseded by new uses and meanings, attends processes of exchange under amicable and violent conditions alike.[112] Whether in the spirit of appreciation or collaboration, the Western appropriation of Indigenous artifacts is therefore inherently politicized. Thomas relates the example of Fiji's British governor in the late nineteenth century, who successfully facilitated cooperation among the island's chiefs and selectively incorporated their rituals into state ceremonies. Repurposed as elements in a new paradigm of colonial sovereignty, Fijian customs retained significance, but assumed new meanings that ironically denied the authority of their native context.[113] The fluidity of recontextualization readily lends itself to the

[110] Nicholas Thomas, *Entangled Objects: Exchange, Material Culture, and Colonialism in the Pacific* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 1–6. Archaeologist Ian Hodder has more recently taken the concept as a framework for the dependency between "the social world of humans and the material world of things" in *Entangled: An Archaeology of the Relationships between Humans and Things* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 88–112, here 89. Entanglement is also central to Dietler's archaeological study of ancient Mediterranean material culture: *Archaeologies of Colonialism*, 9–13.

[111] Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 52–53.

[112] "Creative recontextualization and indeed reauthorship may thus follow from taking, from purchase or theft." Thomas, *Entangled Objects*, 5. Of course, even if such re-authorship signals the character of the exchange, subsequent owners or audiences engage in further reiterative processes of interpretation.

[113] Thomas, 170–74.

creative possibilities of reuse, with the corollary that, once exchanged, objects (or practices or ideas) "are not what they were made to be, but what they have become."[114]

Each of the anthropological paradigms discussed here—islands and beaches, the tribal zone, entanglement, and recontextualization—offers an interpretive approach that explodes the binaries in which colonial histories are entrenched. But each of them also works within particular colonial situations, the textures of which they both derive from and create. The colonial situation that materialized in Prussia starting in the thirteenth century in fact resembles a particular paradigm that scholars—the anthropologist Patrick Wolfe foremost among them—have distinguished as "settler colonialism."[115] Although I will not always make the distinction in this dissertation, *settler* colonialism was especially distinctive to Wolfe for its fixation on the ongoing transformation of both land and people as a single process of "improvement." "The primary objective of settler-colonialism," he argued,

> is the land itself rather than the surplus value to be derived from mixing native labour with it. Though, in practice, Indigenous labour was indispensable to Europeans, settler-colonization is at base a winner-take-all project, a sustained institutional tendency to eliminate the Indigenous population, informs a range of historical practices that might otherwise appear distinct—*invasion is a structure not an event*.[116]

Because of its characteristic preoccupation with land, settler colonialism also entails a different demographic arrangement of exogenous settlers vis-à-vis Indigenous inhabitants—"both the permanent movement and reproduction of communities and the dominance of an exogenous

[114] Thomas, 4. Thomas developed his ideas of entanglement and recontextualization from observations of material exchange, but I will argue throughout this dissertation that they also apply to the exchange of non-material entities, like knowledge.

[115] Patrick Wolfe, *Settler Colonialism and the Transformation of Anthropology: The Politics and Poetics of an Ethnographic Event* (London: Cassel, 1999).

[116] Wolfe, 163 (my emphasis).

agency over an indigenous one," as Lorenzo Veracini has summarized it.[117] Colonialism alone typically refers to dominance by a foreign metropole, which delegates its authority to a representative population in the colony. Although the exogenous population enjoys high status, however, it finds itself constantly concerned about the possibility of losing that status to members of the Indigenous majority population. Ann Stoler has demonstrated how the effort to retain distinctions between colonizers and the colonized resulted in the proliferation of rules governing identity (especially race) and contact (especially sexual intermingling)—rules that nonetheless changed constantly as foreign and Indigenous populations inevitably mixed.[118]

In contrast to this model where a colonial power rules through a small, mostly urban colonizer population, settler-colonial goals are accomplished through the coordinated activities of a settler population whose presence is intended to outnumber (if not altogether eliminate) the Indigenous population. Settlers, moreover, come to see themselves as indigenous, rendering those they have replaced invisible, or else labeling them as trespassers.[119] Anna Johnston and Alan Lawston have described this process of "transfer" as the "typical settler [narrative's] doubled goal…[which is] concerned to act out the suppression or effacement of the indigene…[and] also to perform the concomitant indigenization of the settler."[120] With this mentality, settler colonists

[117] Lorenzo Veracini, *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 3.

[118] Stoler, "Rethinking Colonial Categories: European Communities and the Boundaries of Rule"; Ann Stoler, "Racial Histories and Their Regimes of Truth," *Political Power and Social Theory* 11 (1997): 183–206; Ann Stoler, "Sexual Affronts and Racial Frontiers: European Identities and the Cultural Politics of Exclusion in Colonial Southeast Asia," in *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World*, ed. Frederick Cooper and Ann Stoler (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 198–237.

[119] Veracini, *Settler Colonialism*, 33–34. Veracini illustrates the "transfer" process through a staggering taxonomy of twenty-six paradigms (pp. 34-52), which seems overly restrictive for the complex societies they are meant to encompass.

[120] Anna Johnston and Alan Lawson, "Settler Colonies," in *A Companion to Postcolonial Studies*, ed. Henry Schwarz and Sangeeta Ray (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), 369.

need not kill the native population in order to eliminate it; other methods of assimilation can assume a logic of elimination that, though less bloody, identifies Indigenous people as legitimate targets of violence in order to gain access to territory.[121] The goals of settler colonialism lend themselves to distinctive ideologies that entwine sovereignty with the acquisition of land and its transformation through settlement. In order to clear the way for this transformation, a settler-colonial power must first disavow the sovereignty—or even the presence—of Indigenous populations, thus marking itself as subtly different from cases like British India, where a foreign power was content to exploit its colony's resources without investing overly in the business of settlement. This assertion of exogenous sovereignty by means of settlement constitutes a progress narrative that structures settler-colonial societies in distinctive ways.[122]

Landscape and Colonial Encounters

It is a central argument in this dissertation that the ideology and practices of Christian colonizers in the late medieval Baltic illustrate patterns typical of settler-colonial societies. This is one principal reason why I have chosen to focus on the idea of the "Promised Wilderness," which is, as I observed at the beginning of this chapter, itself a binary. By placing it at the center of this study, it is not my intention to reproduce the progress narrative it encodes, but to analyze it as a distinctive artifact of medieval colonialism. My primary interest, therefore, is in taking Prussia—especially in the fourteenth century, and especially under the lordship of the Teutonic Order—as

[121] Patrick Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (2006): 387–88. Outside this framework of settler-colonialism, Len Scales has argued that later medieval states facilitated mass ethnic violence as a form of "remaking the ethnic map." Len Scales, "Bread, Cheese and Genocide: Imagining the Destruction of Peoples in Medieval Western Europe," *History* 92, no. 307 (2007): 284–300.

[122] Marilyn Lake has recently argued for a transpacific link between Australian and American settler-colonial narratives, on the one hand, and the ideologies of American Progressivism on the other: Marilyn Lake, *Progressive New World: How Settler Colonialism and Transpacific Exchange Shaped American Reform* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2019).

a medieval case study for exploring the relationship between the articulation of colonialism and its forms in practice. More specifically, it is through this landscape of the Promised Wilderness, at once real and imagined, that I have framed my analysis of the colonial encounters that its underlying narrative entails.

"Landscape" is a malleable category for analyzing non-binary patterns because it can mean so many things at once. Much like the "frontier," however, its plasticity can easily collapse into ambiguity, especially at the intersection of different disciplines. When I talk about landscape as an analytic framework in this dissertation, I am drawing on one or more of three main interpretive traditions: (1) as the physical manifestation of culturally specific practices governing the management and use of the environment, such as the division of ploughed fields by geometrically arranged fences; (2) as the representation of the environment by those who claim to control it, such as a settlement narrative; and, most abstractly, (3) as the tangle of relationships between the living environment and the people who move, work, and dwell within it, such as a peasant's perception of a certain woodland (and his relationship with its owners) in the course of gathering kindling. What each of these approaches shares is the acknowledgement that landscape is not synonymous with "nature" or even the "environment." It is not the primeval wildernesses of Romantic paintings that the term might evoke. Nor, on the other hand, does it refer only to the ways that people "shape" the environment—another progress narrative in which it is unruly nature itself that mighty European civilization has tamed.[123]

We will revisit this concept of landscape as a form of encounter between people and the environment, and between people and other people by way of the environment, throughout the dissertation, but I will first describe the three approaches outlined above in some more detail. The

[123] Blackbourn, *The Conquest of Nature: Water, Landscape, and the Making of Modern Germany*, 15–19.

idea that the physical environment can itself be read as a sort of topographical palimpsest will be familiar to historians of all stripes. Medieval historians, in fact, have played a formative role in this tradition, which constitutes a core element of *Annaliste* methodology. Marc Bloch proposed in 1930 that the history of France as a whole, in its continuities and its ruptures, could be told from the methodical analysis of the rural landscape. "Our villages wear an ancient dress," he wrote, "but one that has often been made over. Deliberate refusal to notice and investigate these changes is tantamount to a denial of life itself, since all life is change."[124] About a decade before Bartlett published *The Making of Europe*, William TeBrake built on the foundational work of historians like Bloch and Georges Duby to argue that Europe's history was agrarian history.[125] Agricultural transformations in the countryside radically reconfigured the medieval economy from the eleventh century onward, setting the material foundations for the rapid expansion of medieval settlement, production, and institutions. Contemporaries themselves saw emblems of progress and prosperity in the reclamation of new villages, vineyards, and fields from so-called wastelands. The discursive power of "bringing wilderness into culture" was instrumental in shaping the landscape that would define Europe for the next five centuries.[126]

In a sense picking up where TeBrake and the *Annalistes* behind him left off, David Blackbourn has likewise identified the clearance of wastelands and the drainage of wetlands as formative processes not only in the making of the modern German landscape, but in the "Making

[124] Marc Bloch, *French Rural History: An Essay on Its Basic Characteristics*, trans. Janet Sondheimer (London: Routledge, 1966), xxx.

[125] William H. TeBrake, *Medieval Frontier: Culture and Ecology in Rijnland* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1985); Georges Duby, *Rural Economy and Country Life in the Medieval West*, trans. Cynthia Postan (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1976).

[126] TeBrake, *Medieval Frontier*, 3–14, here 14.

of Modern Germany" itself.[127] Where French rural history might conjure nostalgic images of placid villages and the charming scholars patiently roaming their farmlands, its German counterpart must wade through the muck and mire of nationalist ideologies and the racists who espoused them.[128] "In interwar Germany," geographer Denis Cosgrove has summarized, "this intellectual project…was subverted and distorted by the virus of National Socialism, souring the term *Landschaft* in post-war German geography."[129] To skirt this methodological dilemma, we can invoke Blackbourn's assurance that

> there is no reason, anyway, to fear that we shall burn our fingers by restoring the historical importance of the physical environment. It has in fact slowly been making its way back into German history through studies of regions, rivers, ecosystems, villages. None of this writing bears the slightest trace of the nationalist or *völkisch* baggage of the past. Nor does it open the door to geography-is-destiny conclusions—the kind often associated with Nazism.[130]

Only a brief glance at the field of environmental history furnishes further proof that landscape as a subject of history can, in fact, offer a means of surmounting the problematic legacies of European progress narratives. Scholars like William Cronon, Alfred Crosby, Richard Grove, and Joyce Chaplin have demonstrated that attentiveness to the environmental structures of colonialism and sensitivity to Indigenous perspectives can recover complex histories of encounters from the fractured records of colonial archives.[131]

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[127] Blackbourn, *The Conquest of Nature: Water, Landscape, and the Making of Modern Germany*, 5–19.

[128] Blackbourn, 16–19.

[129] Denis Cosgrove, *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984), 2.

[130] Blackbourn, *The Conquest of Nature: Water, Landscape, and the Making of Modern Germany*, 18.

[131] William Cronon, *Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England*, 1st ed. (New York: Hill & Wang, 1985); Alfred W. Crosby, *The Columbian Exchange : Biological and Cultural Consequences of 1492* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Co., 1972); Alfred W. Crosby, *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900-1900* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Richard Grove, *Green Imperialism: Colonial Expansion, Tropical Island Edens, and the Origins of Environmentalism, 1600-1860* (New York: Cambridge

For the second meaning of landscape outlined above, I draw principally on geographer Denis Cosgrove's formulation of landscape as "a way of seeing," which "constitutes a discourse through which identifiable social groups historically have framed themselves and their relations with both the land and with other human groups."[132] Rooted in real places undergoing real changes, imaginative representations in visual and textual media consequently afford insights not only into the conceptualization of power as a discourse, but also the cognitive processes underlying its exercise.[133] We can thus read medieval narratives of settlement and colonization with an eye for these ideologies of power embedded within them. And if, as Nicholas Thomas argues, the "culture" of colonialism fundamentally shapes the actions of colonial powers, then this archaeology of the textual landscape amounts to more than the exegesis of imagined encounters; it also critically informs our interpretation of the administrative archives assembled in the business of colonial rule.[134] This is the primary reason why I prefer Teutonic *Order* to Teutonic *Knights*: I am more interested in the culture of colonialism as an institutional structure of lordship than as the ideology of a military enterprise, per se.[135]

Finally, the third idea of landscape, as articulated most notably in the work of anthropologist Tim Ingold, at once destabilizes and binds the two approaches we have discussed

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University Press, 1995); Joyce E. Chaplin, *Subject Matter: Technology, the Body, and Science on the Anglo-American Frontier, 1500-1676* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001).

[132] Cosgrove, *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape*, xi–xxxv, 1–9, here xiii. James C. Scott has employed a similar metaphor of "legibility" to explain the strategies that states employ in the management of the space, people, and resources within its domain. James C. Scott, *Seeing like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), 2–3, 183–84.

[133] Denis Cosgrove, *Geography and Vision: Seeing, Imagining and Representing the World* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 1–8.

[134] Thomas, *Colonialism's Culture: Anthropology, Travel and Government*, 2–8.

[135] I also generally try to avoid the problematic term of the "Teutonic State" (*Ordensstaat*), which has not quite yet escaped its nationalist past. The Order's military and institutional identities are, of course, inseparable.

so far. Reacting to Cosgrove's theory of landscape as a way of seeing, for example, Ingold has expressed the doubt that such an analytical distance of observation could ever exist at all, since people are enmeshed in a recursive relationship with their environment.[136] He explains:

> I reject the division between the inner and outer worlds—respectively of mind and matter, meaning and substance—upon which such distinction rests. The landscape, I hold, is not a picture in the imagination, surveyed by the mind's eye; nor however is it an alien and formless substrate awaiting the imposition of human order.…neither is the landscape identical to nature, nor is it on the side of humanity against nature. As the familiar domain of our dwelling, it is *with* us, not *against* us, but it is no less real for that. And through living in it, the landscape becomes a part of us, just as we are a part of it.…In short, whereas the order of nature is explicate, the order of the landscape is implicate.[137]

Ingold's phenomenological understanding of landscape thus acts as a counterbalance to both the representational theory (which by definition privileges those powerful enough to produce hegemonic representations of space) and the topographic inscription theory (which risks privileging simple narratives of human agency). By proposing that landscape exists beyond these more conventional paradigms and yet, somehow, at their convergence, Ingold offers a powerful means of exploding the binaries and progress narratives that we have begun unpacking in this introduction. It is, in fact, through "indigenous understandings" of human engagement with the environment that he suggests we can unravel the "Western historical narrative of the human conquest of nature," which the Promised Wilderness so cogently expresses.[138]

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[136] "Tim Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment: Essays in Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 1–13.

[137] Tim Ingold, "The Temporality of the Landscape," in *The Perception of the Environment: Essays in Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 191.

[138] Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment: Essays in Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill*, 11.

V. Dissertation Structure

The first chapter of this dissertation offers a general overview of the history of the Teutonic Order and its sources. We will begin with its twelfth-century foundation as a crusading hospital and military order in the Holy Land, then trace the unlikely story of how this small German institution came to exercise independent lordship over much of Northeastern Europe from the thirteenth century until its dissolution in the early sixteenth. We will also discuss the Order's written culture, especially in the fourteenth century, including the development of its chancery and the composition of its three most important chronicles: Peter of Dusburg's *Chronicle of Prussia*, Nicolaus von Jeroschin's verse translation of Peter's text, and Wigand von Marburg's *New Prussian Chronicle*.

The remainder of the dissertation can be considered into three main parts. The first comprises chapter two alone, which reconstructs the ideology of the Promised Wilderness from fourteenth-century Teutonic chronicle-writing. In these historical imaginings of Prussia's conquest and settlement by the Teutonic Order, the motifs of "wilderness" and "paradise" fundamentally structure encounters between Christian colonizers and the native lands and peoples of the Baltic. We can therefore see these narratives as typically settler-colonial, yet specific to the history of thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Prussia as well as to the historiographic goals of its chroniclers.

Chapters three and four constitute the second main part, together turning to the "Promised Land" of Prussia's interior. Both chapters explore how the cadastral geography of Prussia took shape, not solely as the imposition of Western forms, but as the precipitate of more complex encounters between Christian lords and rural inhabitants. Chapter three examines charter evidence, particularly descriptions of rural property boundaries. It argues that a more regularized system of land distribution was in place by 1400, which the region's colonizers envisioned as a the divinely mimetic reification of Christian order. Elements of the region's pre-conquest landscapes nevertheless infused this cadastral geography in significant ways. Chapter four examines this

theme more closely by focusing on a certain boundary dispute that unfolded in the late fourteenth century along the borders of the Teutonic Order and one of its episcopal neighbors. In the testimony of witnesses deposed over the course of the inquest into this dispute, we can see that the lines with which colonizers sought to partition their Promised Land were neither as distinct nor as authoritative as they imagined them to be.

Finally, chapters five and six move from Prussia's interior to its contested edges, where over a century of near-constant conflict between the Teutonic Order and its Lithuanian neighbors shaped their shared borderlands. Chapter five examines a set of texts called *Wegeberichte*: verbal descriptions of raiding itineraries that offer a window into the navigational and logistical strategies for the negotiation of the distinctively wet and wooded *wildnis* landscape. It argues that the *Wegeberichte* not only conveyed geographical information, but also reveal patterns of brutally violent encounters, which fundamentally reconfigured the frontier. Chapter six continues this exploration of the *Wegeberichte*, which also furnish fragmented, but invaluable, evidence about the Indigenous guides upon whom the Teutonic Order heavily relied for their geographical and navigational expertise. By compiling scattered biographical details, mapping geographic signatures, and reconstructing exchanges between guides and Teutonic officials, I argue that the Order derived a distinctive geographical archive from the knowledge of these guides, who in turn leveraged their value to the Order's violent designs to garner political and social footing on both sides of a mercurial frontier.

CHAPTER ONE: TEUTONIC PRUSSIA AND ITS SOURCES

I. Pagans, Missionaries, and Martyrs

In his late eleventh-century history of the enterprising bishops of Hamburg-Bremen, the chronicler Adam of Bremen referred to the sea to the north and east of German-speaking lands as "the Baltic," breaking with the tradition of ancient geographers who assigned names corresponding to the peoples thought to inhabit its shores.[1] That it was a sea was never in doubt, at least in terms of scale; but its geographic and geological context make it a peculiar one.[2] Once a massive lake, it is a relatively shallow basin into which four great rivers empty waters carried from Central Eastern Europe (the Oder and the Vistula) and the Russian plains (the Nemunas [Memel] and the Dvina). Ocean water from the North Sea and fresh water from the rivers combine in a brackish mixture, forming two distinct layers as the saltwater sinks to the bottom. Protected from frigid arctic tides, it lends much of its coastlands a temperate clime relative to their northerly latitudes, best suited to heartier grains like rye, although not averse to more sensitive wheat.[3] Although its surface waters are prone to freezing, their calm temperament is friendly to seasonal sailing, and its peculiar layers of differing salinity are favorable to diverse marine life. Not far beyond the coastal areas, however,

[1] Eric Christiansen, *The Northern Crusades*, 2nd ed. (New York: Penguin, 1997), 7–19.

[2] Boockmann, *Ostpreußen und Westpreußen*, 75–85.

[3] On the importance of Baltic grain in northern trading networks, see Nils Hybel, "The Grain Trade in Northern Europe before 1350," *The Economic History Review* 55, no. 2 (2002): 219–47.

the climate becomes significantly colder. Each environmental zone contributed distinctive products to the Baltic economy: fish from its waters, amber from its shores, grain from its fields, and furs from its forests moved across Europe along boats and river barges. The Romans' special fascination with Baltic amber made for a lively trade relationship between the second and fifth centuries, and robust trade networks again took form in the high Middle Ages, especially from the twelfth century onwards.

The region's medieval population spoke a variety of languages as reflected in the modern categorization of four main groups: Scandinavians, Balts, Slavs, and Finno-Ugrians.[4] The first three groups speak Indo-European languages (Lithuanian attracted the special attention of nineteenth-century linguists for its perceived closeness to Sanskrit), while Finno-Ugrian languages have origins independent of the Indo-European family. Throughout this study, I will use these ethno-linguistic categories as a point of departure for discussing population groups in northeastern Europe. Without discounting the mercurial permutations of ethnic, linguistic, or tribal affiliation occurring over millennia of contact, it is convenient (though not foolproof) to use these four broad categories as a basis for large-scale distinctions, at least in the absence of a more nuanced or historically inflected vocabulary.[5]

Western medieval observers generally knew very little about the peoples of northeastern Europe before the thirteenth century.[6] Borrowing ethnographic language from Tacitus, the sixth-

[4] Aleksander Pluskowski, *The Archaeology of the Prussian Crusade: Holy War and Colonisation* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 44–47.

[5] Marija Gimbutas, *The Balts* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1963), 21–23; Pluskowski, *The Archaeology of the Prussian Crusade*, 44–47.

[6] Reinhard Wenskus, "Über einige Problemen der Sozialordnung der Prußen," in *Ausgewählte Aufsätze zum frühen und preußischen Mittelalter: Festgabe zu seinem siebzigsten Geburtstag*, ed. Hans Patze (Sigmaringen: J. Thorbecke, 1986), 413–22. On pre-conquest social structures and settlement patterns more generally, see Pluskowski, *The Archaeology of the Prussian Crusade*, 47–62.

century Gothic historian Jordanes mentioned that the Aestii were a peaceful people living in the littoral zone east of the Vistula, and Einhard similarly wrote in his biography of Charlemagne that they lived along the "Baltic" or "Barbarian" Sea as neighbors of the Slavs.[7] At the end of the ninth century, the Anglo-Saxon traveler Wulfstan sailed east from Haithabu to the Frische Haff, and remarked that the expansive land of Estum had many towns, each with its own king (*cyningc*). Each king, in turn, ruled over his nobles (*rikostan men*) and commoners (*unspedigan, þeôwan*). Wulfstan was the first Westerner to record specific observations of Baltic social structures, which he framed as distant counterparts to Western customs. Besides describing a recognizable tripartite power structure, Wulfstan seized upon the similarity of the Baltic word **kunings* (Prussian *koningas*, Lithuanian *kunings*) to the Anglo-Saxon *cyningc*, "king." Although his intuition was not totally right (the Baltic **kunings* was more akin to a lord than a king), he recognized that underneath strange Baltic customs, such as their funerary rites, was a shared basic social structure, much as later missionaries would.

Contact between Baltic peoples and Westerners intensified after 1100. A string of energetic bishops took up the task of converting Europe's remaining pagan peoples under the aegis of a galvanized twelfth-century papacy. They followed on the heels of famous predecessors, whose efforts to evangelize the north had ended in spectacular martyrdoms. The Bohemian duke Boleslav II had sent Adalbert, second bishop of Prague, in 996 to convert the Prussians, whose resistance halted the mission in under a year.[8] His martyrdom made him a subject for emulation. Soon after the events of the failed mission, Bruno of Querfurt—a member of Otto III's court—composed a

[7] Gimbutas, *The Balts*, 24–28.

[8] Ian Wood, *The Missionary Life: Saints and the Evangelisation of Europe, 400 - 1050* (New York: Longman, 2001), 207–11.

Vita for the fallen Adalbert. Adalbert's life served as a model for Bruno's own mission, which he took on after learning that imperial envoys sent to Poland to learn Slavonic and carry on the mission to the pagans had been murdered. Bruno traveled to Prussia then to Lithuania, where he was martyred.[9]

Despite the violence encountered in the course of Baltic missions, the church held that conversion must be sought peacefully, and baptism chosen willingly.[10] The advent of the crusading movement, however, permanently reconfigured the role of violence in ecclesiastically sanctioned spirituality. The ideology of holy war quickly redefined European attitudes and approaches to converting the Baltic, eliding traditional missionary activity, if often uneasily, with conquest.[11] In 1108, the bishop of Magdeburg called on the princes of Western Europe to take part in a crusade against the Slavic Wendish peoples inhabiting the northern lands east of the Elbe. The text of the bishop's proclamation illustrates the confluence of episcopal initiative, knightly violence, and papal sanction.[12] The bishop justified such violent objectives by portraying the northern pagans as violent and dangerous enemies of Christendom. He graphically recounted the atrocities they had committed, from the murder of innocents and missionaries to the collection of Christian blood for use in obscene rituals.[13] As martyr-crowning persecutors, demonically tainted idolaters, and the

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[9] Wood, 231–32.

[10] James Muldoon, *Popes, Lawyers, and Infidels: The Church and the Non-Christian World, 1250-1550* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1979), 29–48; Buc, *Holy War, Martyrdom, and Terror*, 220–34.

[11] Elizabeth Siberry, "Missionaries and Crusaders, 1095–1274: Opponents or Allies?," in "The Church and War," ed. W. J. Shiels, special issue, *Studies in Church History* 20 (1983): 103–10; Buc, *Holy War, Martyrdom, and Terror*, 26–29.

[12] "Wend" was an umbrella term for the various Slavic tribes inhabiting the northern lands between the Elbe and Oder rivers, and beyond into Western Pomerania. On the so-called Wendish crusade, see Friedrich Lotter, "The Crusading Idea and the Conquest of the Region East of the Elbe," in *Medieval Frontier Societies*, ed. Robert Bartlett and Angus MacKay (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); Christiansen, *The Northern Crusades*, 50–72.

[13] Kurt Villads Jensen, "Crusading at the End of the World: The Spread of the Idea of Jerusalem after 1099 to the Baltic Sea Area and to the Iberian Peninsula," in *Crusading on the Edge: Ideas and Practice of Crusading in Iberia*

violent occupiers of rightfully Christian land, the northern pagans of the Magdeburg charter easily fit into the broadening category of the 'Saracen,' which blended early Christian discourses of victimhood at the hands of Roman pagans with crusading rhetoric trumpeting the triumph of faithful Christian warriors over pagan-like Turks.[14] The expeditions that eventually followed the issue of the 1108 charter therefore solidified the union—in both ideology and practice—between the episcopate and the lay elite to convert and conquer the lands to the north and east of Christian territory.

The careers of two bishops in the first half of the thirteenth century, Albert of Riga and Christian of Prussia, represent a significant development in this relationship between episcopal mission and church-sanctioned violence.[15] Rather than relying solely on the support of secular lords, whose armies operated on vulnerable supply lines and fragile egos, Albert and Christian sought both stability and independence in military orders, a major institutional innovation of the crusading movement. Albert, for his part, founded the Livonian (modern-day Latvia) port town of Riga in 1201 and moved his episcopal see to the newly established outpost. Riga would become a primary gateway to eastern trade markets, but long remained an island of Westerners surrounded by Baltic agricultural populations of varying hostility.[16] To protect his mission, Albert established the Swordbrothers, a military order that nominally owed its allegiance to the episcopate, although

and the Baltic Region, 1100-1500, ed. Torben K. Nielsen and Iben Fonnesberg-Schmidt (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2016), 168–70.

[14] John V. Tolan, *Saracens: Islam in the Medieval European Imagination* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 105–34.

[15] Christiansen, *The Northern Crusades*, 80–83, 104–5, 128–31; Boockmann, *Ostpreußen und Westpreußen*, 85–90.

[16] Friedrich Benninghoven, *Rigas Entstehung und der frühhansische Kaufmann* (Hamburg: Velmede, 1961).

it would soon clash with Albert over its independence.[17] To Livonia's south, Christian of Prussia (perhaps a native of the region) was appointed the equally difficult task of carrying on the Prussian mission as bishop in 1212; he too soon found himself under pressure from neighbors unhappy with the intrusion of a foreign cult.[18] Christian collaborated with Conrad, an enterprising Polish duke ruling Mazovia to the south of Prussia, to establish a military order of their own called the Knights of Dobrin.[19] Conrad formally granted the Knights territory and rights to establish themselves as a self-sustaining local corporation, and Christian's newly energized mission in Prussia remained largely peaceful, if unsuccessful.

Both Albert and Christian attempted to reap the benefits of undergirding fragile episcopal power with military strength. The Swordbrothers and Knights of Dobrin offered a source of armed force that was, ostensibly, more beholden to ecclesiastical regulations than the traditional European nobility. Neither bishop's plans worked out as expected, however. In Livonia, the Swordbrothers grew powerful enough to demand one third of the territory they conquered by 1207, quickly outstripping the bishop's control. In Prussia, conversely, the Knights of Dobrin proved too weak to protect the episcopal mission effectively, and Conrad and Christian called on the Teutonic Knights for aid in the late 1220s.

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[17] Friedrich Benninghoven, *Der Orden der Schwertbrüder: Fratres Milicie Christi de Livonia* (Cologne: Böhlau, 1965), 37–53.

[18] Hartmut Boockmann, *Der Deutsche Orden: Zwölf Kapitel aus seiner Geschichte*, 4th ed. (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1994), 76–79.

[19] Zenon Hubert Nowak, "*Milites Christi de Prussia*: Der Orden von Dobrin und seine Stellung in der preußischen Mission," in *Die geistlichen Ritterorden Europas*, ed. Josef Fleckenstein and Manfred Hellmann (Sigmaringen: Thorbecke, 1980), 339–52.

II. The Teutonic Order and the Prussian Crusades

The Teutonic Knights were a relatively new military order that had originated as a hospital during the 1190 siege of Acre. Both crusaders laying the siege and Saladin's Muslim army withstanding it suffered from hunger, heat, and poor hygienic conditions. Fresh reinforcements from Germany, first from Bremen then from Lübeck, arrived either in late 1189 or early 1190, setting up an ad-hoc field hospital to care for the sick and wounded. In summer of 1190, King Guy of Jerusalem confirmed the appointment of a commanding Master to the hospital, which gradually accumulated property and privileges in the shadow of its much more powerful Hospitaller neighbors. In 1195, the hospital gained an important ally in the emperor Henry VI, who incorporated the fledgling organization into his crusading plans. Although Henry died two years later, his patronage enabled the hospital's transformation into a military order dedicated not only to caring for sick pilgrims and crusaders (in the model of the Hospitallers), but also for taking up the defense of the faith (in the model of the Templars). Pope Innocent III confirmed the new order and its rule on February 19, 1199.[20]

In the following decades, the new order diverged from its Hospitaller and Templar counterparts by developing, if less by design than by pragmatism, a distinctively national identity. This was largely a consequence of continued patronage by German emperors and nobility, intensifying through the close relationship between the Grandmaster Hermann von Salza and Frederick II. Hermann came to power in 1211, a year before Frederick II left Sicily to cross the Alps and take up lordship in Germany. As king (and, after 1220, emperor) of Germany, Frederick largely continued Henry VI's politics and policies, including the patronage of Hermann's order.

[20] Klaus Militzer, *Die Geschichte des Deutschen Ordens* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2005), 12–14. For the critical edition of the Order's Statutes as they were formulated in a number of different languages and manuscripts, see Max Perlbach, ed., *Die Statuten des Deutschen Ordens nach den ältesten Handschriften* (New York: Olms, 1975).

He included Hermann as an advisor in devising his plan for the Holy Land, and acted as a powerful advocate of the order's interests vis-à-vis the more established crusading orders and the papacy itself, with which Frederick eventually found himself at odds. Hermann fashioned himself as an intermediary between the powers, and managed to remain one of Frederick's few loyal allies while retaining the trust of the papal curia. His order relied on the prestige, property, and privileges that Frederick's patronage offered, but he did not wish to contradict the papacy, to which he owed loyalty not only as a spiritual authority but also as an institution with the power to bestow significant endowments. Innocent III granted the order fifty-seven new privileges between December of 1220 and March of 1221 alone, including a generous set of exemptions from episcopal oversight.[21]

Tensions between papacy and empire rose throughout the 1220s, largely because Innocent III and his successors saw Frederick's refusal to fulfill the promise of his early reign—to give up his crown in Sicily—as both an impudent act of defiance and an existential threat to a papacy ever wary of its neighbor's imperial ambitions. In 1229, Gregory IX excommunicated the emperor for having failed to fulfill a crusading oath. Frederick had delayed the departure of his crusading army on the pretense of illness, a decision that Hermann himself had counseled. When Frederick did eventually reach the Holy Land, he crowned himself King of Jerusalem in a wholly secular coronation ceremony that, following the judgment of advisers like Hermann, would not flagrantly contradict the terms of his excommunication and thereby damage papal relations irreparably.[22]

[21] Militzer, *Die Geschichte des Deutschen Ordens*, 23–29.

[22] Frederick fashioned himself a liberator of Jerusalem's holy sites, but had also married the kingdom's heiress four years prior—a papally-approved match that Hermann had helped broker. Boockmann, *Der Deutsche Orden*, 67.

In the remaining decade of his life, Hermann did not ultimately succeed in reconciling the powers effectively, but his diplomatic finesse had cemented his institution as a major player in European politics with extensive property, privileges, and personnel both in the Holy Land and in mainland Europe. Although he and his order's priorities were focused in the Holy Land, he garnered significant territorial rights in the distant region of Prussia. Frederick, for his part, issued the Golden Bull of Rimini in 1226, which took the order's Prussian branch under the empire's protection and granted it *iurisdictio* and *potestas*, making it equal to imperial princes in all lands conquered in Prussia.[23] In 1245, six years after Hermann's death, Frederick issued the complementary Bull of Verona, which granted the order rights to the regions of Kurland, Semigallia, and Lithuania—a legal fiction founded on the supposed universalism underlying Frederick's imperial pretensions.[24] Gregory IX, meanwhile, made a parallel guarantee in 1230 of the order's rights to land it acquired in Prussia, and intensified papal support for the Prussian crusades, promising indulgences equal to Holy Land counterparts, for example, to crusaders who served in Prussia for a year.[25] Gregory followed through in his support in 1234 with a more formal bull of arguably more significance than Frederick's. Gregory claimed the entirety of Prussia—at this point almost completely outside Christian control—as land directly under the protection,

[23] Reinhard Wenskus, "Das Ordensland Preußen als Territorialstaat des 14. Jahrhunderts," in *Ausgewählte Aufsätze zum frühen und preuischen Mittelalter: Festgabe zu seinem siebzigsten Geburtstag*, ed. Hans Patze (Sigmaringen: J. Thorbecke, 1986), 348–49.

[24] Kurt Forstreuter, *Deutschland und Litauen im Mittelalter* (Cologne: Böhlau, 1962), 4.

[25] Iben Fonnesberg-Schmidt, *The Popes and the Baltic Crusades, 1147-1254* (Boston: Brill, 2007), 189–90; 194–95. The most important allowances regarding crusade preaching and indulgences were issued by Pope Alexander IV between the years 1257 and 1260. Alexander gave the Order's priests the right to grant crusading indulgences directly to crusaders who had completed their task; to preach the cross like the mendicants; to absolve crusaders from excommunication; and to redeem crusading vows. See Axel Ehlers, *Die Ablasspraxis des Deutschen Ordens im Mittelalter* (Marburg: Elwert, 2007); Axel Ehlers, "The Use of Indulgences by the Teutonic Order in the Middle Ages," in *History and Heritage*, ed. Victor Mallia-Milanes, The Military Orders 3 (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2008), 139–45.

command, and jurisdiction of Saint Peter, but granted it in fief to the order.[26] Consonant with Gregory's general willingness to cede leadership of the Prussian crusades to the order, the 1234 bull represented the culmination of a decade of papal policy that established, in grudging cooperation with imperial privileges, the basis for the order's lordship in Prussia. By 1235, the order could claim, on the one hand, rights to lordship throughout its Prussian conquests granted by the two most widely recognized sources of authority in the Western medieval world, with the caveat that these powers frequently refused to recognize the authority of the other. On the other hand, the close alliance with Frederick effectively rendered the order a German institution. The new, "Teutonic" ("German") Order had become an international power whose members were nonetheless almost exclusively drawn from German-speaking lands.[27]

The Teutonic Order maintained a secondary presence in Prussia throughout the 1220s from the territory it had received from Duke Conrad in cooperation with Bishop Christian. When Christian's evangelizing efforts provoked certain Prussian tribes to kidnap him in 1233, however, the Knights saw an opportunity to capitalize on their expanded privileges. Their conquests during his five years of captivity were extensive enough that the bishop was forced to relinquish designs to establish the church as the region's principal authority, effectively signaling the transition of the mission to convert and conquer Prussia from the episcopate to the Order. The Knights had already begun their conquests in Prussia when, at the request of Conrad in 1231 to aid against the intensifying incursions of southern Prussian tribes, they crossed the Vistula river with the intent of conquering the Kulmerland region. As they followed the river northwards, they established

[26] Labuda, "Die Urkunden über die Anfänge des Deutschen Ordens im Kulmerland und in Preußen in den Jahren 1226-1235."

[27] Militzer, *Die Geschichte des Deutschen Ordens*, 23–29.

strongholds like Kulm and Thorn that would become the cornerstones of Teutonic administration. Early fortifications were constructed from wood and earth, with irregular plans corresponding to the particularities of local geography and ad-hoc defensive measures.[28] Towns were settled under the protection of the most securely garrisoned strongholds. In 1233, the Order issued a charter to the town of Kulm (the *Kulmer Handfeste*), the terms of which became the standard (though never universal) legal parameters for the foundation of future German settlements within the Order's territory: Kulm law (*Kulmer Recht*).[29]

Subsequent crusades moved along the coast of the Baltic Sea and the Vistula Lagoon (Frische Haff), with the foundation of Elbing (1237) providing coveted sea access for supplies and migrants from Western Europe and Scandinavia. In 1252, the castle of Memel was constructed at the mouth of the Curonian Lagoon (Kurisches Haff) as a forward base for conquering the northeastern region of Samogitia and thereby connecting Teutonic territory in Prussia and Livonia—an aggressively pursued goal that only reached brief fruition in the first decade of the fifteenth century. Königsberg, named after the Bohemian crusading king Ottokar who aided in the subjugation of the surrounding territory, was built in 1254 on a hill overlooking the mouth of the Pregel river, the last major avenue for crusading, castle-building, and settlement in the course of the Prussian Crusades. A line of towns and castles traced the arc of the crusades across Prussia's

[28] Sven Ekdahl, "The Strategic Organization of the Commanderies of the Teutonic Order in Prussia and Livonia.," in *La commanderie: institution des ordres militaires dans l'Occident médiéval*, ed. Anthony Luttrell and Léon Pressouyre (Paris: Comité des travaux historiques et scientifiques, 2002), 222–23; Friedrich Benninghoven, "Die Burgen als Grundpfeiler des spätmittelalterlichen Wehrwesens im preußich-livländischen Deutschordensstaat," in *Die Burgen im deutschen Sprachraum: ihre rechts- und verfassungsgeschichtliche Bedeutung*, ed. Hans Patze (Sigmaringen: Jan Thorbecke, 1976), 567–70.

[29] Dietmar Willoweit, "Die Kulmer Handfeste und das Herrschaftsverständnis der Stauferzeit," *Beiträge zur Geschichte Westpreußens* 9 (1985): 5–24. For a critical edition of the text, see Guido Kisch, *Die Kulmer Handfeste: Text, rechtshistorische und textkritische Untersuchungen nebst Studien zur Kulmer Handfeste, dem Elbinger Privilegium von 1246 und einem Beitrag zur Geschichte des Begriffes "ius teutonicum", "Deutsches Recht" im Deutschordensgebiet*, 2nd ed. (Sigmaringen: Thorbecke, 1978).

western interior, which was gradually settled from the outside in. East of the Pregel, relatively few punctuated the woods and marshes of the sparsely populated *wildnis* region of eastern Prussia, bordering the lands of Masovia and Lithuania.[30] Königsberg quickly became the major center of administration and military operations in the eastern territories. It was accordingly selected as the seat of the Marshal, one of five High Officials (*Großgebietiger*) serving as the highest authorities and advisors under the Grandmaster's oversight.[31]

Despite the rapid accumulation of territory and privileges, the events of the 1260s and 70s proved that the Order's authority in Prussia was far from stable. A series of violent rebellions, led by a number of Indigenous Prussian leaders resistant to Christian rule, were nearly successful in overthrowing newly established Teutonic lordship. Rebel groups operationalized a sort of guerilla warfare that targeted both Teutonic strongholds and locally settled Christian populations. Unlike the thwarted missions of past centuries, the Order withstood the intensity and scope of the conflict; and rather than exhorting the inspired renewal of a foreign mission in martyrial ashes, with grim severity it treated the rebellions as the treason of its subjects. It executed several of the leaders in public spectacles that sensationalized them as criminals and reinforced a condemnatory public memory of their acts among a population widely impacted by the decades' violence.

The legacy of the rebellions cast a long shadow over the Teutonic Order's rule in Prussia. It was less inclined to the leniency it had shown following an early rebellion in 1242, which prompted the formulation of the Treaty of Christburg in 1249 between the Teutonic Order and the

[30] For

[31] On the formalization of the High Officials' roles in fourteenth-century Prussia, see Peter G. Thielen, *Die Verwaltung des Ordensstaates Preußen vornehmlich im 15. Jahrhundert*, Ostmitteleuropa in Vergangenheit und Gegenwart (Cologne: Böhlau, 1965), 68–83.

Prussian leaders, who were represented by a papal legate.[32] Although the peace itself proved fleeting, the resulting document formalized an enduring taxonomy of "free" and "unfree" legal statuses among the Indigenous Prussian population. These statuses are supposed to have predated the arrival of the Order, which incorporated them, in hazily ad-hoc forms, into the delegation of rights and privileges to Indigenous subjects.[33] Prussian nobles (*Adel*) retained the most generous rights as local elites (on the condition of baptism) and tended, accordingly, to nominally accept German lordship while continuing to act according to independent dynastic interests. On the opposite end of the spectrum, unfree peasants (*Bauern*) were the most heavily burdened group, subject to paying tithes in addition to numerous customary obligations owed to new and existing landowners, including taxes in kind (*Zehntzahlung*, technically required of all Prussian subjects by the Treaty of Christburg); the manual labor required for infrastructure projects or agricultural work like haymaking (*Scharwerk*); and castle-building (*Burgwerk*). "Lesser" freemen (*Kleine Freie*) existed somewhere in between. Like the nobility, they owed military service (*Kriegsdienst*) as lightly armored mounted auxiliary troops; but like the peasantry, they could also be subject to labor services. Although these obligations were seen as compatible with free status, exemption from them became the trademark of free status by the end of the thirteenth century, replaced with the relatively lenient provision of *Pflugkorn*, a grain tax evaluated in proportion to arable property. As a compromise between the papacy's inclusive policies and the lordly ambitions of the Order, the

[32] Hans Patze, "Der Frieden von Christburg vom Jahre 1249," *Jahrbuch für Geschichte Mittel- und Ostdeutschlands* 7 (1958): 39–92; Kurt Forstreuter, "Fragen der Mission in Preußen von 1245 bis 1260," *Zeitschrift für Ostforschung* 9 (1960): 250–68; Reinhard Wenskus, "Über die Bedeutung des Christburger Vertrages für die Rechts- und Verfassungsgeschichte des Preußenlandes," in *Ausgewählte Aufsätze zum frühen und preußischen Mittelalter: Festgabe zu seinem siebzigsten Geburtstag*, ed. Hans Patze (Sigmaringen: Thorbecke, 1986), 391–413.

[33] The impossibility to define thirteenth-century class structures with precision is not just a consequence of sparse evidence. It seems the definition of statuses was, by definition, unsystematic, in keeping with the regional diversity among the various Prussian tribes.

Treaty of Christburg imposed obligations on the Prussian population comparable to those expected of Western settlers and allowed for a considerable degree of Indigenous mobility for those whose families remained loyal subjects. The rebellions of the 1260s–1270s did not significantly alter the fundamental guidelines set by the Treaty, but they did cast a long shadow of doubt on the underlying principal—championed by the church—that, through baptism, Indigenous Baltic peoples could become permanent, productive members of a universal Christian community.[34]

III. The Structures of Colonial Society in the Fourteenth Century

The Convent-Castle

After the tumult of its first sixty years in Prussia, the Order had secured a seemingly permanent place by the end of the Prussian rebellions in 1283 and the beginning of the crusades against the Lithuanians to the north and east. Efforts to refurbish or replace its network of ad-hoc wooden fortifications, sporadically underway for some time, continued with renewed momentum. By 1290, the Order's castles largely conformed to a regular plan reflecting the ideological confidence, political stability, and economic vitality of its lordship, as well as the dual nature of its military monastic ethos.[35] The so-called "convent-castles" (*Konventshäuser*) are recognizable not only for their characteristic red-brick façades (the distinctive *Backsteingotik*, or "Brick Gothic" style common in Northern Europe from the twelfth century) but also for their distinctive shape. They typically took the form of a square or rectangle comprising four wings around a central cloister, with a fortified belfry tower in one corner. Theories explaining the character of this style and its

[34] Wenskus, "Nichtdeutsche Bevölkerung des Preußenlandes," 420–23.

[35] Andrzej Arszyński, "Castles and Fortifications of the Teutonic Knights and the Church Hierarchy in Prussia," in *The Teutonic Order in Prussia and Livonia: The Political and Ecclesiastical Structures 13th-16th Century*, ed. Roman Czaja and Andrzej Radzimiński (Cologne: Böhlau, 2015), 57–78; Ekdahl, "Strategic Organization"; Benninghoven, "Die Burgen als Grundpfeiler des spätmittelalterlichen Wehrwesens im preußich-livländischen Deutschordensstaat."

emergence in Prussia have been a subject of intense debate among art historians since the late eighteenth century.[36] Although it is undeniable that an influx of German settlers brought traditions with them from their places of origin, modern scholars have been cautious of attributing a "German" style to the Order's architecture. Most recently, scholars have noted similarities to the French style (rectangular, with a central donjon) originating among the seigneurial nobility and coopted by Philip II as both an icon and instrument of strong central authority. Popular among self-confident monarchs throughout Europe, this style could have plausibly appealed to the Order's leaders, who would have been especially familiar with it from their holdings in Sicily and Apulia. Regardless of origins, however, it is clear that a distinct regional style developed independently over the course of Teutonic rule in the Baltic. In this sense, it reflects the character of the Order itself as a settler-colonial institution: one that obtained its territorial holdings as a foreign power, but came to rule the region as a locally situated regime directly invested in its administration.[37]

They convent-castles also came to function as the Order's local centers of power, and were accordingly organized in order to facilitate the complex tasks of administration in addition to military and spiritual affairs. The ground floor was arranged to carry out the management of the castle as a center of administration and as a complex economic unit in itself, with kitchens, storage spaces, administrative chambers, and furnaces for generating heat. The ground floor and the castle's outbuildings (sometimes quite extensive) additionally accommodated a combination of

[36] The earliest theorists (e.g., Konrad Steinbrecht and Georg Gall) posited that Teutonic architectural styles were imported from the Holy Land via Sicily, under Frederick II's influence. In the 1920s, K.H. Clasen recognized in the convent castles the materialization of the Order's crusading spirit—an inner process occurring independently of outside influence. See Maria Lubocka-Hoffmann, *Die Marienburg: das Schloss des deutschen Ordens. Geschichte, Architektur, Denkmalschutz* (Bydgoszcz: Oficyna Wydawicza Excalibur, 2002), 73–75.

[37] Christofer Herrmann's doubt about the appropriateness of labeling Teutonic architecture as "colonial" draws on the narrower core-periphery model of colonialism discussed in the last chapter. See Christofer Herrmann, *Mittelalterliche Architektur im Preußenland: Untersuchungen zur Frage der Kunstlandschaft und -geographie* (Petersberg: M. Imhof, 2007), 33–34.

economic and military functions from water mills to stables and breeding grounds to armories and smithies. The second story was dedicated to daily conventual and spiritual life—communal refectories, dormitories, chapel, and chapter house. Protected lofts between the second floor and the roof offered additional storage space as well as a fortified area from which both the interior and exterior of the castle could be defended, should the need arise. Large towers also served as defensible points that often became the last refuge for castle inhabitants under assault. In most cases, this was a corner belfry tower. In some others, last-stand refuge could be found in a so-called *Dansker* tower—the primary purpose of which was the disposal of human waste—situated a short distance away from the main castle and connected by a protected walkway spanning a body of flowing water.[38]

The Order's convent castles came to represent the apogee of high-quality construction, military supremacy, and authoritative lordship in the fourteenth century. They accordingly became the model emulated especially by bishops and, to a lesser extent, by towns and local elites throughout the Baltic. The local nobility in Prussia itself (of both Indigenous and foreign descent) generally exercised less independent power than elsewhere in Europe, however, and were therefore excluded from constructing castles as status symbols, managing their estates from humbler manor houses instead.[39]

[38] Ekdahl, "Strategic Organization," 228–31; Benninghoven, "Die Burgen als Grundpfeiler des spätmittelalterlichen Wehrwesens im preußich-livländischen Deutschordensstaat," 570–75.

[39] Teutonic vassals in Livonia were less subdued. Along with the northern Baltic episcopacies (the archbishopric of Riga and the bishoprics of Dorpat, Kurland, and Ösel-Wiek), they constructed castles in competition with the Order, although they were comparatively small. The characteristically Livonian result was a network of strongholds clumped in chains along the contested riverine axes of the Düna and Aa. See Benninghoven, "Die Burgen als Grundpfeiler des spätmittelalterlichen Wehrwesens im preußich-livländischen Deutschordensstaat." The local aristocracy in Prussia garnered more independence only in the mid-fifteenth century as the Teutonic Order's lordship substantially weakened in the course of its conflict with the united Polish-Lithuanian crown (see pp. 107-8 below).

Central and Local Administration

The wealthiest, most elaborate convent castles in Prussia were the seats from which appointed Commanders (*Komture*) oversaw the management of their respective administrative districts, the Commanderies (*Komtureien*).[40] The Commanderies were the backbone of Teutonic lordship in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Commanders answered directly to the Order's Grandmaster, whose own seat of governance was, from 1309 on, the grand castle of Marienburg on the Nogat river, a delta branch of the Vistula.[41] The Grandmaster himself was advised, alongside the four regional bishops, by a small council of five High Officials—the High Commander (*Großkomtur*), Marshal (*Oberst-* or *Ordensmarschall*), Chief Hospitaller (*Oberst-* or *Großspittler*), and Quartermaster (*Obersttrapier*), and the Treasurer (*Tressler*)—who, in theory, resided alongside him (in practice, only the Treasurer and the High Commander, as the Grandmaster's deputy, lived at Marienburg).[42] Although Commanders ostensibly shared the same rank, Commanderies varied significantly in size and importance. There were numerous tiny Commanderies clumped together within the Kulmerland, for example, whereas the eastern Commanderies of Königsberg, Balga, and Brandenburg stretched far to the southeast as the Order expanded its settlement of the *wildnis* throughout the fourteenth century. In these larger provinces, the Commanders were supported not only by their own deputies (*Hauskomture*, some of whom were granted territory to oversee), but

[40] Janusz Tandecki, "Administrative Divisions of the Teutonic Order in Prussia," in *The Teutonic Order in Prussia and Livonia: The Political and Ecclesiastical Structures 13th-16th Century*, ed. Roman Czaja and Andrzej Radzimiński (Cologne: Böhlau, 2015), 31–56; Hans Patze, "Der Deutschordensstaat Preußen 1226-1466," in *Handbuch der europäischen Geschichte 2: Europa im Hoch- und Spätmittelalter*, ed. Ferdinand Seibt (Stuttgart: Klett, 1987), 468–89; Thielen, *Verwaltung*, 84–93.

[41] Klaus Militzer has framed the transfer of the Order's headquarters to Marienburg as a maneuver that loosened the ties of dependencies to popes, emperors, and kings. Klaus Militzer, "From the Holy Land to Prussia: The Teutonic Knights between Emperors and Popes and Their Policies until 1309," in *Mendicants, Military Orders, and Regionalism in Medieval Europe*, ed. Jürgen Sarnowsky (Brookfield, VT: Ashgate, 1999), 71–81.

[42] The Grand Marshal was appointed the Commander of Königsberg, the *Oberstspittler* as Commander of Elbing, and the *Obersttrapier* as Commander of Christburg.

Figure 5. Map of Prussia and surrounding regions in the fourteenth century. Areas in yellow represent the territory directly under the administration of the Teutonic Order; areas in purple represent episcopal territory; areas in pink represent monastic territory under Teutonic lordship; and areas in brown represent the landed estate of towns, also under Teutonic lordship. The striped areas approximate the less densely populated "Wilderness" region.

also by lower-ranking Advocates and Procurators operating from correspondingly smaller castles. More specialized offices also developed over the course of the fourteenth century to handle the burden of administration over large, often undeveloped spaces, such as *Waldämter* (in larger western territories), *Fischämter* (located along rivers, lakes, and coasts), and *Wildhäuser* (eastern vanguard outposts overseeing frontier military and reconnaissance operations).[43] In some cases, territorial Advocates answered directly to the Grandmaster rather than an intermediary Commander.[44]

This centralized system of administration tied to a developed network of convent-castles did not take full form, however, until the stabilization of the Order's new government in Prussia between 1309 and 1324. Throughout most of its first century in the region, the Order divided its territory into two administrative units, each under the authority of a Procurator: Kulmerland and Prussia (the rest of its holdings outside the Kulmerland). Each subsequent challenge to its rule catalyzed an elaboration of this basic structure. The Treaty of Christburg, following the system in place in the empire, formalized the appointment of Regional Commanders (*Landkomture*) to oversee a network of Prussian convents that would continue to expand and condense over the following decades.[45] The Teutonic Order shared lordship and territory in Prussia itself with four bishops overseeing the dioceses of Pomesania, Kulm, Warmia (Ermland), and Sambia (Samland)

[43] For an intricately detailed study of the Teutonic Order's economic structures in the fourteenth and especially fifteenth century, including the financial duties of the central and local offices, see Jürgen Sarnowsky, *Die Wirtschaftsführung des Deutschen Ordens in Preußen*, 2 vols. (Cologne: Böhlau, 1992).

[44] Wenskus, "Territorialstaat," 360-64. The creation of such 'independent' offices was especially common as the result of dissolving Kulmerland Commanderies in order to make more Brothers available to staff the growing Commanderies in the east. See "Territorialstaat," 362-63.

[45] In reality, interior administration in the region of "Prussia" may have been less the responsibility of the Regional Commanders than of the Advocates ranking under them. See Wenskus, "Preußen als Territorialstaat," 355–60, esp. 359.

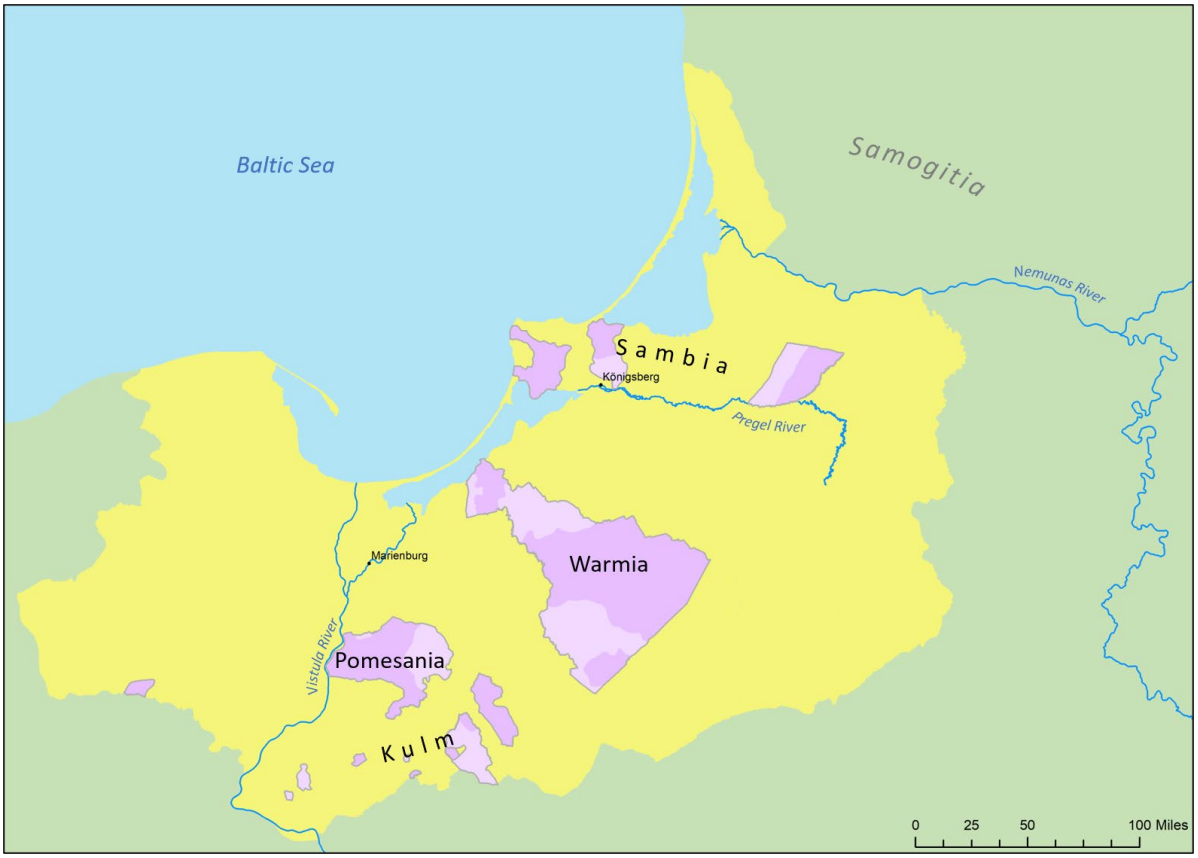

Figure 6. Map of the four principal bishoprics of Prussia, divided into territory under the direct lordship of the bishops (darker purple) and the lordship of the respective cathedral chapters (lighter purple).

(**Figure 6**).[46] In contrast to its territory in Livonia, where Bishop Albert's early disputes with the townspeople and the Swordbrothers set the tone for centuries of tension, the Order's Prussian branch enjoyed a generally dominant relationship with its episcopal neighbors. This was in no small part thanks to an arrangement by which three of the four bishops (Pomesania, Kulm, and Sambia; the bishop of Warmia remained independent) were essentially incorporated into the Order. The Knights effectively secured control over the election of bishops through the chapters, which they managed to fill with Priest-Brothers advocating for the Order's interests.[47] The disappearance

[46] Andrzej Radzimiński, "Church Divisions in Prussia," in *The Teutonic Order in Prussia and Livonia: The Political and Ecclesiastical Structures 13th-16th Century*, ed. Roman Czaja and Andrzej Radzimiński (Cologne: Böhlau, 2015), 109–44.

[47] Beyond the direct decisions of the bishops and the chapters, Teutonic influence worked through the appointment of Advocates (*Vögte*) and Procurators (*Pfleger*, *provisores*) managing episcopal castles and serving as advisors. Even in independent Warmia, fourteenth-century bishops usually conceded the appointment of their own episcopal Advocates

of most episcopal mints by the early fourteenth century suggests the economic and political impact of this incorporation.[48]

Two major events prompted the fixation of the structure that would remain stable for the majority of the Order's history in Prussia. First was the contested annexation of Danzig (Gdańsk) and the Polish province of Pomerelia (eastern Pomerania) in 1308/09.[49] The maneuver arose in response to a series of dynastic shifts in the western border region, with which the Teutonic Knights had had a stormy relationship since the Pomerelian duke Swietopelk had chosen to ally himself with the Prussians in the first uprisings against the Knights during the 1240s. When a power vacuum opened in 1294, the Order vied with neighboring Polish lords for influence, and took advantage of the new duke Ladislaus I's call for aid in 1308. The Order seized the city of Danzig and gradually incorporated the entire region into its own holdings as Commanderies subdivided into smaller Advocacies. The second event was the decision to move from Venice, the temporary location of the Order's high government following the fall of Acre in 1291, to the castle of Marienburg in Prussia—a convenient location for overseeing the heartlands of Prussia and the newly acquired (and always coveted) lands of Pomerelia. The relocation was not immediate because there were two sizeable groups of detractors: brothers outside Prussia who saw the move

(*Bischofsvögte*) to the Grandmaster, who would choose a Teutonic Knight-Brother from outside the diocese. Wenskus, "Preußen als Territorialstaat," 354; Thielen, *Verwaltung*, 94.

[48] Pluskowski, *The Archaeology of the Prussian Crusade*, 172.

[49] As with the province of Mazovia, calling Pomerelia a "Polish" region may be misleading. Paul Milliman has recently argued that during the thirteenth century, the lords of the more southerly duchies of Poland—themselves subject to complicated politics of union into a single "Polish" kingdom—saw the rulers and inhabitants of Pomerania as different from themselves, even barbaric, because they remained predominantly pagan until the twelfth century. The enterprising duke Swietopelk brokered deals with both Polish and Indigenous Prussian neighbors from the 1210s through the 1240s to establish his province as an effectively independent duchy. It was only in the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries that a sense of kinship and a narrative of loss took form as part of the Polish kingdom's broader claim that the Teutonic Knights had unrightfully taken its territory. See Paul Milliman, *The Slippery Memory of Men: The Place of Pomerania in the Medieval Kingdom of Poland* (Boston: Brill, 2013), 23–93.

from Venice as a distancing from the true identity of the Order as an institution primarily dedicated to aiding the crusades in the Holy Land; and brothers within Prussia who feared that the move would jeopardize their own independence. It was not until the death of the Grandmaster Karl von Trier in 1324, who had spent most of his remaining years in Germany after successfully advocating for the Order's Prussian branch at the papal curia in Avignon in 1318, and the election of his High Commander Werner von Orseln as successor, that the relocation to Marienburg stabilized. Werner von Orseln settled in Marienburg and undertook a series of administrative changes that gave the institution a shape that would remain largely stable for the next two hundred years. Chief among these reforms was the dissolution of the now defunct position of Prussian *Landmeister* and the realignment of the network of Commanders under the Grandmaster's direct oversight, while the formerly narrow, specialized capacities of the five High Officials were expanded into more extensive "Super-Commander" administrative roles based in particular convent castles.[50]

The century between the Order's identification of Marienburg as its new center (1309) and the decisive battle of Tannenberg-Grunwald (1410) was a period of economic expansion, political stability, international prestige, and intellectual creativity. Early scholars identified this as the Order's *Blütezeit*, or "blossoming," in Prussia—a term that has stuck in spite of its colonialist, and at times nationalist, implications. It was during this period that the Order not only produced a greater volume of documents, but also instituted procedures to centralize, copy, and archive its records.[51] For these two reasons—the dramatic narrative of a rising power and the availability of surviving documentation to depict it—the *Blütezeit* has attracted a great amount of scholarly

[50] Militzer, *Die Geschichte des Deutschen Ordens*, 95–100; Wenskus, "Preußen als Territorialstaat," 360–64.

[51] The expanding volume of documentation was in no small part facilitated by the arrival of greater volumes of paper in Prussia from Italy, especially from the 1320s. By 1400, more paper was being sourced from newly established paper mills in Germany, especially in Nuremberg. See Klaus Roemer, *Geschichte der Papiermühlen in Westpreußen und Danzig, nebst einem Anhang für den Netzedistrikt* (Münster: Nicolaus-Copernicus-Verlag, 2000), 9–11.

attention.[52] The remainder of this chapter will outline key patterns of settlement and administration that emerged in the fourteenth century, major developments in the intellectual life of the Order (especially in regard to its contemporary historiography), and, briefly, the times of trouble from its defeat at Tannenberg through the uprising of the towns in the mid-fifteenth century (the "Thirteen-Years' War").

As the primary landowner in the region besides the neighboring bishops, the Teutonic Order managed a network of private estates (*Vorwerke*) distributed across its various administrative districts.[53] Nearly two hundred of these estates were active by 1400, but they comprised only a relatively small percentage of territory. Most land was therefore not worked directly, but rented out to tax-paying farmers or to Freeholders providing military service in exchange for property and land-use privileges. The foundation of new settlements, the incorporation of existing ones, and the development of appurtenant land took place according to both intricate rules and a multiplicity of specifications particular to individual contexts.[54] New foundations, on the one hand, most often involved the immigration of Western settlers at the invitation of newly franchised landowners. Even in the first century of the Order's colonization,

[52] For one particularly theatrical example, see Marian Tumler, *Der Deutsche Orden im Werden, Wachsen und Wirken bis 1400 mit einem Abriss der Geschichte des Ordens von 1400 bis zur neuesten Zeit* (Vienna: Panorama, 1955).

[53] The *Vorwerk* resembled the more familiar "grange" of monastic orders like the Cistercians. By the end of the fourteenth century, around 200 such *Vorwerke* provisioned the Order's convent-castles, with 20 servicing Marienburg alone. See Sarnowsky, *Die Wirtschaftsführung des Deutschen Ordens in Preußen*, 264–80; Zenon Hubert Nowak, "Die Vorburg als Wirtschaftszentrum des Deutschen Ordens in Preußen," in *Zur Wirtschaftsentwicklung des Deutschen Ordens im Mittelalter*, ed. Udo Arnold (Marburg: Elwert, 1989), 154–56; Pluskowski, *The Archaeology of the Prussian Crusade*, 331–32.

[54] Key works in the vast literature on the German settlement of northeastern Europe in general include Walther Ziesemer, "Siedlungsgeschichte Ost- und Westpreußens," *Hansische Geschichtsblätter* 53 (1928): 153-171; Fritz Morré, "Der Adel in der deutschen Nordostsiedlung des Mittelalters," in *Deutsche Ostforschung: Ergebnisse und Aufgaben seit dem ersten Weltkrieg,* ed. Hermann Aubin (Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1942), 463–85; Charles Higounet, *Die deutsche Ostsiedlung im Mittelalter* (Berlin: Siedler, 1986). On East Prussia specifically, see Karl Kasiske, *Die Siedlungstätigkeit des Deutschen Ordens im östlichen Preußen bis zum Jahre 1410* (Königsberg: Gräfe und Unzer, 1934); Mortensen and Mortensen, *Besiedlung*, 1937. Readers of Polish may also consult Henryk Łowmiański, *Studia nad początkami społeczeństwa i państwa litewskiego* (Vilnius: Towarzystwo Przyjaciół Nauk w Wilnie, 1931).

when open areas were most often selected for settlement, significant preparation was involved in laying the foundations for new towns and villages. Boundaries and areal measurements were determined in tandem by teams of officially appointed agents and knowledgeable locals working with a degree of geometric precision that grew increasingly sophisticated in pace with the Order's institutional regularization. Primary landholders—put simply, either the Order or one of the four bishops—issued charters, or *Handfesten*, which sometimes included property descriptions inventorying the natural (trees, rocks, bodies of water) and artificial (etchings, posts, ditches) features of the landscape serving as boundary points and markers.[55] Spearheading these operations on the landowner's behalf were *locatores*, who were not only responsible for such preliminary tasks but also served as intermediaries between Western communities and enterprising Eastern landowners throughout the settlement process.[56] Migrant settlers came mostly from crowded areas of northern Germany and the Rhineland, where population growth outstripped the availability of desirable property.[57] Land clearance and economic development required a steady supply of labor, which *locatores* secured by recruiting peasant settlers motivated by promises of ample land and liberties. Successful *locatores* were rewarded with favorable tenancy rights over relatively large properties and with appointment as *Schulzen*—hereditary village magistrates with oversight over most local court proceedings and revenues.[58]

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[55] See chapter four, esp. 220-25.

[56] Bartlett, *The Making of Europe*, 121–22, 142–45; Higounet, *Die deutsche Ostsiedlung im Mittelalter*, 247–49; Peter Erlen, *Europäischer Landesausbau und mittelalterliche deutsche Ostsiedlung: ein struktureller Vergleich zwischen Südwestfrankreich, den Niederlanden und dem Ordensland Preußen* (Marburg: J.G. Herder-Institut, 1992), 156–66.

[57] Bartlett, *The Making of Europe*, 111–16; Higounet, *Die deutsche Ostsiedlung im Mittelalter*, 247–49; Ziesemer, "Siedlungsgeschichte Ost- und Westpreußens," 163–64; Morré, "Der Adel in der deutschen Nordostsiedlung des Mittelalters." On the migration of nobles specifically, see Werner Paravicini, "L'Ordre Teutonique et les courants migratoires en Europe centrale XIII-XIV^{e} siècles," in *Edelleute und Kaufleute im Norden Europas: gesammelte Aufsätze*, ed. Jan Hirschbiegel, Andreas Ranft, and Jörg Wettlaufer (Ostfildern: Thorbecke, 2007), 379–81.

[58] Robert Bartlett has argued that the *locatores* must have been "fairly wealthy and respected," given the economically and socially intensive nature of their enterprises, but it is difficult to identify them with much certainty. Bartlett, *The*

German and Prussian Law

Because immigrant settlers were offered substantial lands and liberties, new German settlements could easily impinge on existing Indigenous villages. Conglomerations of various Polish (e.g., the Cuiavian Poles of the Kulmerland and the Kushobian Poles of Pomerelia), Rus', and northern Baltic (e.g., Samogitians, Lithuanians, and Curonians) peoples were not uncommon in Prussia, especially along the edges of Teutonic territory.[59] But the most numerous of the area's Indigenous inhabitants were the Prussians themselves, who may have retained traces of earlier regional divisions long into the fourteenth century.[60] While immigrant settlements operated under German legal systems—most often Kulmish Law but also, from 1340 onwards, Magdeburg Law—in both Teutonic and episcopal territory, it was common for non-German communities to retain Indigenous law codes, albeit incorporated into the broader legal machinery of Christian lordship.[61] Although such legal heterogeneity ostensibly reflected a willingness of Christian colonizers to respect the integrity of its non-Western subjects, it could in practice engender unequal treatment along ethnic lines, especially in the case of Schulzen settling local disputes in favor of more recently settled Germans. Supposedly to counteract the partiality of local justice, the Order

Making of Europe, 142. Reinhard Wenskus has suggested that some seem to have been well-connected Indigenous elites (e.g., Kushobian Poles from Pomerelia, who were particularly popular among monastic landowners), but the common adoption of German names limits their usefulness in identifying ethnic background. Wenskus, "Nichtdeutsche Bevölkerung des Preußenlandes," 362–63. For further discussion of onomastic evidence as a problematic source for attributing ethnic or cultural background, see chapter six, pp. 340-43.

[59] For one particularly rich case study, see Richard Hoffmann, *Land, Liberties, and Lordship in a Late Medieval Countryside: Agrarian Structures and Change in the Duchy of Wrocław* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylania Press, 1989).

[60] Fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Teutonic documents and chronicles continued to use ethnonyms reflecting the thirteenth-century origins of certain Prussians, such as the Scalovians (*Schalauer*) from the eastern border region of Scalovia, who were among the last of the Prussian tribes to submit to Teutonic hegemony. Whether such usage only reflects Teutonic constructs of Indigeneity or does offer an insight into contemporary Prussian identities remains an open question.

[61] Wenskus, "Preußen als Territorialstaat," 376–80.

stipulated in the Handfesten that cases involving "our Prussians" were not the province of the village Schulze but must be brought to the court of a Teutonic official, usually an Advocate. Property disputes were perhaps the most common grievance requiring judicial resolution between Prussian and German communities. Scholars of the *Ostsiedlung* have argued that new German settlements were prone to impinging on existing Prussian villages, such that Prussian and German Handfesten were often issued in tandem—one to grant new land for settlement and one to protect older property rights.[62]

Substantial differences between German and Prussian law codes impacted not only the provision of justice, but also the nature and terms of settlement itself. The determination of property area to be granted and the calculation of projected yields and corresponding dues were assessed based on fundamentally different units of measurement. German settlement, on the one hand, was founded on the *Hufe* (Lat. *mansus*)—the land area thought to be manageable by a single family employing a heavy plough.[63] Prussian settlements, on the other hand, were assessed according to the *Haken* (Lat. *uncus*), approximating the area manageable with the lighter scratch-plow used by the Prussians.[64] Haken—and the Prussian properties they constituted—were

[62] In some cases, local lords were compelled to promise Prussian villages that no new German settlement would be founded within a one-mile radius. Hans Mortensen and Gertrud Mortensen, *Die Besiedlung des nordöstlichen Ostpreußens bis zum Beginn des 17- Jahrhunderts*, vol. 1 (Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1937), 22–32; Wenskus, "Nichtdeutsche Bevölkerung des Preußenlandes," 424–26.

[63] Areal units of measurement varied considerably throughout Europe. The two most common types of Hufen were "Frankish" and "Flemish." The latter was adopted in Prussia as the Kulmish Hufe, approximately equal to thirty *morgen* (the area that could be covered in a single day with a heavy plow), and corresponding to about 41.5 modern acres, or 0.065 square miles. D. Hägermann and A. Hedwig, "Hufe," in *Lexikon des Mittelalters*, vol. 5 (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1977), 155–56. For a technically detailed study of the Prussian Hufe, from its Western regional origins to a fairly regular unit of measurement in Eastern settlement patterns, see Walter Kuhn, "Flämische und fränkische Hufe als Leitformen der mittelalterlichen Ostsiedlung," in *Vergleichende Untersuchungen zur mittelalterlichen Ostsiedlung* (Cologne: Verlag, 1973), 1–52.

[64] Walter Kuhn, "Der Haken in Altpreußen," in *Vergleichende Untersuchungen zur mittelalterlichen Ostsiedlung* (Cologne: Böhlau, 1973), 141–72.

accordingly smaller than Hufen, with correspondingly (if not necessarily proportionally) lighter dues.

Given the ad-hoc tangling of interlocking law codes and considerable variability across time and space (let alone the matter of interpretation within problematically nationalist and ethnic categories), the study of settlement in Prussia has generated more questions than answers.[65] In the early twentieth century, scholarship on the *Ostsiedlung* was consequently subject to intense debate about technical detail in addition to political ramifications. One such debate revolved around whether the legal code of a settlement corresponded, by necessity, with the ethnicity of its inhabitants.[66] Here, as elsewhere, nationalist sympathies could cloud the interpretation of an already murky evidentiary base, prompting a wide variation of conclusions.[67] What is clear is that the organization of the countryside and the structures governing it reflected the heterogeneous makeup of the population, which required a customized system of administration. For example, Prussian villages were organized into regional conglomerates under the supervision of bilingual officials of Prussian descent (*Kämmerer*) who held free property in exchange for attending to matters of local administration, especially the collection of taxes from the Prussian population.[68]

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[65] For a representative discussion of the sources available for the study of settlement, see Mortensen and Mortensen, *Besiedlung*, 1937, 1:1–20.. Here they insist on the "completeness" (*Lückenlosigkeit*) of their source base, although they make efforts throughout their work to identify proxies for details missing from the documentary record.

[66] The Mortensens, for their part, concluded that German law did altogether indicate German ethnicity. Even in cases where a Prussian might be granted property within the limits of German settlement, he was not considered a legal resident of the village, but a foreigner under the direct jurisdiction of the Order. They made this deduction based on a series of interpretive assumptions about their proxy evidence, which was also largely limited to the well-documented area along the Pregel river. Mortensen and Mortensen, 1:69–99.

[67] Access to national archives was increasingly restricted to approved citizens as political conflicts intensified in the 1930s, however. See Burleigh, *Germany Turns Eastwards*, 46–53.

[68] Wenskus, "Nichtdeutsche Bevölkerung des Preußenlandes," 422–23. These Indigenous provincial administrators are not to be confused with the *Kämmerer* (Chamberlains) of the court context, who were typically drawn from among the Knight Brothers to act in the service of a particular higher official. Thielen, *Verwaltung*, 116.

These groups of villages became the basis of administrative districts called *Kammerämter*.[69] Despite the Prussian roots of these districts, German settlements also appeared in the *Kammerämter* under the jurisdiction of village Schulzen. How to interpret such evidence of assimilation is another question. It might suggest the influence of the church, whose leaders remained optimistically insistent that the patient assimilation of pagan peoples was the cornerstone of a universal Christian society. But more likely it was a matter of practicality. The lords of the Order found themselves ruling over a population whose settlement patterns, cultural customs, and language differed from their own, and among whom the threat of resistance still loomed large. Nor, of course, did the Prussians constitute the cohesive group the ethnonym implies. The most stable and profitable arrangement was one that made room for such differences.

Despite the existence of a parallel legal system for the allocation of property and adjudication of disputes among Prussian subjects, there is no surviving indication that the Prussian language ever assumed a written form. It gradually fell out of spoken use in the centuries following Christian conquest, in contrast to other Baltic languages like Lithuanian and Latvian. Bridging the language gap was essential in a number of contexts, however, from preaching to court proceedings to military communications. While there was undoubtedly some degree of bilingualism among Teutonic brothers and clerics, settlers, and Prussians themselves, duties of oral translation were principally assumed by a class of Indigenous officials called *Tolke*. Comparable to the dragomen of Holy Land crusading and to the native intermediaries central to European diplomacy in the New World, the *Tolke* were essential agents for the running of a heterogeneous colonial society.[70]

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[69] On the *Kammerämter* in Sambia, for example, see Grischa Vercamer, *Siedlungs-, Sozial- und Verwaltungsgeschichte der Komturei Königsberg in Preußen (13.-16. Jahrhundert)* (Marburg: Elwert, 2010), 145–55.

[70] Wenskus, "Nichtdeutsche Bevölkerung des Preußenlandes," 422; Kurt Forstreuter, "Latein und Deutsch im Deutschen Orden," in *Studien zur Geschichte des Preußenlandes: Festschrift für Erich Keyser zu seinem 70. Geburtstag*, ed. Ernst Bahr (Marburg: N.G. Elwert, 1963), 375. On the importance of the Ottoman dragoman in

IV. The Textual Sources of Teutonic Prussia

Language and Documentary Culture

Linguistic heterogeneity in Prussia was not limited to a divide between the region's Indigenous population (Baltic and Slavic languages) and immigrants from Western Europe (Germanic and Latinate languages). Not only did Indigenous Balts and Slavs speak a variety of languages and dialects, but so too did foreign newcomers. Most members of the Order, on the one hand, were of knightly origin, and correspondingly came from areas of the empire where knightly families were well established—principally "middle" German regions like Thuringia and Upper Saxony. Brothers from northern Germany were always in the minority in Prussia. The heritage of colonists, on the other hand, was less unified. Some settlers came from central Germany, but most came from Low German-speaking areas of northern Germany. Merchants, and in turn the major towns under their influence, likewise spoke Low German. As immigrants from different origins mixed over centuries of German settlement, distinctive regional dialects developed that would persist in East Prussia through to the mid-twentieth century (*breslauisch*, for example). Members of the Order came to communicate with each other in a Middle German dialect; many migrant settlers, on the other hand, spoke Low German. Livonia, in contrast to Prussia, attracted crusaders and colonists almost exclusively from northern Germany. In this northernmost Teutonic territory, Low German quickly became the standard language of communication in both domestic and diplomatic contexts (most importantly, with Lithuania).[71]

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diplomatic contacts between the Christian and Islamic worlds, see John V. Tolan et al., *Europe and the Islamic World: A History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013), 245–47. On the role of Native mediators in the translation not only of language but also of cultural diplomatic forms in the early American Great Lakes region, see White, *The Middle Ground*, 50–93.

[71] Karl Helm and Walther Ziesemer, *Die Literatur des Deutschen Ritterordens* (Gießen: W. Schmitz, 1951), 35–40; Forstreuter, "Latein und Deutsch im Deutschen Orden," 375–79.

Spoken and written language, moreover, did not always coincide. A standard Middle German chancery speech spread from the Grandmaster's headquarters Marienburg after 1309, in parallel to spoken language within the Order's ranks. Some towns correspondingly kept records in the same dialect, even if they primarily spoke Low German, while others (notably Königsberg and Danzig) conversely kept records in Low German despite the use of Middle German in local Teutonic convents. Stranger still, the Trade Ministers (*Großschäffer*) of Marienburg and Königsberg kept records in Latin through the 1370s, even though they were principally in correspondence with Low German-speaking and -writing merchants in Bruges.[72] In sum, linguistic heterogeneity also remained the rule in the written record well into the fourteenth century.[73]

The development of a "standard" German dialect in Teutonic territory occupied a central place of interest in German scholarship on Prussia and the Teutonic Order through the 1940s. Besides the value of its study as a matter of linguistic scholarship, it also served as a proxy for tracking several historical processes of nationalist import: migration from the West (including the identification of settlers origins based on linguistic evidence), acculturation of the East (with German-speaking settlers seen as the carriers of Westernizing German culture), and the emergence of modern, secular institutions (the Burger class, the Prussian state) from medieval institutional origins (that is, the Teutonic Order).[74] The earlier the detectable adoption of German as a standard

[72] The *Großschäffer* were officials in charge of managing the import and export of goods, especially grain and amber. Although the Knights, like other military orders, were forbidden in their statutes from engaging in trade, they received special papal dispensation in 1257 and 1263 to buy and sell in a limited capacity. Over the course of the fourteenth century, the two offices of *Großschäffer* (one in Marienburg and one in Königsberg) took shape to handle the increasing volume and complexity of trade. Thielen, *Verwaltung*, 101–3.

[73] Forstreuter, "Latein und Deutsch im Deutschen Orden," 386–88.

[74] Herbert Grundmann, "Deutsches Schrifttum im Deutschen Orden," *Altpreußische Forschungen* 18, no. 1 (1941): 22. Given Grundmann's ambivalence towards (if not outright rejection of) a nationalist narrative, it is perhaps surprising that his article was published in 1941.

language of spoken and written communication, the earlier the origins of a state and society recognizable as ethnically, culturally, and politically German. This question of linguistic change in Prussia, besides its political stakes, was subject to debate because of the particular difficulty involved in the interpretation of available sources. Not only is the documentary record of the Teutonic Order's early decades of existence fragmentary, but much surviving Prussian material from the whole of the Middle Ages exists only in copies. Whether originals were in German, in other words, can often remain only speculative.[75]

Since the 1940s, scholars have accepted as canonical Herbert Grundmann's conclusion that German did not become the language of written record in Prussia remarkably early (as some early scholars had held), but in fact relatively late.[76] Until the 1370s, Teutonic documentary culture in Prussia remained predominantly Latinate, which Kurt Forstreuter, for one, attributed to the Order's Holy Land roots and to the plurality of spoken dialects among its members. Moreover, although the office-holding Knight-Brothers were, as a rule, ignorant of Latin (even if they could read and write German, which was by no means assured), the Order's central chancery in Marienburg, as well as its subordinate conventual counterparts, almost exclusively comprised Latin-oriented priest-brothers.[77] The earliest surviving document originally issued in German was a charter

[75] On the problematic nature of early Teutonic records, see especially Labuda, "Die Urkunden über die Anfänge des Deutschen Ordens im Kulmerland und in Preußen in den Jahren 1226-1235"; Forstreuter, "Latein und Deutsch im Deutschen Orden," 380–84.

[76] Grundmann, "Deutsches Schrifttum im Deutschen Orden." Grundmann's conclusions were not wholely original, but synthesized the observations of scholars like Max Perlbach, the editor of the Order's Statutes (see n20 above), into a cohesive argument from extensive evidence. Some of his views, like his assumptions about the role of literacy in the Teutonic Order and his emphasis on a dichotomy between verse as a textual form most suited for out-loud reading and prose as a form for silent reading, have invited revision; but his principal argument regarding the late arrival of German to the chancery remains standard. Cf. Gisela Vollmann-Profe, "Ein Glücksfall in der Geschichte der preußischen Ordenschronistik: Nikolaus von Jeroschin übersetzt Peter von Dusburg," in *Forschungen zur deutschen Literatur des Spätmittelalters: Festschrift für Johannes Janota*, ed. Horst Brunner and Werner Williams-Krapp (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2003), 132, 139nn51-52.

[77] The period of transition to German is even later in Livonia—surprising perhaps, given the early cohesion of a regional spoken dialect. Forstreuter, "Latein und Deutsch im Deutschen Orden," 374–75, 378. On the development of

granted to the town of Thorn in 1262, and until 1309, the only documents written in German were town charters.[78] The transition to German as the preferred language of written record began during the rule of Grandmaster Heinrich Dusemer (r. 1345-1351) and gained particular traction under Winrich von Kniprode (r. 1351-1382), one of the Order's most influential administrators, whose reforms of land tenure and documentary culture accelerated the proliferation of internal records significantly. Nevertheless, chancery clerics retained a close attachment to Latin. One letter written to the Order's Chief Procurator in Rome from the Livonian *Landmeister* in 1389 was composed in German, but betrays the hard-dying habits of a Latinate scribe: "das[s]" inserted to amend "quatenus" or accidentally begun with a *q*, and Latin endings appended to German words.[79] Elsewhere, communication intended for an exclusively internal audience largely remained Latin even after it had lost its place as the default language for outgoing documents. Registers of Handfesten like OF 105, for example, continued to feature Latin headings and summaries for entries recorded in German as well as for those in Latin. By around 1400, in any case, the standard Middle German dialect of the Teutonic chancery became the basis of the High German *Schriftsprache* throughout the region. This would persist as the primary language of documentation and administration into the modern era, even with the arrival of Polish rule in West Prussia after the mid-fifteenth century and, perhaps more surprisingly still, even as Low German remained the spoken language of the majority of the population.[80]

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the central chancery in Marienburg following the Order's relocation from Venice to Marienburg, see Max Hein, "Die Ordenskanzleien in Preußen 1310-1324," *Altpreußische Forschungen* 9 (1932): 9–21.

[78] Forstreuter, "Latein und Deutsch im Deutschen Orden," 382.

[79] Forstreuter, 379–80.

[80] Forstreuter, 389–90; Helm and Ziesemer, *Die Literatur des Deutschen Ritterordens*, 37–39; Ralf G. Päsler, "Zur Sprachensituation im Deutschordensland Preußen. Ein Problemaufriss," in *Ostmitteldeutsche Schreibsprachen im Spätmittelalter* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2007), 98.

Literary and Historical Texts

The creation and curation of a distinctive literary corpus in Teutonic Prussia tells a different story from the development of its documentary record.[81] Although the Order adapted, translated, and commissioned literary texts for a variety of reasons, the moral edification of its members (most of whom were laymen of knightly origins) ranked high among its leaders' priorities.[82] Contemporary criticisms of moral deficiencies prompted Grandmaster Werner von Orseln (1324-1330) to spearhead a reform movement out of Marienburg that galvanized a flourishing of literary production across the entirety of Teutonic territory. Werner von Orseln's successors—especially Luther von Braunschweig (1331-1335) and Dietrich von Altenburg (1335-1341)—continued his efforts over the next two decades as patrons of literature and proponents of spiritual reform.[83] Much scholarship on the resulting literary corpus (much of it in verse) has accordingly sought to reconstruct the Order's intellectual and spiritual life not only as a political institution, but as a social collective of the crusaders manning its armies and occupying its administrative posts.[84] Because they were almost exclusively illiterate, the Order's knight-brothers primarily encountered

[81] The related terms "Deutschordensliteratur" and "Deutschordensdichtung" have rightly invited criticism for reflecting early twentieth-century scholars' alignment of regional (Prussian) and institutional (Teutonic) literature under a blanket term. The texts comprising the canon reflect such diversity in authorship, style, language, and circulation to prohibit an overly centralizing or unifying picture of literary activity under the Order's aegis. See Ralf G. Päsler, *Deutschsprachige Sachliteratur im Preußenland bis 1500: Untersuchungen zu ihrer Überlieferung* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2003), 15–19.

[82] On the centrality of lay reform to the Order's institutional literary tastes and activities, see Jarosław Wenta, *Studien über die Ordensgeschichtsschreibung am Beispiel Preußens* (Toruń: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Miołaja Kopernika, 2000), 132–82.

[83] The politically central engine of creative production largely explains why the Order's literary output, at least in Prussia, was both relatively late and short-lived—beginning centuries after the Order's foundation, decades after the end of the Prussian crusades, and on the heels of the Order's administrative stabilization in Marienburg; and quickly petering out after 1350. Luther von Braunschweig is known to have composed at least one German verse text himself (a *Life* of Saint Barbara), although it does not survive. Wenta, 152–53; Helm and Ziesemer, *Die Literatur des Deutschen Ritterordens*, 92–93.

[84] Arno Mentzel-Reuters, *Arma spiritualia: Bibliotheken, Bücher, und Bildung im Deutschen Orden* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2003), esp. 17-104; Wenta, *Studien über die Ordensgeschichtsschreibung am Beispiel Preußens*, 137–40, 140nn454-55.

texts through oral recitations in what Jarosław Wenta has identified as three principal venues: the mass; the conventual chapter; and at the "table" (*Tischlesung*, "table reading").[85] Each venue was associated with a particular set of texts appropriate to the context. Of central liturgical importance, for example, was the Teutonic Breviary, which listed the readings—Psalms and hymns, scriptural passages, and excerpts from saints' *Lives*—specially selected in accordance with the Order's own liturgical calendar and translated into German.[86] Closely associated with the Breviary were the late thirteenth-century *Passional* and *Väterbuch*—collections of translated saints' *Lives* drawn from the *Legenda aurea*, the most popular compilation of Latin hagiography from the later Middle Ages.[87] The *Statutes*, which themselves stipulate that they are to be read out at least three times per year, as well as certain histories such as Nicolaus von Jeroschin's *Chronicle of Prussia* were suited for chapter meetings.[88] *Tischlesung*—traditionally assumed to have specifically referred to the Augustinian practice of reading out texts at mealtimes, based on the *Statutes'* Augustinian roots—in fact appears to have encompassed an array of readings befitting an array of "tables," from the altar ("God's table") to the *Ehrentisch* (the celebratory banquet held in honor of select crusaders at the close of a *Reise*).[89]

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[85] Wenta, *Studien über die Ordensgeschichtsschreibung am Beispiel Preußens*, 140–61; Mentzel-Reuters, *Arma spiritualia*, 76–82, 383–85.

[86] Wenta, *Studien über die Ordensgeschichtsschreibung am Beispiel Preußens*, 140–42.

[87] Although the Teutonic Breviary drew on both compilations, the *Passional* was most likely *not* produced specifically for the Order, while the contents of the *Väterbuch* was more relevant to preachers than to laymen. Both, however, most likely had the same compiler. Wenta, 143–47; Helm and Ziesemer, *Die Literatur des Deutschen Ritterordens*, 48–71.

[88] Wenta, *Studien über die Ordensgeschichtsschreibung am Beispiel Preußens*, 152–54.

[89] Wenta's atomization of *Tischlesung* into a plurality of different readings for different contexts counters the historiographic assumption of a single venue, despite the paucity of evidence as to what the *Tischlesung* actually entailed. Wenta, 154–61.

The production of historical texts in Prussia likewise sprang from the reform efforts of Werner von Orseln in the mid-1320s, a century after the Order's arrival in Prussia. From its beginnings, therefore, historical writing was closely aligned with the ideological goals of the Teutonic Order as both a political power eager to stabilize its lordship in the region and a spiritual institution deeply rooted in the crusading movement. The composition of a regional history through the triangulation of eyewitness experiences, second-hand stories, and the testament of written sources necessitated, moreover, access to the memory of both Teutonic brothers and archives. Besides the centrality of the Order's role in the region, reliance on Teutonic sources was all the more necessary given Prussia's almost complete lack of monasteries—as a rule, the most reliable keepers of time and repositories of records.[90] The Order effectively exercised a monopoly over its past until the end of the fourteenth century, and its early histories shaped an official narrative of divinely ordained conquest and colonization. Heroized stories of thirteenth-century tribulations served as a template for exemplary behavior to its members and projected a coherent moral picture consonant with contemporaries' expectations for the self-appointed bulwark of

[90] The two principal exceptions were the Pomeranian monasteries of Oliva (northwest of Gdańsk) and Pelplin (southwest of Marienburg), which were incorporated into Teutonic territory in its annexation of Pomerelia in 1310. A monk from Oliva composed an influential chronicle about the monastery's foundation in response to the Knights' ongoing efforts to consolidate their control over the western borderland region in the mid-fourteenth century. *Chronica Olivensis*, ed. Theodor Hirsch, SSRP 5 (Leipzig: 1874), 594-95, 602-23. See Milliman, *The Slippery Memory of Men*, 63–64.

In a Franciscan context, the anonymous *Annals of Thorn*, covering the years 941 through 1410, were similarly begun in the early fourteenth century and completed in the early fifteenth. It served as a significant source for fifteenth-century chroniclers, especially Johann von Posilge. *Franciscani Thorunensis Annales Prussici (941-1410)*, ed. Ernst Strehlke, SSRP 3 (1866; repr., Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1965), 57-316, 398-99. See Hartmut Boockmann, "Geschichtsschreibung des Deutschen Ordens im Mittelalter und Geschichtsschreibung im mittelalterlichen Preußen. Entstehungsbedingungen und Funktionen," in *Literatur und Laienbildung im Spätmittelalter und in der Reformationszeit*, ed. Ludger Grenzmann and Karl Stackmann (Tübingen: Laupp & Göbel, 1984), 85–86; Wenta, *Studien über die Ordensgeschichtsschreibung am Beispiel Preußens*, 236–37.

Episcopal historical writing is essentially limited to one annalistic source, which mainly comprises a record of the boundaries between the Sambian bishopric and the Order. *Annales canonici Sambiensis*, ed. Max Töppen, SSRP 1 (Leipzig: 1861), 272-390. See Boockmann, "Geschichtsschreibung," 81.

Christendom. Three chronicles—Peter von Dusburg's *Chronicle of Prussia*, its German translation by Nicolaus von Jeroschin, and Wigand von Marburg's *New Prussian Chronicle*—stand out as the works constituting an official Teutonic historiography of Prussia's colonization. This is not to say, of course, that they are the only fourteenth-century histories to have been written under the ideological aegis of the Order, nor that Teutonic histories only concerned Prussia.[91] They do offer, however, the primary window into the ways the Order conceptualized its own colonial history and portrayed it to both internal and external audiences.

Teutonic Prussia's historiographic tradition began with the Latin chronicle of Peter of Dusburg, which was completed in 1326 and dedicated to Grandmaster Werner von Orseln, who presumably commissioned it.[92] Peter's four-book history focuses on the Prussian crusades, but begins with an account of the Order's Holy Land foundations, which Peter grounded in two main sources: the Prologue of the Order's *Statutes* and the brief *History of the Origins of the Teutonic Order*, an anonymous text that was likely composed in the context of a mid-thirteenth century dispute with the Hospitallers.[93] Parallel to the Order's Holy Land roots are Bishop Christian's doomed mission among the pagan Prussians, which serves as a narrative entry point for the Order's intervention in the region. From there, the story of Prussia's conquest unfolds as a series of divinely

[91] An equally rich tradition concerns the history of Livonia, both before and after the Order's arrival. The three most notable works are Henry of Livonia's early thirteenth-century *Chronicle* (*Chronicon Livoniae*, ed. Leonid Arbusow and Albert Bauer, 2nd ed., MGH SS rer. Germ. 31 [Hannover: 1955]); the German rhyme chronicle composed by an anonymous Knight-Brother of the Livonian branch in the late thirteenth century (*Livländische Reimchronik*, ed. Leo Meyer [Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlagsbuchhandlung]); and Hermann von Wartberg's late fourteenth-century *Chronicle of Livonia* (*Chronicon Livoniae*, ed. Ernst Strehlke, SSRP 2 [Leipzig: 1863], 21-116).

[92] Peter of Dusburg, *Chronicon terrae Prussie*, ed. Max Töppen, SSRP 1 (Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1861), 21-219. For a recent overview of the major themes of Peter's text and its reception, see Marcus Wüst, "Entstehung und Rezeption der 'Chronik des Preußenlandes,'" in *Neue Studien zur Literatur im Deutschen Orden*, ed. Arno Mentzel-Reuters and Bernhart Jähnig (Stuttgart: S. Hirzel, 2014), 197–209.

[93] Perlbach, *Statuten*; *Narratio de primordiis Ordinis Theutonici*, ed. Udo Arnold, SSRP 6 (Frankfurt am Main: 1968), 24-29. See Udo Arnold, "Die Anfänge der Ordensgeschichtsschreibung," in *Neue Studien zur Literatur im Deutschen Orden*, ed. Arno Mentzel-Reuters and Bernhart Jähnig (Stuttgart: S. Hirzel, 2014), 177–96.

inspired victories and demonically conspired setbacks, culminating in the end of the wars with the Prussians and the beginning of those with the Lithuanians. It eventually ends in Peter's own times, about forty years after he dates the close of the Prussian crusades. Peter's history is, at heart, about the conflict between Christians and pagans, but it is not a military history. Its events are not meaningful in themselves, so much as they collectively constitute a typological and ultimately eschatological narrative, which Peter develops through a dense framework of scriptural allusions. This explains the Order's lordship in Prussia not only as the achievement of hardy crusaders (whom it flamboyantly commends as exemplars of prayerful grit), but as the fulfillment of God's will. Non-martial episodes—the foundation of towns and convents, elaborate miracles and visions, remarkable natural (and supernatural) phenomena—punctuate and peripherally illustrate the central conflict, while the chronicle's fourth book solely comprises an annalistic account of events taking place outside Prussia.[94]

Peter himself is a mysterious figure who gives few clues to his identity. He was certainly a priest, and the quality of his Latin suggests he was more educated than the average Teutonic priest-brother. Based on the convergence between the chronicle and a another independent text, the *Epitome gestorum Prussiae,* modern scholars now generally agree that Peter and the *Epitome*'s author, the so-called *canonicus Sambiensis* (a canon of the Sambian chapter based in Königsberg), were the same person.[95] Although the chronicle represents the first major historical text produced by the Teutonic Order, much early scholarship preferred Nicolaus von Jeroschin's vernacular

[94] Helmut Bauer, *Peter von Dusburg und die Geschichtsschreibung des Deutschen Ordens im 14. Jahrhundert in Preußen* (Berlin: Emil Ebering, 1935), 39–55; Helm and Ziesemer, *Die Literatur des Deutschen Ritterordens*, 149–51.

[95] For a succinct historiographic summary of the authorship debate, see Wenta, *Studien über die Ordensgeschichtsschreibung am Beispiel Preußens*, 208–10.

translation as livelier, stylistically more interesting, and German.[96] As a narrative, Peter's original is undoubtedly staid, but not because Peter was an inferior author to Nicolaus. That he crafted a cohesive narrative from such highly fragmented written and oral sources is an achievement not to be underestimated.[97] Moreover, he adapted contemporary ideological and historiographic crusade traditions to a Baltic, pagan context at a moment of crisis for the Teutonic Order as a spiritual institution, for all the military orders as independent entities, and for the crusading movement itself.[98] Peter's Latin prose was nevertheless restricted to a small readership, and his chronicle never achieved wide circulation.[99] The material he synthesized, as well as the coherent ideological urgency he gave it as an "official" history, significantly influenced the thought world of the Order's members and served as a major source for subsequent historiographic projects—not through his own work, however, but through its translation.[100]

Like Peter, Nicolaus von Jeroschin was a priest-brother about whom very little else is known. He appears to have been familiar with events and places mentioned in the chronicle after 1311, but the suggestion that he was an old man based on the oft-quoted reference to his bald head may indicate more about the hairlines of his post-medieval interpreters than about the age of the

[96] Nicolaus von Jeroschin, *Dî Kronike von Pruzinlant*, ed. Ernst Strehlke, SSRP 1 (Leipzig: 1861), 303-624.

[97] Gerard Labuda, "Zu den Quellen der 'Preußischen Chronik' Peters von Dusburg," in *Der Deutschordensstaat Preußen in der polnischen Geschichtsschreibung der Gegenwart*, ed. Udo Arnold and Marian Biskup (Marburg: N.G. Elwert, 1982), 163.

[98] On Peter's place within the broader landscape of crusade historiography, see Bauer, *Peter von Dusburg*, 17–39.

[99] Wüst, "Entstehung und Rezeption der 'Chronik des Preußenlandes,'" 207–8.

[100] Vollmann-Profe, "Ein Glücksfall in der Geschichte der preußischen Ordenschronistik: Nikolaus von Jeroschin übersetzt Peter von Dusburg," 125–27; Boockmann, "Geschichtsschreibung," 82–83; Roman Czaja, "Das Selbstverständnis der geistlichen Ritterorden im Mittelalter: Bilanz und Forschungsperspektive," in *Selbstbild und Selbstverständnis der geistlichen Ritterorden*, ed. Roman Czaja and Jürgen Sarnowsky (Toruń: Uniwersytet Mikołaja Kopernika, 2005), 12; Rainer Zacharias, "Beobachtungen zur Theologie der Chronik-Literatur des Deutschen Ordens: ein Quellenvergleich zwischen Peter von Dusburg und Nikolaus von Jeroschin," in *Neue Studien zur Literatur im Deutschen Orden*, ed. Arno Mentzel-Reuters and Bernhart Jähnig (Stuttgart: S. Hirzel, 2014), 212.

priest himself.[101] In any case, the translation was not his first undertaking—fragments survive of his *Life of Saint Adalbert*, a saint of particular importance to Prussia whose absence from the *Passional* prompted Nicolaus's addition to the hagiographic corpus—but it was by far his most significant. He dedicated the chronicle to both Luther von Braunschweig and Dietrich von Altenberg, which dates its composition to the years on either side of 1335. The commissioning of a vernacular verse history at the height of the Order's reform movement speaks to its intended purpose to edify Teutonic brothers through exempla of spiritual and military discipline grounded in a tangible historical reality. In this sense, Nicolaus's agenda remained ideologically and theologically consistent with Peter's aims, and he accordingly kept the structure and content of the original text intact, even as he transformed Peter's language to befit a vernacular knightly audience.[102] Peter had shaped Teutonic history in Prussia as a theologically grounded justification of the Order's activities past, present, and future legible to its most educated members and most vociferous detractors. Nicolaus retained Peter's carefully calibrated framework aligning worldly and sacred history, but modified it to speak to a broader audience with an ear for German verse and a taste for chivalric adventure.[103]

This is not to say that Nicolaus lacked creative voice or a flair for imaginative historical composition. His translation is an original achievement in its own right, and scholars have been

[101] Helm and Ziesemer, *Die Literatur des Deutschen Ritterordens*, 151–54. NvJ, lines 18,918-30.

[102] Zacharias, "Beobachtungen zur Theologie der Chronik-Literatur." Nicolaus even retained Peter's chapter divisions, with some minor divergences. His principal structural change was folding Peter's fourth book (concerning events outside of Prussia) into the main narrative.

[103] Helm and Ziesemer, *Die Literatur des Deutschen Ritterordens*, 156–57; Boockmann, "Geschichtsschreibung," 82; Vollmann-Profe, "Ein Glücksfall in der Geschichte der preußischen Ordenschronistik: Nikolaus von Jeroschin übersetzt Peter von Dusburg," 125–27.

keen to anatomize divergences between the texts.[104] Nevertheless, its brilliance lies not in innovation per se, but in the seamless adaptation of Peter's detached prose into an emotionally resonant narrative—as one scholar has put it, "the Latin chronicler gives a report; Jeroschin tells a story."[105] Nicolaus's verse embraces dramatic laments and moments of joy, heaps praise on honorable figures while downplaying others, and indulges in topics of particular interest to a knightly audience like hunting and, above all, combat.[106] The translation does not blindly eliminate all material smacking of clerical learning. Passages like the allegorizing of material and spiritual weapons remained essential to couching knightly violence within an idiom of crusade religiosity expressed by church leaders like Bernard of Clairvaux. It does, however, tend to emphasize the emotional proximity of conflict over its theological underpinnings. In recounting instances of papal confirmation, for example, Nicolaus exchanges the technical formality of Peter's Latin for a vocabulary of outrage and injustice expressed in dramatic speeches. The wickedness of the pagan enemy, called animals, monsters, and even devils, is more sinister and more emotionally proximate—unhuman, rather than simply (if not less dangerously) unbelieving.[107]

The third major Teutonic chronicler of the fourteenth century, Wigand von Marburg, took a decidedly different approach to Prussia's history, marking him as a transitional figure in the region's historiography.[108] The Peter-Nicolaus tradition was born out of reform and ultimately

[104] See Töppen's forward to his edition of Peter's chronicle (pp. 9-11) and especially Walther Ziesemer, *Nicolaus von Jeroschin und seine Quelle* (Berlin: E. Ebering, 1907).

[105] "Der lateinische Chronist berichtet, Jeroschin erzählt." Ziesemer, 10n10.

[106] Vollmann-Profe, "Ein Glücksfall in der Geschichte der preußischen Ordenschronistik: Nikolaus von Jeroschin übersetzt Peter von Dusburg," 128–31.

[107] Vollmann-Profe, 137–39.

[108] Wigand von Marburg, *Cronica nova Prutenica*, ed. Theodor Hirsch, SSRP 2 (Leipzig: 1863), 429-662. See Gisela Vollmann-Profe, "Wigand von Marburg," in *Die deutsche Literatur des Mittelalters: Verfasserlexikon*, ed. Burghart Wachinger et al., 2nd ed., vol. 11 (New York: De Gruyter, 2004), 1658–62.

grounded in a theological understanding of history, even if Nicolaus especially might linger on the gory details of battle more than its moralizing lesson. Wigand's chronicle, conversely, is a military history through and through, filled with knightly deeds because they are honorable, not because they are instruments of a divine plan. Some scholars have seen this as indicative of a broader change in the Teutonic Order's character from a self-consciously religious institution to a more secular state by the end of the fourteenth century.[109] Arno Mentzel-Reuters, however, has instead suggested that figures like St. Louis IX (1226-1270) had blurred this distinction, offering a model for knightly piety through deeds undertaken in the course of crusading.[110] Wigand himself was not a member of the Order, but a herald in its service, responsible for tasks like the preparation of courtly feasts and games, and for acting as a keeper of the names and family arms of nobles whose deeds on Baltic battlefields and tournament grounds would be celebrated at venues like the *Ehrentisch*. He composed his work, which focuses on the Order's wars with Lithuania from 1293 to 1394, during the 1390s. Although he was doubtless familiar with at least Nicolaus's chronicle if not also Peter's, his work shows no trace of them. Instead, principal sources included the *Chronicle of Oliva* (which he encountered while accompanying Grandmaster Konrad von Wallenrode to Danzig), Hermann von Wartberge's *Chronicle of Livonia*, various administrative records and reports, and possibly the *Epitome* of the "Sambian canon."[111]

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[109] Krzysztof Kwiatkowski, "Die Selbstdarstellung des Deutschen Ordens in der 'Chronik' Wigands von Marburg," in *Selbstbild und Selbstverständnis der geistlichen Ritterorden*, ed. Roman Czaja and Jürgen Sarnowsky (Toruń: Uniwersytet Mikołaja Kopernika, 2005), 127–38; Wenta, *Studien über die Ordensgeschichtsschreibung am Beispiel Preußens*, 160; Helm and Ziesemer, *Die Literatur des Deutschen Ritterordens*, 165.

[110] Arno Mentzel-Reuters, "Leseprogramme und individuelle Lektüre im Deutschen Orden," in *Neue Studien zur Literatur im Deutschen Orden*, ed. Arno Mentzel-Reuters and Bernhart Jähnig (Stuttgart: S. Hirzel, 2014), 38–39.

[111] Bauer, *Peter von Dusburg*, 68–69; Wenta, *Studien über die Ordensgeschichtsschreibung am Beispiel Preußens*, 228–29. Although scholars have treated Wigand's chronicle somewhat dismissively as a simple, if lively, heraldic epic, his source base indicates that he was evidently versed in Latin.

If the content and composition of his work were straightforward, however, its transmission was not. Wigand's original chronicle comprised about 17,000 lines of German verse, of which only 645 survive in ten fragments.[112] The complete work exists only in the form of an abridged Latin prose translation by a German priest named Konrad Gesselen in 1464. Working in Thorn, Konrad produced the translation for the Polish historian Jan Długosz, through whom Wigand's chronicle ultimately had a greater impact on history-writing outside Prussia than within. Konrad admits in his preface to the text that he has reduced the original German "using concise and uncouth language" (*verbis succinctis et incultis*).[113] Amounting at first glance to nothing more than a ubiquitous formula of stylized humility, Konrad's apology here rings true. The text is plainly written, occasionally awkward or unclear, and open about frequently abridging the narrative and biographic detail that must have made Wigand's original so appealing to its knightly audience. These shortcomings do not by any means negate the value of the text as a window into how lay members of the Teutonic Order—and the international guests manning its armies and lining its banquet halls—participated in its history at the height of its power in Prussia between 1395 and 1410. It does yield, however, less direct and less precise insights into a contemporary thought world than do Peter and Nicolaus's chronicles.

V. Conclusion: Tannenberg-Grunwald and the End of the *Blütezeit*

As long as they continued to be performed in the grand banquet halls of Marienburg and Königsberg, Wigand and Nicolaus's chronicles assured that officially approved narratives would

[112] Vollmann-Profe, "Wigand von Marburg"; Helm and Ziesemer, *Die Literatur des Deutschen Ritterordens*, 165. Theodor Hirsch suggests in his preface to Wigand's text (441-42) that the original comprised 25,000 lines; estimates have since then been more modest.

[113] Wigand von Marburg, *Cronica* 1, p. 453.

remain the principal source of knowledge among Europe's crusading elite. This monopoly over its history, however, was coming to an end by the beginning of the fifteenth century. After the official conversion of Lithuania's grand duke and its union with the Polish crown in 1385/6, the Order's constant conflict with both powers was increasingly censured by the papacy, and criticism of the Order as a violent, morally deficient institution spread throughout Europe.[114] Faced with a series of legal and theological threats to its territorial lordship by the kings and lawyers of Poland-Lithuania, the Order financed the formal education of a new cadre of clerics and scholars equipped to take on its defense in Western courts and councils.[115] Catastrophic losses at the Battle of Tannenberg in July of 1410, however, left the Order crippled financially, politically, and ideologically. A series of fundamental changes in the system of land tenure followed, along with shifts in the social structures built upon the foundation of property ownership. Above all, the death and capture of so many members forced reliance on foreign mercenaries, already a recruitment source of increasing importance ever since the influx of foreign crusaders had begun to dwindle after the events of 1386.

The spike in soldiers' wages drained Marienburg's coffers, inducing the Order to impose new cash taxes on subjects whose livelihood was threatened not only because they struggled to obtain enough coin, but also because a critical point of access to social mobility—military service—was restricted by reliance on foreign manpower. The Order developed two strategies that met short-term financial needs but bred deep-seated resentment. First, it systematically bought up the fiefs of "greater" noble freemen, converting them into tax-paying villages. Second, if there was not enough cash to pay fees, it instead granted property to mercenaries, who came to constitute a

[114] For more detailed discussion of medieval Lithuania and its modern historiography, see chapter five, 312-22.

[115] Boockmann, "Geschichtsschreibung," 89–90.

landed class in their own right. By 1500, the social landscape in Prussia had changed dramatically, even if the basic structures of the *Ostsiedlung* remained intact. Even the "lesser" Prussian freemen, whose light cavalry services remained useful to the Order in an exception to the rule, were no longer valued by the end of the fifteenth century, and their property was frequently given away to noblemen less interested in recognizing their rights. Although they had long remained among the Order's most loyal subjects in exchange for favorable status, property, and privileges, it was lesser freemen who spearheaded the Peasants' Revolt of the 1520s.[116] More dramatic still was the Order's conflict with the towns, where burgeoning economic power and resentment against increasingly possessive Teutonic lordship combined into political rebellion. In 1440, an alliance formed among certain towns and nobles against the Order called the Prussian League. When the League formally requested of the Polish king that he incorporate Prussia into the kingdom of Poland-Lithuania in 1454, it funded the resulting Thirteen Years' War between the Order and Poland, which ended in the defeated Order's cession of West Prussia to Poland through the Second Peace of Thorn.[117] By the time Grandmaster Albert of Hohenzollern formally converted to Lutheranism in 1525, transforming East Prussia into an independent secular duchy in the process, the Order's power as a territorial lord and its identity as a religious institution spearheading the colonization of Northeastern Europe had long been eclipsed by economic, social, and political strife.

In this context of internal division and open warfare, fifteenth-century chronicles largely fixated on the conflict between the Prussian League and the Order. As bustling port towns like Danzig accumulated wealth and strove for the political independence to protect it, they developed

[116] Wenskus, "Nichtdeutsche Bevölkerung des Preußenlandes," 428–30.

[117] Michael Burleigh, *Prussian Society and the German Order: An Aristocratic Corporation in Crisis c. 1410-1466* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984); Boockmann, *Ostpreußen und Westpreußen*, 185–221.

robust historiographic traditions of their own vis-à-vis histories still sympathetic to the Order's cause.[118] Even as contemporary histories diverged on the more pressing subject of the League and its rebellion, however, a common narrative took shape on both sides in which the majority of the fourteenth century—from the relocation to Marienburg in 1309 to the end of Winrich von Kniprode's rule as Grandmaster in 1382—represented an age of prosperity and moral uprightness in Prussia. Where Peter and Nicolaus had seen the end of an era (the Prussian crusades), in other words, fifteenth-century historians saw a beginning; and where Peter and Nicolaus had envisioned the future (the conversion of Lithuania), the new generation saw the onset of trouble. Still, even on the eve of reformation and secularization in the sixteenth century, the last historical text produced by the Teutonic Order in Prussia—the so-called *Jüngere Hochmeisterchronik*—continued to imagine the Order's history on a cosmic scale, with the Old Testament at its beginning and Prussia at its center.

[118] Boockmann, "Geschichtsschreibung," 88–92.

CHAPTER TWO: A PROMISED WILDERNESS

I. Wilderness, Paradise, and Colonial Narratives

In an 1877 commemorative address to the members and graduates of Shurtleff College in Alton, Illinois, the Baptist minister Samuel Baker related an anecdote from a certain John M. Ellis about an encounter he had as a young minister in the late 1820s, when he had first come westward from Massachusetts. "As he was riding on horseback" through the so-called Sangamon Country of central Illinois, Baker recounted,

> making his way over the lonely prairies, interspersed here and there with patches of "timber," he [Ellis] came to a clearing in the midst of hazels and blackjacks, and was arrested in his purpose by the sound of an ax. Observing the woodman nearby, he called to him with the question, "What are you doing here, stranger?" "I am building a theological seminary," was the reply. "What, in these barrens?" "Yes, I am planting the seed."[1]

The stranger, Baker revealed, was the pioneer Baptist missionary John M. Peck, whom Ellis had reportedly stumbled upon as he cleared space to construct the Rock Spring Seminary, later renamed Shurtleff College. A prolific founder of Baptist churches across the American Midwest, Peck drew on his experiences as a missionary to theorize a tripartite typology of American

[1] *Jubilee Memorial of Shurtleff College, Upper Alton, Illinois* (Alton, IL: Daily Telegraph Steam Print, 1877), 85. I am inspired by George Williams's recounting of this anecdote in *Wilderness and Paradise in Christian Thought* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1962), 4.

Westerners—pioneers, settlers, and capitalists—that Frederick Jackson Turner would later adapt for his own frontier thesis of Western history.[2]

The rhetoric of the transformed and transformative wilderness frontier has ebbed and flowed through nearly two thousand years of Christian history, from the wastes of twelfth-century Europe to the forested islands of the sixteenth-century Caribbean, to the plains of the American West.[3] Particularities of time and place have lent it a great variety of forms, each a fuguelike variation upon a core theme in Christian discourse—the spiritual and ecological transformation of wilderness into paradise. The affinity that John Mason Peck, our evangelizing frontiersman of legend, shares with the ascetic endeavors of the Late Antique desert fathers and their self-appointed monastic successors is instantly recognizable. Each expressed simultaneous desire and contempt for nominally unsettled places far removed from human society. The burst of settlement that took place between 1000 and 1350 likewise generated thousands of legends recounting the foundation of new villages and religious houses and the concomitant reclamation of arable land from

[2] Williams, *Wilderness and Paradise in Christian Thought*, 3–4. Williams's intellectual history is a useful and erudite survey of the scriptural roots and historical materializations of Christian ideas about wilderness and paradise. For a work comparable in scope, but with more definitively spiritual and environmentally activist aims, see Susan Bratton, *Christianity, Wilderness, and Wildlife: The Original Desert Solitaire* (Scranton, PA: University of Scranton Press, 1993). Also sweeping in scope (and confident in its Western narrative) is Clarence Glacken's classic history of environmental thought, *Traces on the Rhodian Shore: Nature and Culture in Western Thought from Ancient Times to the End of the Eighteenth Century* (1967; repr., Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973). For a survey of the "desert wilderness" in medieval thought, see Jacques Le Goff, "The Wilderness in the Medieval West," in *The Medieval Imagination* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 47–60. Cf. ecocritical scholar Greg Garrard's statement that "the concept of wilderness only came to cultural prominence in the eighteenth century" in *Ecocriticism* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 59. For introduction's discussion of Turner's frontier thesis, see pp. 37-39 above.

[3] Cf. Christopher Loveluck, *Northwest Europe in the Early Middle Ages, c. AD 600-1150 : A Comparative Archaeology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), esp. 274-89. Although Columbus and other early Iberian colonizers wrote of the paradisiacal landscapes they encountered in the Americas, the mass death they brought to Indigenous populations in fact prompted significant regrowth of tropical ecologies such that the myth of a pristine landscape only gained currency after the sixteenth century. See Shawn William Miller, *An Environmental History of Latin America* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 49–76. On the Christian mythos of settlers of the American West, see Donald Worster, *Rivers of Empire: Water, Aridity, and the Growth of the American West* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985), 61–126.

uncultivated wilderness.[4] Perhaps the most notable among these are the foundation legends of monastic houses, which often accrued elaborate mythologies as decades of property disputes prompted wealthy religious communities to consecrate their territorial and usufructal rights with tales of the miraculous.[5] Such stories supposed that the backbreaking labor of saintly founders had transformed once-wild landscapes in ways that afforded their institutional descendants a uniquely privileged bond to the area they claimed. (Never mind that the labor had, in most cases, been carried out not by monks themselves, but by laymen more or less coerced into service.) Wilderness, in these narratives, resists simple classification as uncultivated, barbaric, or pagan. Ellen Arnold has argued, for example, that the adoption of a pastoral view of nature allowed Benedictine monks to incorporate human society into their environmental imagination, such that the cultivated garden existed on the same continuum as wilderness.[6] Wilderness is never far from paradise in Christian thought, precipitating holiness through adversity and promising fecundity through careful tending.

Much has been made of wilderness's thorny intellectual history and its formative influence on modern environmentalism, especially in the United States.[7] The relationship between the

[4] Bartlett, *The Making of Europe*, 133–66.

[5] The Cistercians have generally taken center stage in this literature for the myth of improvement at the heart of their institutional identities. See, for example, Constance H. Berman, *Medieval Agriculture, the Southern French Countryside, and the Early Cistercians: A Study of Forty-Three Monasteries* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1986); Loveluck, *Northwest Europe in the Early Middle Ages, c. AD 600-1150 : A Comparative Archaeology*, 292–99. For the "negotiation" of monastic landscapes (wild and otherwise) in the Benedictine context, see Ellen F. Arnold, *Negotiating the Landscape: Environment and Monastic Identity in the Medieval Ardennes* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), esp. 31-61.

[6] Arnold, *Negotiating the Landscape*, 26–29. Arnold draws in particular on Cronon's criticism of American wilderness ideas to formulate this argument.

[7] A classic intellectual history of American ideas about wilderness is Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, 5th ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014). For the oft-cited backlash against the myth of pristine wilderness, see William Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature," in *Uncommon Ground: Toward Reinventing Nature*, ed. William Cronon (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1995), 69–91. For a pointed postcolonial critique of wilderness-centered American environmentalism, see Ramachandra Guha, "Radical American Environmentalism and Wilderness Preservation: A Third World Critique," *Environmental Ethics* 11 (1989): 71–83.

wilderness imagination and frontier spaces is only one element of this history, albeit an important one. Nor, as the examples of Late Antique hagiography and high medieval foundation legends attest, is this relationship unique to North America, or, for that matter, to modernity.[8] The point here is not that modern discourses' medieval lineage has been overlooked, or that it even exists at all. Such an inheritance claim would quickly lead (or, rather, mislead) us into one or more of insidious developmental narratives we outlined in the introduction. Still, that John Mason Peck could fit as neatly into a twelfth-century legendary account of a religious community's saintly founder as he does into Ellis's nineteenth-century one insists on an explanation. Both traditions share a common framework of Christian "improvement," in which narratives of migration, settlement, conquest, and eschatology coalesce in the real and symbolic act of cultivation.[9] If modern discourses did not extend directly from medieval roots, both traditions seem to have been propagated from the same stem.

The Order's chroniclers drew on these interlacing motifs of wilderness, paradise, and transformation to structure their histories and situate them within a universalizing and legitimizing Christian metanarrative. The events of Prussia's conquest, colonization, and settlement emerge as a civilizing mission to transform the Baltic into a productive Christian landscape and to assimilate its Indigenous inhabitants into a prosperous Christian society. Pagan converts are cast as participants in this colonial project, while those who cling to political and cultural autonomy are violently cast out from their native lands. The chronicles also portray Western settlers as hardy

[8] Blackbourn, *The Conquest of Nature: Water, Landscape, and the Making of Modern Germany*, 9–18, 293–309; Max Oelschlaeger, *The Idea of Wilderness: From Prehistory to the Age of Ecology* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1991).

[9] Bartlett specifically associates the rhetoric of improvement with the landscape-transforming process of "Cerealization" in *The Making of Europe*, 152–66. William Cronon has likewise noted that Puritan colonists referred to processes of deforestation as progress in *Changes in the Land*, 108–26.

Christian pioneers whose godly work becomes a primary target for diabolically contrived interference. Adaption to the Baltic's hostile wilderness landscapes, moreover, requires the adaptation of settlers' own bodies—a process that subjects them to the dangers of murder, of starvation, and, perhaps most perilous of all, of developing an unnatural affinity with the lands and people they seek to change. It is through these entwined historiographic discourses—of wilderness and wild folk, and of the Promised Land and its promised people—that the nature of the Order's settler-colonial institutional ideology emerges as something both particular to the late medieval Baltic and, on a larger scale, similar to the mythologies of other settler-colonial encounters at the notional edges of the Christian world.

To explore these themes, this chapter constitutes a philological study of the three most important texts in the Order's fourteenth-century Prussian chronicle tradition—especially Peter of Dusburg's *Chronicle of Prussia* and its German verse translation by Nicolaus von Jeroschin, as well as the herald Wigand von Marburg's *New Prussian Chronicle*. It builds on the premise of environmental historians and postcolonial scholars that colonial powers see native peoples and environments as mutually constitutive subjects—a relationship particularly salient to both the progress narratives and the everyday realities of settler-colonial societies.[10] My approach to these texts resembles what Ellen Arnold has referred to as "environmental exegesis": taking sources "full of nature, natural metaphors, depictions of human uses of nature, and stories about the ways that nature affected and changed people.…picking up the traces of nature in these stories, and reading them in the context of the religious stories."[11] This chapter is not only about the environment, however; nor is it only about religion. By investigating the ways that Teutonic

[10] See, for example, Grove, *Green Imperialism*, 24–25; Chaplin, *Subject Matter*, 1–35.

[11] Arnold, *Negotiating the Landscape*, 13, 13n52.

chroniclers imagined Baltic landscapes, it draws especially on the approach that geographers like Denis Cosgrove take to the interpretation of cultural landscapes as artifacts of power, which embed long histories of encounters with subjected people and places. Such ideologies, ecocritical scholars observe, are essential for understanding the total ontological shift that the Indigenous populations of colonized environments experience.[12]

The chapter is divided into three main thematic sections. The first begins with the depiction of Prussia as a wild land, whose hostile inhabitants ply its waterways and worship pagan gods in murky forests. The second part shifts to scripturally allusive descriptions of Prussia as a fertile Promised Land—a prize destined for hardy Christian settlers. The third section explores how these themes converge, locating Prussia and its colonization at the center of a grand narrative of Christian universalism.

II. A Wild Land

Contested Waters

When the first Teutonic brothers arrived in Prussia, the names with which they labeled their new surroundings reflected their perception of a wild and watery place. They named their first sylvan foothold "Vogelsang" (birdsong) and their second castle "Nessau" (wet meadow, "because the riverine meadow [*ouwe*] surrounding the castle was flooded and wet [*naz*]" from its proximity to the Vistula).[13] The names of subsequent castles, towns, and villages gestured to the wet and

[12] Cosgrove, *Geography and Vision*, 1–8; Elizabeth DeLoughrey and George H. Handley, "Introduction: Toward an Aesthetic of the Earth," in *Postcolonial Ecologies: Literatures of the Environment*, ed. Elizabeth DeLoughrey and George H. Handley (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 5–8.

[13] Peter of Dusburg, *Chronicon terrae Prussie* 2.11, ed. Max Töppen, SSRP 1 (Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1861), p. 47; Nicolaus von Jeroschin, *Dî Kronike von Pruzinlant*, ed. Ernst Strehlke, SSRP 1 (Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1861), lines 3,513-610. The etymology of Nessau is original to Nicolaus's translation (lines 3,575-78).

wooded landscape, often adopting Baltic toponyms or adapting them into vernacular German equivalents. Even when the Order devised new names independent of Indigenous nomenclature, preexisting toponyms had a way of lingering in local vocabulary. Peter and Nicolaus remarked, for example, that Königsberg, named in 1255 in honor of King Ottokar of Bohemia, who first advised its settlement, "was known to the Prussians as Tvangste, after a nearby wood."[14]

Each of the three chroniclers' narratives reflects the impact of Prussia's wildly wooded and watery landscapes on their geographic imaginations. With its focus on seasonally dependent military expeditions, Wigand von Marburg's history progresses in sync with the irregular rhythms of Prussia's lakes and rivers. Action and description abound when martial mobility is facilitated by seasonal changes, either the freezing of lakes and streams or the calming of rivers into low, turgid summertime currents. When Prussia's waterways behave contrary to expectations, however, Wigand cuts chapters short, punctuating descriptions of newly arrived crusaders or logistical preparations with the explanation that climatic conditions were unsuitable for a *Reise*.[15] By the chroniclers' rendering, Christian history in Prussia turned fundamentally on the rhythms of the region's waterways. To control these waterways was, to a significant degree, to control the region.[16]

Over the course of each narrative, Prussia's Christian conquerors become adept at managing its watery landscape despite the influence of climatic factors beyond their control.

[14] Peter of Dusburg, *Chronicon* 3.72, p. 92; Nicolaus von Jeroschin, *Kronike*, lines 10,116-18.

[15] Wigand von Marburg, *Cronica nova Prutenica*, ed. Theodor Hirsch, SSRP 2 (Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1863), 429-662. Such cancellations occur, for example, in chapters 30, p. 501 (melt-ice flooding); 77, p. 568 (bad weather); 113, p. 603 (bad weather).

[16] For a recent study of brackish North Atlantic coastal landscapes as a definitive locus of encounters between colonists and Native Americans in seventeenth-century America, see Andrew Lipman, *The Saltwater Frontier: Indians and the Contest for the American Coast* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2015).

Attentiveness to regular and irregular flooding patterns, for example, is strategically decisive. Wigand tells how both Christian and pagan expeditions already underway could be forced to turn back or change course at the threat of impending floods caused by melting ice and snow in the Wilderness, forcing armies to take on the strenuous task of swimming across even small streams.[17] Conversely, expeditions undertaken despite difficult conditions are noteworthy events. Nicolaus describes the devastation caused by a Lithuanian commander who unexpectedly crossed into southeastern Prussia, even though "all the rivers in the wilderness had broken their banks and flooded wide areas, as usual." Recognizing the Lithuanians' dependence on stable bridges to cross the flood-swollen rivers, the Commander of Tapiau successfully blocked their egress by destroying all the bridges in the area. Despite the enemy's initial success in transgressing natural patterns, the Order nevertheless secures Christian victory through an equally savvy understanding of the relationship between military mobility and seasonal changes in the land.[18]

Both pagans and Christians developed specialized tactics and transportation methods suited to the rivers and streams that spread like arteries and veins throughout Prussia and beyond. Castles were frequently situated in strategic locations along rivers in order to control the traffic of people, supplies, and information between the Baltic Sea and the strongholds and settlements of the interior. Wigand is characteristically attentive to castle construction in his narrative, including the tactical advantages and disadvantages of riverside locations. He frequently references architectural and strategic details drawn from each side's efforts to control Prussia's rivers. A typical example is the Lithuanian duke Kęstutis's construction of New Cawen on the small island of Gotteswerder

[17] Wigand von Marburg, *Cronica* 30, p. 501: "propter inundacionem ex resolucione nivis et glaciei dissolute"; ibid., 114, p. 604: "tanta quoque inundacio in desertis erat, quod cum fatiga parva flumina compulsi sunt transnare."

[18] Peter of Dusburg, *Chronicon* 3.337, p. 185; Nicolaus von Jeroschin, *Kronike*, lines 25,018-57.

(Wyrgalle) in the Nemunas River, attached by a turreted and sentried bridge to the mainland on the far side of the river. Although the stronghold is sited in a perfect location to exert control over the river, the Order manages to besiege and burn it thanks to a superior command of naval tactics.[19] The demolition of the critical control point renders two neighboring castles vulnerable to attack, frustrating Kęstutis's plans. When the Christians later capture these two castles, Kęstutis learns valuable news of the setback from native fishermen he captured from the "wilderness" (*desertum*), allowing him to alter his plans accordingly. Here, as elsewhere, Indigenous omniscience turns the tide of war.[20]

This competition for Prussia's waterways was a technical contest as much as a tactical one. Drawing from observations on the battlefield and from the reports of their respective intelligence networks, both sides employed a mixture of ingenuity and mimicry in engineering fortifications and strategies.[21] An illustrative example is the Christian adoption of a certain Lithuanian naval tactic targeting the distinctive *Dansker* towers common in Teutonic convent-castles. A long, covered passageway connected the tower to the main castle, often traversing a stream to facilitate the collection of waste from toilets installed along the passageway. Aside from its hygienic function, the *Dansker* tower and its connecting bridge occasionally assumed a strategic role as a last defensible point of retreat. Multiple episodes in Wigand's narrative recount how Teutonic

[19] Wigand von Marburg, *Cronica* 59, p. 546-47.

[20] On seventeenth-century Dutch and English colonists' reliance on Native fishermen for navigating North Atlantic coastal landscapes, see Lipman, *The Saltwater Frontier*, 78.

[21] Alvydas Nikžentaitis, "Changes in the Organisation and Tactics of the Lithuanian Army in the 13th, 14th and the First Half of the 15th Century," *Fasciculi Archaeologiae Historicae* 7 (1994): 45–53; Darius Baronas, "Der Kontext der litauischen Kriegskunst des 13. Jahrhunderts und die militärischen Innovationen von der zweiten Hälfte des 14. Jahrhunderts bis zum Beginn des 15. Jahrhunderts," in *Tannenberg - Grunwald - Žalgiris 1410: Krieg und Frieden im späten Mittelalter*, ed. Werner Paravicini, Rimvydas Petrauskas, and Grischa Vercamer (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2012), 159–73.

garrisons, pushed from the main castle by assault or arson, made their last stand in the castle's *Dansker* tower (*secretum*), holding out for reinforcements or a favorable change in momentum.[22] In response, the Lithuanians developed a clever tactic to smoke out tenacious garrisons by passing burning ships underneath the tower's bridge.[23] Not to be outdone, Christian forces successfully mimicked this technique in an episode occurring three years later, commandeering two barge-like Lithuanian boats (*promen*) to set fire to the fortified bridge connecting the island castle to the mainland.[24] The command of Prussia's definitive waterways through marine tactics and naval technology represents a broader motif in Wigand's narrative. To master Prussia's rivers is to master both its interior and, especially, its borders. Wigand's rhetorical agenda notwithstanding, it is clear that this is a contest in which the Teutonic Order was quite successful.

In Nicolaus's narrative, Prussia's watery landscape is also a stage for the discursive contest between Christians and pagans. Crossing frozen rivers and lakes—when Christian armies would tread thin ice between triumph and tragedy—is hailed as miraculous, when successful.[25] Nicolaus recounts how a story of a Christian army's wanderings through winter wastelands, after its guides had become confused about the projected route and lost their way. Disastrously threatened by an enemy that had received word of the Christians' plans, their harried journey home across the frozen Curonian Lagoon is nothing short of a miracle "because the ice was so thin that it was bending like

[22] For example, one castle's Procurator and a knight hide in the *Dansker* tower to wait, in vain, for relief. Wigand von Marburg, *Cronica* 53, p. 529.

[23] Wigand von Marburg, *Cronica* 64, p. 555.

[24] Wigand von Marburg, *Cronica* 74, pp. 564-65. Hirsch notes (565n921) that so-called "*Prahmen* still refer to flat vessels in Prussia today."

[25] Conversely, it was not uncommon to fall through the ice, although Wigand is more forthcoming with stories of failure than Peter or Nicolaus (see, for example, *Cronica* 62, p. 550).

ocean waves when they are whipped up by a thunderstorm."[26] In the unlikely passage across a tumultuous sea, Nicolaus sees the hand of God at work.[27]

This challenging environment emerges as a testing ground for both physical and spiritual strength. One of the most explicit expositions of this theme is set not at a river or lake, but in a bog—another quintessentially resistant Baltic environment. The episode unfolds during a destructive raid upon Thorn and the surrounding Kulmerland by an unprecedentedly massive Sudovian force, which immolated the town's extramural suburbs, enslaved numerous Christian settlers, and plundered their goods.[28] During the campaign, a mighty Sudovian chases a Christian woman into the bog, where he attempts to murder her in a frenzied state of madness. While Peter praises the woman for "manfully resisting, forgetful of the fragility of her sex," Nicolaus elaborates further on the encounter.[29] In his version, the woman's ability to transcend her "womanly weakness and innate fragility" is inspired by the "grace of God" to fight back with her fists until he crashes down into the swamp.[30] As she attempts to strangle him, he bites off her thumb "like a dog," enraging her so much that she stuffs his mouth, nose, and ears with mud until he suffocates. The

[26] Nicolaus von Jeroschin, *Kronike*, lines 22,701-3: "God performed a miracle for them and no one died."

[27] Typological inference to the Israelites' crossing of the Red Sea is never far from Nicolaus's descriptions of such transits, as episodes discussed later in this chapter demonstrate. Direct attribution to a miracle is original to Nicolaus; cf. Peter (*Chronicon* 3.285, p. 169), who notes perfunctorily that the army was protected by the lord. An earlier episode (*Chronicon* 3.202, p. 140); lines 17,095-120) that recounts an army's quasi-miraculous nocturnal crossing of thin ice shows the same interpretive difference. Where Peter's remark that no trace of the ice remained the next morning focuses on the oddity of a weather phenomenon, Nicolaus is more emphatic in his telling that the army did not come to harm.

[28] Peter of Dusburg, *Chronicon* 3.162, pp. 126-27; Nicolaus von Jeroschin, *Kronike*, lines 14,751-84. The Sudovian force is said to have been greater "than ever had been seen before in Prussia."

[29] Peter of Dusburg, *Chronicon* 3.162, p. 127: "illa fragilitate sexus sui oblita viriliter restitit."

[30] Nicolaus von Jeroschin, *Kronike*, lines 14,759-62: "und dô er sî begreif, / von gotis hulfe ir intsleif / ir wîblîche brôde / und angeborne blôde." Cf. Rasa Mažeika, "'Nowhere Was the Fragility of Their Sex Apparent': Women Warriors in the Baltic Crusade Chronicles," in *From Clermont to Jerusalem: The Crusades and Crusader Societies, 1095-1500*, ed. Alan V. Murray (Turnhout: Brepols, 1998), 229–48.

encounter's moral is blunt: inferior in his faith, "the strong heathen died while the weak woman survived."[31]

Its setting, however, bears further consideration. On the one hand, it augments the absurdity of the spectacle, which despite (or perhaps because of) its violent content and serious message consequently amounts almost to pantomime as the waifish Christian woman overpowers her strapping pagan adversary in a muddy wrestling match to the death. On the other hand, the setting amplifies the horror of the encounter. Bogs were dangerous places, where lurking pagans might prey on passing Christians. The tale's central reversal therefore becomes all the more significant. Strength of spirit triumphs over strength of body, even in the midst of defeat and even knee-deep in the hostile land of beastly enemies. In fact, it is not the woman's hands that ultimately suffocate him, but the mud of the bog itself.

As a counterexample to a normal or natural pattern, the encounter in the bog demonstrates how discourses of paganness, religious violence, and Prussia's distinctive hydrography converge in accounts of the Order's protracted invasion. On the one hand, watery landscapes stage episodes that heighten the drama of conquest through the recounting of fiery naval battles and of transit across perilously thin ice. On the other hand, the Order's strained efforts to command these slippery places reflects a larger narrative: the mission to establish and retain control over the entire region and its native inhabitants.

[31] Nicolaus von Jeroschin, *Kronike*, lines 14,783-84: "sus wart der starke heiden blas / und daz cranke wîb genas." This episode demonstrates the tendency of both authors, especially Nicolaus, to portray pagans as distinctively violent and beastly. Mary Fischer has observed that trope was a "lively, but conventional anecdote." Mary Fischer, "Die Darstellung von Frauen in der historischen Erzählung des Deutschen Ordens," in *Neue Studien zur Literatur im Deutschen Orden*, ed. Arno Mentzel-Reuters and Bernhart Jähnig (Stuttgart: S. Hirzel, 2014), 240.

Wild Spaces as Pagan Spaces

The story of the Sudovian and the Christian woman illustrates the power of faith to transcend corporal and terrestrial limitations. In Peter and Nicolaus's understanding of pagan belief, conversely, it is the Prussians' erroneous equation of the natural with the supernatural that keeps them inescapably mired in the material world. This association between paganism and wilderness has deep roots in medieval thought. In Roman religious practices, the numinous presence of gods, heroes, and spirits was diffuse throughout the landscape. Temples and shrines offered access points at liminal spaces like hilltops and crossroads and at sites of special significance to the city of Rome's mythic history and urban topography.[32] The Roman adoption of Christianity in the fourth century profoundly reconfigured the relationship between the divine and the terrestrial, such that the presence of the divine shifted from the Mediterranean landscape into the bodies of holy men and women.[33] Access to divinity became restricted in Late Antiquity to coveted relics in the possession of urban bishops, such that the range of licit spaces for worship narrowed, even if the loci themselves proliferated through imperial patronage.

As Church fathers like Ambrose and Jerome grew increasingly suspicious that certain Christian practices continued to smack of Jewish or pagan idolatry, they asserted (following the words of Saint Paul) that *people*—not places—should be the living temple of God.[34] Until the later Roman period, the word *ecclesia* referred not to a structure designated for worship, but to the

[32] On the diversity of early imperial pagan practices and the connections between Roman civic identity and religious cult, see Mary Beard, John North, and Simon Price, *Religions of Rome*, vol. 1 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 167–210.

[33] See Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), esp. 86-127.

[34] Robert Markus, "How on Earth Could Places Become Holy?," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 2 (1994): 260–63.

congregation of worshippers themselves.[35] R. A. Markus has argued that post-Constantinian Christian holy sites developed from association with the cult of *martyrs* specifically, who represented the bridge between the heroic past of the persecuted church and its triumphant present. The sanctity of these sites derived from a collapsing of sacred and earthly time, which allowed visitors to bask in the presence of past martyrs whose Christlike deaths both bore witness to bloody origins, and represented the eschatological promise of an angelic end time.[36] Peter Brown, conversely, has shown that the special nature of saintly bodies could develop not just through their deaths, but also through spectacular lives.[37] The optimal place to demonstrate superhuman qualities was in the desert wilderness, a landscape that readily lent itself to the ascetic behavior of early hermits and monastic communities. Sanctity was most readily accessed through the bones of holy people, but wild places were its wellspring. Wilderness, precisely because it was so alien to sanctity, was sanctifying—at least, for those strong enough in body and faith to overcome the challenges posed by a landscape scarce of resources and abundant in demons.

At the same time, wild places became associated with the pagan practices of Celtic and Germanic peoples resistant to the efforts of early missionaries. In contrast to the increasingly urban and indoor Christian religion, pagan customs took place outdoors, and, according to Christian sources, often centered on a topographic feature like a tree or spring.[38] The condemnable veneration of trees and springs is a recurring motif in Christian accounts of pagan practice. To

[35] Robert Bartlett, "Reflections on Paganism and Christianity in Medieval Europe," *Proceedings of the British Academy* 101 (1999): 67.

[36] Markus, "How on Earth Could Places Become Holy?," 262, 270–71.

[37] Brown, *The Cult of the Saints*, 69–85.

[38] Robert Bartlett has identified this difference in venue as the most marked and persistent distinction between European pagan and Christian practices. "Reflections on Paganism and Christianity in Medieval Europe," 69–72.

Peter and Nicolaus in the fourteenth century, the Prussians' attachment to wild landscapes signaled intellectual defect—an innate lack both of the reason needed to conceptualize God and of the ability to know him through the written word.[39] Such lack of reason was, from the twelfth century on, a common explanation for the inability to see Christian truth, which questioned whether groups like Jews could even be considered fully human.[40] Peter invoked these scholastic discourses, but although his depiction of the Baltic pagans as irrational dehumanized them, he took a different approach to explaining their relationship to material wealth.[41] Because the pagans are unable to comprehend God without Christian assistance, he reasoned, they cultivate a fundamentally irrational connection to the natural world, worshipping wild animals and celestial bodies as their gods ("birds, beasts, and even toads…sun, stars, and moon"), and treating the land itself as their temple ("fields, waters, and woods").[42] Paralyzed by their irrational reverence for the landscape, Prussia's Indigenous people are forbidden from ploughing its fields, fishing in its waters, or cutting

[39] Peter of Dusburg, *Chronicon* 3.5, p. 53; Nicolaus von Jeroschin, *Kronike*, lines 3,983-4,264.

[40] Christian scholars like Abelard argued that reason was fundamental to the human capacity to perceive the moral lessons of Natural Law, which—although the New Testament represented a prescriptive update—was supposedly common to all human beings. The logical conclusion was that Jews and pagans must not be fully human. Jews became associated with slavishness to bodily appetites opposite to reason, motivated by greed for the material rewards on which Mosaic Law was supposedly fixated, in contrast to the spiritual rewards at the heart of the New Testament. Anna Sapir Abulafia, *Christians and Jews in Dispute: Disputational Literature and the Rise of Anti-Judaism in the West (c. 1000-1150)* (Brookfield, VT: Ashgate, 1998), 6–7, 107–17.

[41] Of course, these were not the only discourses for understanding or explaining religious Others. The popular travel narrative of John Mandeville, for example, does not depict all pagans as monstrous; some are perfectly reasonable beings in tune with a Natural God who resembles the Christian deity in all but name. Sara Lipton, "Christianity and Its Others: Jews, Muslims, and Pagans," in *The Oxford Handbook of Medieval Christianity*, ed. John H. Arnold (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 428.

[42] Nicolaus's "welde" may have a broader sense than Peter's "lucos"; but it rhymes easily with "velde," which corresponds more closely to "campos." *Kronike*, lines 4,009-10.

down its forests.[43] Peter thus characterizes Prussian people as not simply *under*developed, but as fundamentally held back from development by their pagan beliefs.[44]

The poverty of their material culture in turn reflects the poverty of their undeveloped landscape. Aside from the grave goods buried with their elite, the Prussians are supposedly uninterested in products of value or quality. "They put on yesterday's clothes today in the same state as when they took them off, paying no mind as to whether they are inside out"; nor do they sleep on soft beds.[45] Although they follow a theoretically admirable code of hospitality, the entertainment of guests inevitably devolves into grotesque displays of drunkenness because of a lack of fine food and drink.[46] Their ability to "distinguish a specific day for the purpose of trade or making payments" remains limitedly crude, moreover, without a concept of calendrical time.[47] A destitute people robbed of the capacity to shape the natural world, excluded from the eschatological destiny of Christian time, and therefore denied the agency to make their own

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[43] The reference to forestry was added by Nicolaus. Compare Peter, *Chronicon* 3.5, p. 53: "they also held groves, fields, and waters as sacred, such that they had not dared drain or cultivate farmland or to fish in them" (*habuerunt eciam lucos, campos et aquas sacras, sic quod secare aut agros colere vel piscari ausi non fuerant in eisdem*) with Nicolaus (lines 4,009-14): "they also held fields, waters, and woodlands as sacred according to their minds, so that they did not wish to plough or fish in them, *nor to fell trees in the forests*" (*sô hattin sî velde, / wazzere unde welde / heilic nâch irme sinne / sô daz sî nicht darinne / pflûgin noch vischin torstin /* noch houwin in den vorstin). Emphasis added.

[44] Peter's explanation of the Prussian limited relationship with the natural world as a function of irrational religious belief bears striking resemblance to later colonial missionaries' attitudes towards native peoples. Nicholas Thomas, for one, has pointed to the centrality of tools and technology to European narratives of transforming "a condition of stasis, neglect, and nonproduction which is associated with barbarism." Such beliefs were only applicable, however, to colder, more remote places like southern New Zealand, which did not show the same signs of human impact as warmer places like Tahiti and Tonga. Of the Maori, for example, colonizers recognized "no basis in the native inhabitants' relationship with the surrounding world for advancement and denied the kind of continuity elsewhere asserted." Undeveloped, "wild" landscapes, in other words, facilitated narratives of uncivilized, "wild" people in need of Westerners' transformative intervention. Thomas, *Entangled Objects*, 147.

[45] Peter of Dusburg, *Chronicon* 3.5, p. 54; Nicolaus von Jeroschin, *Kronike*, lines 4,146-49.

[46] The trope of pagan drunkenness recurs in the chronicles, as in one story in Peter and Nicolaus's accounts that tells how the Brothers were able to take advantage of their inebriated enemy to gain control of the Kulmerland region. Peter of Dusburg, *Chronicon* 3.7, p. 55-56; Nicolaus von Jeroschin, *Kronike*, lines 4,313-400.

[47] Peter of Dusburg, *Chronicon* 3.5, p. 54-55; Nicolaus von Jeroschin, *Kronike*, lines 4,225-46.

history, the Prussians emerge as hardly more human than the animals they worship. Material poverty is a proxy for spiritual dereliction, both rooted in an irrational devotion to the sanctity of wilderness.

Although Peter frowned, by necessity, upon the Prussians' pagan beliefs, he nevertheless theorized a quasi-ecclesiastical structure to explain the phenomenon that he and his sources had observed of pan-Baltic religious practices. The system described centers around the figure of Criwe, a fictive pagan pope residing in the aptly named Nadrovian city of Romovia, "named after Rome."[48] Like the pope, Criwe is said to command the obedience and reverence of all the pagans—not only the Prussians, but also the peoples of Lithuania and Livonia.[49] His inviolable emissaries, like papal legates, carry a staff and other insignia as visual symbols of the sacral authority vested in them, affording them condign reception by hosts all across the pagan world. As the high priest of his cult, Criwe not only coordinates the various peoples in his domain, but also tends to the proper performance of rituals. He oversees burial rites, facilitates offerings and sacrifices in thanksgiving for victories in battle, and protects an eternal flame—a practice aligning his followers with the peoples of scriptural antiquity. The invention of Criwe complicates the discursive construction of paganness. Rather than a total antithesis to Christianity, paganism emerges in Peter and Nicolaus's chronicles as its warped mirror image—barely familiar for its grotesque disfigurement, but recognizable nonetheless.[50] The ignorance at the root of the Prussians' beliefs,

[48] Peter of Dusburg, *Chronicon* 3.5, p. 53-54: "trahens nomen suum a Roma"; Nicolaus von Jeroschin, *Kronike*, line 4,021: "und was nâch Rôme genant." We will revisit Criwe in chapter five.

[49] Although he normally calls the pagans *infideles*, Peter (*Chronicon* 3.5, p. 53) extraordinarily refers here to the "universal church of the faithful" (*universalem ecclesiam fidelium*). Nicolaus (*Kronike*, lines 4,025-56) makes no such overt comparison to the Christian church, simply calling the pagans *heiden*.

[50] On the efforts of medieval churchmen to frame pagan customs (such as blood sacrifice) within a Christian theological framework, see Bartlett, "Reflections on Paganism and Christianity in Medieval Europe." From a literary critical perspective, Edith Feistner has argued that the Romovia/Criwe story in Peter and Nicolaus's chronicles constructs pagan alterity as a "distorted image" (*Zerrform*) of the Christian self, intended not simply to present pagans

moreover, smacks of Edenic innocence; and indeed the image of Prussia after the Christians' initial arrival is one of peaceful coexistence. Patient instruction in the faith would have eventually prevailed over stubborn ignorance, Peter implies, had the devil not intervened. Throughout the chronicle, recurrent pagan violence is the product of diabolical design—narrative logic that Nicolaus enthusiastically developed in his translation.[51] Still, even if the Prussians' resistance to Christian faith and lordship is less an inherent vice than the result of devilish influence, Peter and Nicolaus do not shy away from the implication that the pagans' own instigation of violence necessitated a firmer Christian hand.[52]

In contrast to these ethnographically invested (if still condemnatory) depictions of paganness, Wigand's chronicle focuses almost exclusively on its more macabre elements like human sacrifice.[53] Even without laying a formal or intellectual foundation to explain the affinity

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negatively, but to suggest that the Prussians already have a foundation for adopting Christian beliefs and social structures. "Vom Kampf gegen das 'Andere': Pruzzen, Litauer und Mongolen in lateinischen und deutschen Texten des Mittelalters," *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum und deutsche Literatur* 132, no. 3 (2003): 284.

[51] As Alan Murray has observed, the devil's intervention is a convenient explanatory device for rationalizing the erratic violence of both pagans (whom the chroniclers still wish to portray as capable of converting) and wayward Christians (like Poles and post-conversion Lithuanians, who cannot be inherently wicked). Alan V. Murray, "Heathens, Devils and Saracens: Crusader Concepts of the Pagan Enemy during the Baltic Crusades (Twelfth to Fifteenth Centuries)," in *Crusading on the Edge: Ideas and Practice of Crusading in Iberia and the Baltic Region, 1100-1500*, ed. Torben K. Nielsen and Iben Fonnesberg-Schmidt (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2016), 211–16.

[52] Cf. Mažeika, who has suggested that Peter's attribution of pagan error to ignorance rather than diabolical intent essentially absolved the Prussians of sin. Rasa Mažeika, "Granting Power to Enemy Gods in the Chronicles of the Baltic Crusades," in *Medieval Frontiers. Concepts and Practices*, ed. David Abulafia and Nora Berend (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2002), 159.

[53] The depiction of pagans as violent people obsessed with bloody sacrifices has a tradition extending to Late Antiquity, when Christian authors like Prudentius vilified Roman practices. Lipton, "Christianity and Its Others: Jews, Muslims, and Pagans," 425. Complicating the profile of Late Antique pagans, Pierre Chuvin has pointed out that paganism was not a strictly religious category, but encompassed the political and cultural practices of the urban elite as well; only in the late fifth century did the primary association between paganism and the religious practices of rural people take form. Pierre Chuvin, *Chronique des derniers païens: la disparition du paganisme dans l'Empire romain, du règne de Constantin à celui de Justinien*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Fayard, 1991). Such scenes in the Teutonic chronicles go beyond intellectual discourse, in any case. As Mažeika has argued, these were real practices that many Christians took seriously, interpreting pagan gods as demons powerful enough to hold Baltic tribes in their thrall. Mažeika, "Granting Power to Enemy Gods in the Chronicles of the Baltic Crusades," esp. 160.

with wilderness, Wigand never loses the association in his depictions of pagan rituals. In what is perhaps the grisliest of these scenes, the Commander of Memel, Marquard, leads a winter raid into the Lithuanian land of Medeniken, to which the crusaders duly lay waste. By following their tracks through the snow, however, the Lithuanians pursue the raiding party into a marsh, which, despite the extensive snowfall, had not frozen over. Here they defeat the Christians and capture the Commander. Marquard's bad luck only worsens when the Lithuanians choose him by lot as a sacrifice to their gods, "as was customary in their erroneous belief."[54] They place him on his horse ("red and dripping with the gore from its wounds"), bind his hands and feet, and burn him alive.[55] A similar episode takes place following a summer raid into the northwestern Lithuanian region of Samogitia. Overtaken near a forest stream during their return from an expedition of raiding and slaving, a Christian force sustains heavy casualties and injuries. In the aftermath, the Lithuanians seize one of the captive Brothers and tie him to a tree in order to offer him to their gods, piercing him to death with their lances.[56] Human sacrifice, in each case, is the culmination of a disastrous turn of events resulting from the Lithuanians' uncannily superior command of the environment. Whether manifested in their skill to track Christian quarry through snow-laden swamplands or to fly through dense forests in swift pursuit, Wigand's pagans repeatedly demonstrate their terrifying affinity for wilderness in admonitory vignettes almost like fairy tales: however successful a campaign, they warn, Christians caught crossing wild places where they do not belong must take utmost care, lest they wish to end their days as an immolation to wicked gods.

[54] Wigand von Marburg, *Cronica* 147, p. 638: "juxta errorem suum."

[55] Wigand von Marburg, *Cronica* 147, p. 638: "perfusus cruore ex vulneribus rubicundus apparuit." It is not entirely clear whether the horse's wounds or Marquard's wounds are meant.

[56] Wigand von Marburg, *Cronica* 92, pp. 582-83.

By depicting pagans as instigators of conflict and persecutors of Christians, Teutonic chroniclers participated in contemporary debates over the use of violence against non-Christians. As outlined in Gregory IX's 1235 bull *Cum hora undecima* and essentially consistent with the policies of his thirteenth- and fourteenth-century successors, the church officially held that the goal of missionary work, universal conversion, must be (and could only be) achieved through peaceful preaching of the gospel, complemented and facilitated by (appropriately non-usurious) trade relations. This theory relied, however, on the double premise that non-Christians themselves were both rational beings and amenable to peaceful coexistence.[57] Even non-Christians, argued canon lawyers, were guaranteed natural rights to property and lordship, the deprivation of which would thus be illicit. As vicars of Christ on earth, however, the popes were responsible for all souls, and consequently held *de iure* power over non-Christians. Because papal authority technically superseded natural law, in other words, papally authorized wars were justified. The caveat was that baptism still must never be imposed—an injunction against violence that stood contrary to the identity of the Teutonic Order as defenders of Christendom and threatened its pretensions to territorial expansion [58] Its chroniclers, accordingly, cast the Order's pagan enemies as irrational aggressors, thus conveying the slanted message that the Indigenous population of the Baltic, both lacking reason and resisting peaceful coexistence, doubly forfeit any natural right to their wild land.

[57] Muldoon, *Popes, Lawyers, and Infidels*, 36–45.

[58] Muldoon, 6–15. For an overview of the conflict between the Teutonic Order and the institutional church on this point in the late fourteenth century, which, at the instigation of Poland and Lithuania, effectively tarnished the Order's reputation and dramatically culminated at the Council of Constance, see Boockmann, *Der Deutsche Orden*, 145–50. For a recent consideration of the episode in the context of ecclesiastical theories on forced conversion, see Buc, *Holy War, Martyrdom, and Terror*, 228–31.

Making Fortresses from Forests

The special relationship between Baltic pagans and wild places is especially apparent in the region's woodlands. Like its hydrography, Prussia's forests furnish a frequent site of confrontation in both chronicle traditions. But unlike the lakes and waterways that gradually become the fishing holes and highways of Christian occupation, woodlands never come under the same degree of control. In fact, despite the best efforts of both pagans and Christians, the forest—at least in areas of contested authority—remains something of a transient middle ground, rather than a space to plant firm footholds for lordship.

Nevertheless, it is again Baltic natives who move most fluidly through the forests, blending in and out of groves and thickets like shadows, and disappearing as suddenly as they materialize. Prussians and Lithuanians harass unsuspecting Christian from woodland hideaways, with sudden ambushes often leaving little or no time to prepare defenses. Not just Christian armies, but also Christian settlements are the targets, as when the townspeople of Kulmsee find themselves unable to harvest their fields because of the threat of Prussian ambushes from the surrounding forest.[59] Such tactics were especially common during the Prussian revolts of the thirteenth century, when it was not just forests along Prussia's borderlands that posed danger, but also those of the interior. Peter and Nicolaus describe the flight of Elbing's townspeople to a fortified mill in the face of one such sudden attack.[60] Trapped and outnumbered, they manage to secure an oath of peace with the Prussians, who nonetheless set fire to the mill and kill the settlers as they try to escape. Ambushing and oath-breaking are related dangers, particularly in the context of rebellion.

[59] Peter of Dusburg, *Chronicon* 3.153, p. 124; Nicolaus von Jeroschin, *Kronike*, lines 14,361-426.

[60] Peter of Dusburg, *Chronicon* 3.170, pp. 129-30; Nicolaus von Jeroschin, *Kronike*, lines 15,071-200.

Stories of forest ambuscades are, in fact, a common way that all three chroniclers illustrate the trope of the treacherous pagan.[61] For example, Peter and Nicolaus tell the story of the Scalovian noble Sarecka, who, under the false promise of conversion, asks the Commander of Memel to give him and his men safe passage to Teutonic territory.[62] The Commander obliges, unaware of Sarecka's plan to ambush the Teutonic Knights. It is only through the last-minute intervention of a trusted pagan spy that the Commander manages to avoid and outmaneuver the ambushers, capturing Sarecka and eight of his men. Although Sarecka bursts from his restraints and kills some of his captors, the Christian army nevertheless manages to evade his larger scheme. In most cases, however, the outcome is considerably worse.[63] In one of the chronicles' most striking episodes, the Natangian rebel leader Henry Monte takes advantage of his upbringing among the Brothers to outfox them. Knowing the Brothers' practice of hiding in marshes and forest undergrowth when the routes to their castles are blocked, Henry is able to locate the hideaways of Christians in retreat. Calling out to them in German, he announces that the enemy has left and that it is now safe to emerge from hiding, affording him and his followers an opportunity to capture or kill the Christians as they emerge, unawares: "such treachery is said to have occurred frequently," Nicolaus soberly concludes.[64] By framing Henry Monte's action as a common practice of Prussian rebels raised

[61] For one of many examples of a Christian army ambushed as it travels along a road (in this case, as it retreats), see Wigand von Marburg, *Cronica* 86d, pp. 576-77.

[62] Peter of Dusburg, *Chronicon* 3.186, pp. 134-35; Nicolaus von Jeroschin, *Kronike*, lines 16,229-338.

[63] Such as when "a traitor among the Brothers' ranks" (*quidem de familia fratrum*; *zu gesinde…einen valschin man*) leads the Brothers from the castle Wiesenburg along enemy tracks under the pretense of overtaking the enemy; their pursuit ends in a fatal ambush by the awaiting Sudovian army. Peter of Dusburg, *Chronicon* 3.116, p. 110; Nicolaus von Jeroschin, *Kronike*, lines 12,165-226, here 12,180-81. In another episode, Prussian and Teutonic forces agree to settle a siege through single combat. The Prussians ambush the appointed Teutonic combatant (a man named Troppo), ultimately killing him by a series of traps as he tries to escape. Peter of Dusburg, *Chronicon* 3.119, p. 111; Nicolaus von Jeroschin, *Kronike*, lines 12,353-492.

[64] Nicolaus von Jeroschin, *Kronike*, lines 14,963-94, here 14,994: "Der nôt sî vil begîngin."

among the Teutonic Knights, Peter and Nicolaus hint at the long shadow cast by the Prussian rebellions, half a century after the final uprising had taken place. Such uneasiness that a potential traitor might be indistinguishable from a trusted neighbor reflects a common colonial anxiety about the sustainability of assimilation and the fragility of new categories.[65] Well after the trial and execution of Henry Monte and his fellow rebel leaders "put an end to the rebellion of the Prussian people," their ghosts would continue to haunt the dark fringes of Christian imagination.[66]

Even when they are not waiting to attack an unsuspecting enemy, the Prussians and Lithuanians demonstrate an uncanny ability to blend into the forests. In one of the most popular stories to circulate in Western Europe about Prussia, the Lithuanian duke Kęstutis relies on this particular legerdemain to escape from captivity at Marienburg.[67] His feat is not without accomplices, of course. Kęstutis initially receives help from an Indigenous attendant (*servitor*) named Alpf, "who, a Christian though he may have been, was nevertheless a pagan at heart [*origine*]."[68] Alpf provides Kęstutis with the set of Teutonic vestments that will enable him to steal away in broad daylight:

> [Alpf] conspired with the prince [*regem*], bringing him a white pallium with the black cross, so that he could, under cover of the Brothers' garb, ride swiftly away along the paths he knew, astride horses belonging to the High Commander. And thus he gleefully slipped away, dressed in this fashion on his stolen horse. A Teutonic Brother ran up to him as he passed by. They exchanged greetings, then

[65] Stoler, "Rethinking Colonial Categories: European Communities and the Boundaries of Rule." For an appraisal of the practicalities and asymmetries of bilingualism in an earlier context (the German settlement in Slavic territory east of the Elbe), see Sébastien Rossignol, "Bilingualism in Medieval Europe: Germans and Slavs in Helmold of Bosau's Chronicle," *Central European History* 47, no. 3 (2014): 523–43.

[66] Peter of Dusburg, *Chronicon* 3.262, p. 161; Nicolaus von Jeroschin, *Kronike*, lines 20,516-687, here 20,686-87: "Sus dô untrûwe dô gelac, / der dî prûzsche dît ê pflac."

[67] The exciting story of Kęstutis' escape from Marienburg was one of the few pieces of knowledge about Lithuania widely circulating in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Klaus Militzer, "Was wußte man in den deutschen Städten während des Mittelalters über Litauen und Vilnius?," *Lituanistica* 31 (1997): 22.

[68] Wigand von Marburg, *Cronica* 52, p. 528: "qui licet esset christianus, origine tamen paganus erat."

> the Brother presently returned to the inner courtyard, never realizing, after the fact, that the one he had greeted was the one who had escaped.[69]

After ridding himself of his horses, Kęstutis conceals himself in a woodland marsh until nightfall, when he is able to sneak through the shadows into the southern region of Masovia. After seeking refuge with a kinswoman (*germanam*) for some time, he finally reunites with legates of his own, who await him in the Lithuanian wilderness with fresh horses for the remaining journey.[70] In Wigand's telling of the sensational jailbreak, Kęstutis cunningly operationalizes two types of camouflage. First, he is evidently indistinguishable enough in appearance and comfortable enough with the Order's customs to easily avoid detection as an outsider. Second, Kęstutis blends seamlessly into the forest, little more than a shadow himself as he beats his swift retreat along sylvan byways.

Escaping into the forest is not always so covert. Dispersion into woods and brambles amounts to something of a stock trope in the narration of frontier violence. In a typical example from Wigand's text, the Lithuanian inhabitants of Erogeln flee from a surprise attack "into the bramble thickets" (*ad rubeta*), saving themselves but leaving their lands vulnerable to depredation.[71] In other cases, it is castle garrisons who leave their fortified posts at the news of impending attack, seeking instead the protection of the surrounding forest.[72] Several telling anecdotes reaffirm the trope that woods were safer spaces for Baltic natives than for German

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[69] Wigand von Marburg, *Cronica* 52, p. 528: "Hic [Alpf] consolatus est regem, ferens ei pallium album cum cruce nigra, ut sic sub habitu fratris equitaret celeriter vias suas in equis magni commendatoris ei allatis, et sic letus evasit in huiusmodi habitu et equis. Cui occurrit quidam frater ordinis et mutuo fraterne se salutabant nec novit, sed postea reduxit ad cor, talem fuisse, qui evaserat."

[70] Wigand von Marburg, *Cronica* 52, p. 528-29.

[71] Wigand von Marburg, *Cronica* 39, p. 513.

[72] For example, when a Lithuanian garrison has enough time to flee into the forest because a Teutonic army, led past the castle by a guide unfamiliar with the area, loses time backtracking to it. Peter of Dusburg, *Chronicon* 3.265, p. 162; Nicolaus von Jeroschin, *Kronike*, lines 20,758-815.

settlers. Take, for example, the story of another elite Prussian named Nalubo.[73] Refusing to convert to Christianity or to submit to the Order, even after his friends and brothers have done so, Nalubo finds himself in grave danger. His brother, Wargullo, having requested the Brothers' permission to warn Nalubo of an impending Teutonic attack, advises his brother to seek asylum in the forests. Nalubo heeds his brother's warning. Like the Lithuanian inhabitants of Erogeln, he saves his life but loses his land.

When forests are absent or insufficiently defensible, they can be made. The chroniclers employ strikingly similar language when describing the ubiquitous practice of assembling makeshift defenses from woodland undergrowth.[74] In a section of Peter's Latin chronicle that Nicolaus particularly embellished in his translation, Nicolaus describes how a Christian army returning from a raiding expedition finds its path completely blocked by trees. He explains that a contingent of Lithuanians, rather than facing the Christian force head-on, "focused instead on the roads the brothers had used to enter the country, which they blocked with trees and transformed into a thick forest to confuse the Christians as they returned."[75] Such makeshift forests appear in Wigand's chronicle too, especially when the Lithuanians are fleeing or defending themselves. In one major raid, they fashion "two pathways and a bridge through the enclosures of hewn trees

[73] Nicolaus expands the dialogue between the two brothers, adding the line to flee to the *forests* specifically: "Now get out of here, Nalube, as quickly as you can, and flee to the forest—escape the pain of death!" (*Balde ûf, Nalube, balde* / *unde vlûch kegn walde* / *inwîchende des todis pîn!*). *Kronike*, lines 11,609-11. In Peter's text, Wargullo says: "You make a mistake, Nalubo, now you must get up and become a wanderer, a refugee from your land" (*Nalubo maledicte, nunc surgas, et sis vagus et profugus de terra tua*). *Chronicon* 3.101, p. 105. In both versions, Nalubo does eventually convert, becoming a known and respected Christian in the region.

[74] Variously labeled *hagen, heyne/hayne, hegen,* or *slege* in German and *septa/cepta, rubeta,* or *insidias* in Latin, these structures have been of particular interest to scholars studying the geography of the Prussian-Lithuanian Wilderness. See especially Mortensen and Mortensen, *Besiedlung*, 1937, 1:20–22 and passim.

[75] Nicolaus von Jeroschin, *Kronike*, lines 25,080-86: "ûf di wegge, dâ gerant / dî brûdre wâren in daz lant / und sî aldâ vorwaltin / mit boumen und vorstaltin / in einis waldis dicke / den cristnen zu schricke / wen sî widder zugin dan." These details are original to Nicolaus's translation of Peter's text (*Chronicon* 3.338, p. 185).

[*septa*]" to facilitate their tactical retreat; and in the aftermath of another, the duke Algirdas hides away, "entrenching himself in the woods with sundered trees" until his Christian pursuers force him out.[76] The duke Vytautas similarly encamps with a powerful force "in a woodland glade [*nemore*] surrounded by enclosures [*septa*] formed from cloven tree limbs, securely armed with eight palisaded earthworks and encircling oak trees"—a fortress carved from the wilderness itself, hidden well enough that the Christians only learn of it through a Lithuanian captive.[77]

Despite the imposing magnificence of Vytautas' woodland stronghold, the Christians manage to bypass it, "circling about through the wilderness such as they had never done before."[78] The campaign's culminating act of violence demonstrates that Christian dominion was strong enough to disassemble their Indigenous rivals' dangerous link to the land. The Christians also learn, of course, to construct traps of their own for the pagans in the wilderness, which cunning men like Kęstutis seek to avoid by capturing Christians from the peripheries of settled regions.[79] Thus forest *Hagen*, similar to the towns and fortifications along the waterways discussed earlier in the chapter, become a key site where the discursive contest between pagan and Christian dominion

[76] Wigand von Marburg, *Cronica* 87, p. 578; 75, p. 567, respectively. The Latin translator's common use of the term "septa" may provocatively conjure associations with sacred spaces, like the interiors of churches and temples. Peter uses the term twice, for example, to signify the interior of a church (*Chronicon* 2.2, p. 34) and that of a castle (*Chronicon* 2.4, p. 35).

[77] Wigand von Marburg, *Cronica* 162, p. 657: "A certain Lithuanian was captured there, from whom they heard that Vytautas was stationed in a grove walled off with hewn trees and protected by eight earthworks palisaded by oaken tree trunks fastened together; he also had cannons and countless spears, and his army of Samogitians" (*Quidam Lithwanus ibidem deprehensus est, a quo audiunt, Wytaudum stare in nemore intra septa succisarum arborum et armatum viij vallis cum truncis et roboribus conclavatis cum bombardis et telis innumeris et Samaitis cum potencia sua*).

[78] Wigand von Marburg, *Cronica* 162, p. 657: "circuiens per deserta, qualis nunquam a Prutenis fuit perambulata."

[79] As when the Procurator of Insterburg "rode into the wilderness against the pagans and set traps there" (*equitavit ad deserta contra paganos posuitque insidias*). Wigand von Marburg, *Cronica* 69, p. 557. For Kęstutis's strategy, see chap. 80a.

manifests itself.[80] The Prussians' and Lithuanians' special relationship with the region's forests therefore not only illustrates their rootedness in wilderness: it also becomes a means of justifying and illustrating the Order's historical mission to *un*root them.

The parallels between paganism and the more negative attributes of woodlands notwithstanding, the discursive affinity between Prussia's Indigenous lands and people went beyond a religious association. Each of the chroniclers, but especially Peter and Nicolaus, betray a shared anxiety: namely, that Prussia's native people possessed innate qualities that even conversion might not unroot.[81] We see this in the stories they tell about supposedly assimilated Prussians across the social scale. The Natangian rebel leader Henry Monte, for one, seems to have represented one particularly disturbing episode. The intimate familiarity with German language and customs that Henry had acquired from his childhood among the Brothers becomes his most deadly weapon in executing a long-harbored plan of betrayal. It is no coincidence that his designs are most devastatingly wrought in the forest. The boy Alpf also conspires against the Order from the inside when he aids in Kęstutis's jailbreak. Although lacking Henry's status and notoriety, Alpf's potential to undermine Teutonic plans comes across as all the more insidious: unlike Henry, who ultimately reveals himself as a traitor, Alpf remains—as far as we know—securely positioned within the Order's ranks.

Was it the wish to exorcise these demons of racial difference that compelled Peter and Nicolaus to heroize the ethnic violence carried out in frontier forests and villages? Nicolaus in particular revels in the exploits of a certain Martin von Golin, who appears multiple times in both

[80] *Hagen* could be sites of conflict between Indigenous populations, too, as when the Pomerelian duke Swietopelk and his brother Sambor drew on their familiarity with Prussian customs to presciently impede an enemy Prussian army's retreat back to their forest *Hagen* by placing obstacles in the undergrowth. Peter of Dusburg, *Chronicon* 3.11, p. 58; Nicolaus von Jeroschin, *Kronike*, lines 4,602-9.

[81] Cf. Heng, *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages*, 27–31.

his and Peter's chronicles as something of a ruthless bounty-hunter character. One episode tells of how Martin was caught unawares by the Sudovians as he rested with four German and eleven Prussian companions.[82] The Germans perish immediately in the surprise attack, but the Prussians, leaving all their possessions behind, manage to flee to safety in the forest, where Martin later seeks them out. Martin and his remaining men later carry out a particularly brutal ambush of their own upon a Prussian village They slaughter its men as they sit defenseless in a bathhouse, and take its women, children, and livestock captive. The spectacle of violence amounts to a sort of proxy vengeance for the fallen German comrades, and thus carries a chilling subtext: if we cannot find you, we will kill or capture your neighbors.[83]

Hunters and the Hunted

Baltic woodlands were hideaways and havens for elusive enemies as well as reclusive beasts—a connection that did not escape the notice of Teutonic chroniclers.[84] Sometimes blurring the lines between the animal and human nature of the targeted quarry, hunting scenes in the Order's histories capture the animating—and, conversely, animalizing—resonance of the pursuit. The assumption that humans and animals occupy distinct ontological categories has been challenged by proponents

[82] Peter of Dusburg, *Chronicon* 3.198, p. 139; Nicolaus von Jeroschin, *Kronike*, lines 16,945-17,034. As in the story about Nalubo (cf. n73 above), Nicolaus adds specific language about fleeing into the forest (line 16,967), although Peter does say that Martin himself roamed around "in silva" in search of his companions. It is notable that Peter and Nicolaus number "Stovemel and Kudar of Sudovia" and "Nakam of Pogesania" among the "Christian bandits" whose illustrious deeds "no one could ever fully recount"; being German was not a prerequisite for heroic praise. *Chronicon* 3.198, p. 139; *Kronike*, lines 16,927-44.

[83] Peter of Dusburg, *Chronicon* 3.200, p. 140; Nicolaus von Jeroschin, *Kronike*, lines 16,927-17,052.

[84] In this section, I focus on hunting as a ritualized elite practice rather than as a practical or professional means of food provision, although Nicolaus in particular suggests a link between these two distinct types of hunting. On hunting practices among the Western medieval aristocracy, see John Cummins, *The Hound and the Hawk: The Art of Medieval Hunting* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1988); Eric J. Goldberg, *In the Manner of the Franks: Hunting, Kingship, and Masculinity in Early Medieval Europe* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2020).

of critical animal theory.[85] Karl Steel, for one, has recently argued that humans "attempt to claim a unique, oppositional identity for themselves" vis-à-vis animals, especially under circumstances that threaten to blur the categories of animal and human natures. Violent acts of domination, especially the domestication, slaughter, and consumption of animals, constitute the active denial of such ontological overlap, and thus reinforce the boundaries that define humans (who should *not* be tamed, killed, or eaten) in opposition to animals (who *should* be).[86] In Steel's analysis, medieval Christians justified this dominance on two principal grounds: first, that humans, as rational beings fashioned in God's likeness, were mentally and spiritually superior to animals; and second, that humans' special physiology facilitated the outward physical expression of these internal traits (e.g., having hands and walking upright facilitates actions impossible for animals walking on all fours).[87]

Steel's theory does not fully explain how the Teutonic chroniclers employed hunting motifs. When carried out in a courtly manner, the violent pursuit, killing, and consumption of wild animals does not distinguish the Christian hunters as human so much as it codes their behavior as civilized and masculine. Especially in scenes that cast *pagans* as the Christians' quarry, an oppositional identity (to borrow Steel's formulation) emerges along a religious axis that also

[85] "Critical animal theory [advocates] for nonanthropocentric approaches to determining the moral significance of animals: it reconceives the distinct subjects of animal rights thinking by describing humans and nonhumans as co-constituted by their shared worlds, and in place of rationalist patterns of rights, critical animal theory proposes affective nonprogrammatic relations of caring, protection, and humility." Karl Steel, *How to Make a Human: Animals and Violence in the Middle Ages* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2011), 3–4.

[86] Steel, 15. For another perspective, see Joyce Salisbury, who argues that the ontological boundaries between animals and humans grew thinner over the course of the Middle Ages in *The Beast Within: Animals in the Middle Ages* (New York: Routledge, 1994), esp. 167-78.

[87] In an intellectual tradition stemming from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and Augustine's writings and manifesting in medieval genres like hagiography, upright posture positioned humanity to gaze at the heavens and contemplate divinity, whereas beasts, low to the ground, could only think of food. Exceptions to the rule (such as monkeys with hands and walking upright) could be explained as the artificial product of human domination (i.e., training). Similarly, peasants' beastly livelihood despite their human physiology was taken as a cause for their domination by lords. Steel, *How to Make a Human*, 29–60. On the disparaging attribution of animal traits to peasants, see Paul Freedman, *Images of the Medieval Peasant* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 139–54.

dehumanizes the animal-like pagans—a trope we have already seen in the depiction of pagans as the inhabitants of wild places. The problem is that the chroniclers sometimes invert this paradigm: pagans appear as adept hunters, Christians are described as animals (even as the pagans' quarry), and Christian victories also bring a mastery of the wild places normally associated with beastlike pagans. In fact, it is *this* ontological blurring of Christian civility and pagan barbarity that seems more at stake than the human-animal boundary itself. Hunting expertise does, therefore, encode a narrative of Christian dominance over nature. The caveat, however, is that because Christians could resemble their quarry (wild animals *or* pagans) in the process, mastering Prussia's wild landscape threatened .[88]

Each text conveys moments of triumph and defeat in vignettes centered around hunting. Occasionally, it is the pagans (especially the Lithuanians) who emerge as master hunters. Wigand describes how the Lithuanian duke Kęstutis (whom we followed earlier in his escape from Marienburg) showcased his and his men's hunting prowess in a theatrical refusal to compromise with the Christians. Teutonic watchmen at the frontier castle of Insterburg observed Kęstutis's Lithuanian vanguard drag the hulking carcass of a wild boar along through a field in view of the castle, having transfixed it with a spear as it rushed at their encampment. The visible act sends a message to both sides that the Lithuanian force was armed and dangerous. Kęstutis, on the one hand, seizes the opportunity to unexpectedly raid the area, prompting the Knights at Insterburg to request parlay. Although he accepts the diplomatic gesture, Kęstutis first tears through the night, raiding settlements and taking prisoners before arriving, astride stolen horses, at the agreed place

[88] Working from a different premise—that hunting rituals brought humans dangerously close to animals in the form of hounds, quarry, dung, and entrails—Susan Crane has made a similar argument about the confluence of human and animal bodies in later medieval hunting. Susan Crane, "Ritual Aspects of the Hunt *à Force*," in *Engaging with Nature*, ed. Barbara Hanawalt and Lisa J. Kiser (South Bend, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 2008), 63–85. Salisbury discusses later medieval anxieties about the blurring of animal and human boundaries more generally, especially as manifested in comparing Jews to pigs and peasants to irrational beasts. Salisbury, *The Beast Within*, 133–38.

and time the next day. Wigand renders the Brothers' shock at this display with a rather uncharacteristic spark of humor. Cowed by two impressive displays of dominance—the killing of the boar and ostentatious property theft—the Insterburg's Procurator is barely able to muster the words to admit his surprise at the humiliating turn of events, prompting Kęstutis' cocky reply to the effect that he had better get used to it.[89]

The sheepish admission of Lithuanian success is, of course, the exception to the rule. As much as Wigand found ironic humor in the paradigmatic inversion of Christian dominance, he portrayed moments of pagan inferiority in hunting wild animals with more seriousness. One such episode occurs in the midst of a brutal, multi-week siege of the Lithuanian stronghold of Kawen, which Wigand describes in unusual detail. At the assault's dramatic culmination, the Christians set fire to Kawen's interior like a funeral pyre, singing a hymn of praise in German as many of the fleeing enemy fall victim to the flames as two of the Lithuanian dukes look down sadly from their position in the nearby mountains.[90] In the days after the victory, a strange series of events takes place. First, as the Grandmaster (who was present at the battle) praises God and gives thanks for the victory on the night before Easter, a wild boar terrifies one of the Lithuanian leaders—a sign, it would seem, that the land itself (with God's help) is rejecting the pagans. Afterwards, one of the Lithuanians sends a gift of twelve pigs and a cow to the Grandmaster, Marshal, and Bishop of Sambia gathered at Kawen with the request that they graciously accept this gift, although "if he

[89] Wigand von Marburg, *Cronica* 69, p. 557: "et prefectus ayt, quod nec sperasset huiusmodi. Et rex: tales sunt amodo qualitates temporum!" As usual, the translation contracts what was likely a more elegantly constructed scene. Still, the translator's decision to keep the dialogue at all suggests a degree of continuity with the narrative character of the original. Cf. Rasa Mažeika, "Pagans, Saints, and War Criminals: Direct Speech as a Sign of Liminal Interchanges in Latin Chronicles," *Viator* 45, no. 2 (2014): 271–88.

[90] Wigand von Marburg, *Cronica* 54, p. 537: "Whereupon the Christians joyously began to sing this praiseworthy song in their common tongue: 'Christ has risen,' concluding: 'we all wish to be happy, the pagans have been thoroughly punished, *kirieleison*.'" (*Unde christiani ceperunt letanter cantare hoc laudabile carmen in vulgari: Cristus surrexit, concludentes in vulgari: nos omnes volumus letari, pagani sunt in omni pena, kirieleison*).

had been back home in Lithuania [*domi*], he would have set aside bountiful game instead."[91] Each episode makes a connection between Christian victory, pagan fear, and the valuable bounty of wild game (or, for the demoralized Lithuanians, the lack thereof), and signals a break in the pagan connection to wildness.

In Peter and Nicolaus's texts, the practice of hunting likewise demonstrates a superior Christian mastery over the natural world. Nicolaus diverges from Peter, however, by devoting significantly more attention to hunting and frequently employing venatic vocabulary throughout his translation. A Western import in his narrative, hunting arrives in Prussia as the Promethean bequest of a single nobleman, Otto von Braunschweig, the grandfather of Nicolaus's patron, Grandmaster Luther von Braunschweig.[92] Whereas, in Peter's telling, Otto brings sober pilgrims with him to Prussia, he brings a lavish array of hounds, falcons, and huntsmen in addition to a large army in Nicolaus's version. The rhetorical link between martial strength and hunting prowess is hardly subtle. In fact, it is Otto's magnificent retinue that proves the deciding factor in the Prussian conflicts following his arrival. In both versions of the text, a Prussian noble named Pomanda decides to convert and join the Christians' side, subsequently using his status among the Prussians to lure them into vulnerable positions for attack. The texts diverge, however, in their explanation of Pomanda's actions. Where Peter solemnly observes that the convert was moved by the Holy Spirit, Nicolaus writes that the Prussian was so dazzled by the wealth and grandeur of

[91] Wigand von Marburg, *Cronica* 54, p. 537: "Magister vero cum suis multo gaudio perfunditur in laude divina. Rex etiam territus fuit valde per aprum silvestrem in vigilia pasche. Item ad honorem magistri, marschalci et episcopi Sambiensis quidam de paganis destinavit 12 porcos pingues et unam vaccam macram in bono animo, dicens: quod si domi fuisset, carnes ferinas sufficientes destinasset, et petiit, ut hec gratanter suscipiant."

[92] Remarking on the divergence from Peter's depiction, Max Töppen (*Chronicon*, 64n3) explains Nicolaus's lavish attention to Otto's magnificent retinue as a gesture to his patron, the Grandmaster Luther von Braunschweig. I think it is clear that Nicolaus's relish for hunting extended beyond flattery.

Otto's court that he could not help but join the Christians' cause. Whatever the motivation, Pomanda's righteous treachery enables a decisive Christian victory.[93]

The impact of Otto's hunting accoutrements is not limited to a single victory in Nicolaus's text. After the conclusion of the violence, Nicolaus uses Otto and his courtly following to explain the origins of hunting in the lands of the Teutonic Order. When he departs at the end of his pilgrimage, Otto leaves a year's worth of food behind at the castle-convent of Balga, as well as much of his hunting retinue: weapons, horses, hounds, nets, and "two of his very worthy huntsmen."[94] By facilitating the hunting of "countless beasts," Otto's bequest enables all the lesser houses in Prussia to nourish themselves from the wilderness for many years.[95] Furthermore, the sloughed remnants of Otto's courtly entourage germinate as the foundation for all future hunting. Both of Otto's hunters eventually become brothers in the Teutonic Order, his hounds sire many future generations, and, perhaps most importantly, his legacy inaugurates a custom of "great hunting all over Prussia."[96] He concludes that "no one should wonder that the Teutonic brothers are accustomed to such hunting, because hunting, which is forbidden to other orders, is permitted to them."[97] In Nicolaus's history, therefore, hunting is not only an emblematically elite import that

[93] Peter of Dusburg, *Chronicon* 3.26, p. 64; Nicolaus von Jeroschin, *Kronike*, lines 5,382-427.

[94] Nicolaus von Jeroschin, *Kronike*, lines 5,505-6: "und sîner vûzjegêre / zwêne vil gewêre."

[95] Nicolaus von Jeroschin, *Kronike*, line 5,512: "wildis âne zal."

[96] Nicolaus von Jeroschin, *Kronike*, lines 5,509-17: "mit disem jaitgeverte / vil manic jâr man nerte / dî nidirstin hûsir al, / want man wildis âne zal / dâ mitte slûc und darzû ouch / man von den hundin hunde zouch. / Alsus man von des Ottin zit / unz hûte grôzir jait pflît / in Prûzinlande manchirwein."

[97] Nicolaus von Jeroschin, *Kronike*, lines 5,018-22: "und daz di dûtschin brûdre pflein / sulchir jagit bisundirn, / des darf nimande wundirn, / want in irloubit ist dî jait, / dî andrin ordin ist vorsait." On the Teutonic Order's special relationship with hunting, see Klaus Militzer, "Jagd und Deutscher Orden," in *Jagd und höfische Kultur im Mittelalter*, ed. Werner Rösener (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1997), 325–63. Gifts of falcons were a common diplomatic tool, especially in the fifteenth century. Dieter and Luise Heckmann have investigated the crucial role that falcons played in the diplomacy of an aristocratic institution without access to marriage alliances, and have identified patterns in the types of falcons gifted as proxies for environmental change, given the birds' sensitivity to temperature. See Marie-Luise Heckmann and Dieter Heckmann, "Falken im Ordensland und Herzogtum Preußen: ein ökologisch und

nourishes, distinguishes, and thereby civilizes Christian Prussia—it is an exclusive privilege of the Teutonic Knights among all crusading orders.[98]

Given the significance of hunting in Nicolaus's text as a hallmark of the Order's prestige, it is not surprising that the chase often features as a stylistic motif and narrative device. It is particularly prevalent in the description of violent conflict, casting the Teutonic Knights and their allies as virile huntsmen in the valiant pursuit of frightened pagan quarry. One episode nearly identical in both versions of the texts relates the assassination of Henry Monte, the Natangian rebel leader accustomed to luring unsuspecting Germans from their hiding places. Both authors set the scene by explaining that after a crushing defeat, there was no longer anywhere hidden enough that the Natangian rebels did not have to fear the Order. Henry Monte and his men consequently seek protection by entering deep into the wilderness, but their efforts are in vain.[99] A group of Brothers, observing that Henry has sent his companions out hunting, sneak up on him in his tent, string him up to a tree, and disembowel him.

A later chapter recounts a similar confrontation, but this time between a group of allied Prussians and the rival Lithuanians. Under the leadership of their leader Mucke (whom Nicolaus

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ökonomisch knappes Gut," *Preußenland*, n.s., 8 (2017): 7–40; Dieter Heckmann, "Preußische Jagdfalken als Gradmesser für die Außenwirkung europäischer Höfe des 15. und 16. Jahrhunderts," *Preußenland* 37 (1999): 39–62.

[98] In the course of the Lithuanian *Reisen*, the Order organized hunts as centerpieces of the courtly activities it facilitated for aristocrats seeking adventures in the north. See Werner Paravicini, *Die Preußenreisen des europäischen Adels*, vol. 1 (Sigmaringen: J. Thorbecke, 1989), 300–302. William Urban has argued that courtly pastimes like hunting and feasting took on an especially masculine form in the Baltic, since ladies were forbidden from joining the Knights' crusades. William Urban, "The Teutonic Knights and Baltic Chivalry," *The Historian* 56, no. 3 (1994): 527–28.

[99] Although it is implicit in Peter's text, the link between sanctuary and wilderness is especially clear in Nicolaus's translation. Compare Peter's language: "Whereupon it happened that Henry Monte, the leader of those same ones [Natangians'], retreated with certain of his men into the wilderness" (*unde accidit, quod Henricus Monte capitaneus ipsorum, cum quibusdam suis complicibus secessit in desertum*) with Nicolaus's: "It happened that Henry Monte, their [the Natangians'] leader, was then seen escaping with his company into the wilderness for protection" (*Des geschach / daz man Heinrich Monten sach / intwîchin, iren houbitman, / mit sînre companîe dan / durch schirm in dî wiltnisse, / dâ er vil gewisse / vor allin vîendin hofte sin*). Peter of Dusburg, *Chronicon* 3.135, p. 117; Nicolaus von Jeroschin, *Kronike*, lines 13,359-65.

intriguingly calls "Prewilte or Mucke"), nineteen Prussians skillfully track an army of forty-five Lithuanians through the forest as they hunt, eventually ambushing them in their sleep.[100] Nicolaus frames the pursuit itself as a hunt, blending a regular vocabulary for raiding (he refers to Mucke's entry into Lithuania as "brigandage" [*strûterîe*], for example) with venatic verbs: "and when he came a-hunting in the wilderness, there he overtook forty-five horsemen."[101] Just as in Wigand's telling of the events following victory at Kawen, it is a hunting expedition in each of the above episodes that empowers Christians and their allies, conversely leaving pagan enemies vulnerable, emasculated, and, ultimately, either dead or subject to Teutonic rule.

Nicolaus's most elaborate representation of Christian-pagan conflict as a hunt is among the chronicle's most dramatic scenes, describing the crushing defeat of the Lithuanian duke Vytenis on Holy Wednesday of 1311, which Nicolaus credits for saving the Christians in Prussia from persecution and even extermination. Invigorated by recent victories, Vytenis and his massive army (4,000 men according to Nicolaus) return for more raiding in Christian lands, which they expect to be undefended, targeting the bishopric of Warmia above all. They pillage their way towards the episcopal castle of Braunsberg and back, ravaging numerous churches, altars, liturgical paraphernalia, and clergy. Upon return to "a wild and lonely area of Barthia," Vytenis theatrically casts a eucharistic host on the ground and tramples it in front of his prisoners, boasting that his army has killed the Christian God, rendering the Lithuanian gods more powerful.[102] Nicolaus's

[100] Nicolaus calls Mucke "Prewilte oddir Mucke." *Kronike*, line 26,078. Cf. Peter of Dusburg, *Chronicon* 3.352, p. 190.

[101] Nicolaus von Jeroschin, *Kronike*, lines 26,081-86: "und dô er ûf dî wilde quam, / jagende er dâ vornam / vunfundvîrzic rîten." And soon after (lines 26,105-8): "there he caught sight of a great number of horsemen, and when they became aware of him, they turned to hunting after him" (*dô begond er schouwin / von rîten eine grôze schar; / und dô dî wart ouch sin gewar / und* mit jage *nâch im wûc*). Emphasis added.

[102] Nicolaus is drawing here on a common motif for depicting pagan atrocity, which was widely circulated in the Bishop of Magdeburg's 1108 appeal to the princes of northwestern Europe for support. This letter in turn borrowed directly from Robert the Monk's version of Pope Urban II's sermon at Clermont. Nicolaus' use of a well-known

hero, the High Commander Heinrich von Plötzkau, enters the scene at this point, leading a small resistance force against Vytenis's hilltop encampment. Despite initial losses and the enemy spears coming down on them "as if it were snowing," the Teutonic forces persevere "like lions" until their banner miraculously reaches the middle of the enemy *Hagen*, prompting the Lithuanians to scatter "like a frightened flock of starlings."[103]

It is at this point in the narrative, following Nicolaus' juxtaposition of the sanguinely leonine Christians with the hysterically avian Lithuanians, that the hunting motif takes over fully. The narrator addresses the Christian men directly, crying at them to "keep hunting, good heroes! Do not let the wicked ones, the worthless ones escape you!"[104] The meter quickens from eight beats per line to four, and the tone changes: the battle becomes a chase. For nearly one hundred lines, Nicolaus continues the act, urging the Christian army to show no mercy on behalf of victimized Christians and churches, to hack the pagans into silence and follow them with battle cries until the pace, like the pulse of both the hunters and the hunted, slows once again and "the game is won; chase, heroes, chase! The heathens have lost heart."[105]

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stereotype along with an elaborate hunting metaphor illustrates the propagandistic force of his narrative for a knightly audience. See Jensen, "Crusading at the End of the World: The Spread of the Idea of Jerusalem after 1099 to the Baltic Sea Area and to the Iberian Peninsula," 168–70.

[103] Nicolaus von Jeroschin, *Kronike*, lines 23,688-94; 23,709-18: "und des heris grôste part / mit dem vanen zu berge wart, / dranc vor zû kegn den heiden, / dî ouch in swindin vreiden / wurfin kuilen unde sper / kegn den cristnen abe her / rechte als ob iz snite. / … / Dâbinnen ouch der brûdre van / dort in unsirs hêrren nam / zu in in dî heigne quam. / Daz gab den heiden sulchin schric, / daz als in eins ougen blic / wart ein gebrach der luite pur, / dâmit ouch nam dî dît den snur / gar zustrouwit an dî vlucht / recht als eine starentrucht, / sô man sî vorschoichit tût."

[104] Nicolaus von Jeroschin, *Kronike*, lines 23,719-21: "nû jagit nâch, ô helde gût! / Lât ûch nicht intwerdin / dî bôsen, dî unwerdin!"

[105] Nicolaus von Jeroschin, *Kronike*, lines 23,761-63: "daz spil ist ûch gevallen: / jagit, helde, jagit! / dî heiden sîn vorzagit."

In content and form, the scene imitates the movement, sequence, and verbal formulas of the ritualized chase, a precisely choreographed courtly affair by the fourteenth century.[106] What Nicolaus does not describe—explicitly, at least—is the final denouement: the ritualized dismemberment of the slain quarry. The connotation that the defeated pagans share the beastly nature of wild animals is nonetheless clear. Language recurring throughout the history conveys the wild, even monstrous, disposition of Indigenous rivals, pushing Nicolaus's hunting metaphors beyond an entertaining narrative motif for battle scenes to a dehumanizing discourse. Nor do Nicolaus's hunted pagans seem to share in the tragically valiant traits commonly ascribed to the hart in stylized literary depictions of its pursuit. Similar to Wigand's descriptions of defeated Lithuanians, Nicolaus's pagans are terrified, panicked, and humiliated when he compares them to hunted animals.

The association between pagans and wild beasts has significant implications for chronicling the Teutonic conquest and settlement in the Baltic. Each of the three Teutonic historians illustrates the primeval affinity between Indigenous people and lands as a threatening, even sinister, obstacle to the cultivation of a productive Christian society. At the same time that they conveyed the connection as a strength of the pagans, however, the contest for waterways and woodlands, the competing construction and destruction of wilderness *Hagen*, and the discursive role of hunting as a narrative motif altogether challenge the primacy of the pagan connection to the landscape—a link that Peter, and Nicolaus after him, rooted in an irrational fixation in

[106] After the twelfth century, the rituals of the aristocratic hunt grew increasingly complex. The unmaking of the slain quarry became a literary topos for elaborate courtly behavior, most famously in Gottfried von Strassburg's depiction of Tristan's flawless execution of the task under the watch of King Mark. Cummins, *The Hound and the Hawk*, 12–46. By the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries at the latest, hunting did not in fact take place in wild landscapes, but in parks intricately managed to serve as stages for different varieties of hunting. John Cummins, "Veneurs s'en vont en paradis: Medieval Hunting and the 'Natural' Landscape," in *Inventing Medieval Landscapes*, ed. Michael Wolfe and John Howe (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2002), 33–57; Jean Birrell, "Deer and Deer Farming in Medieval England," *Agricultural History Review* 40, no. 2 (1992): 112–26.

wilderness intrinsic to their portrayal of Baltic belief systems. Taking these implications to their logical ends ultimately leads to the conclusion that at each extreme—superhuman in their strengths, subhuman in their weaknesses—their pagan rivals are hardly human at all.[107] Even in the wilderness, all three chronicles shape Teutonic history in the region as narrative proof that Christians, as missionaries, conquerors, and settlers, are the rightful inheritors of the Baltic landscape, whose native peoples they have unrooted, with much bloodshed on both sides. Unlike the passive non-development underlying *pagan* habitation of territory, the Christian claim is both divinely ordained and actively wrought through his faithful people: the history of Prussia—embedded in a broader global history of Christian salvation—illustrates this foundational principle of settler-colonial societies. Nicolaus therefore delivers on his initial promise to convey the miracles of Teutonic settlement of Prussia by hailing the victory over Vytenis as a clear sign of God's favor for his people in a wild land.[108]

Prussia's wild landscapes were central to each chronicle's narrative as corridors of mobility and trade, natural bunkers and battlements, and stages to play out contests for regional dominance. Granted that waterways, marshlands, and forests posed real challenges in the colonial settlement of the Baltic, ideas of wilderness in Teutonic chronicles fixated on issues of control—or, more pointedly, the lack of it. But as this chapter has argued so far, historical discourses about these landscapes never concerned places alone (or even primarily), but people too, whose wily and inscrutable traits convey the chroniclers' association between wilderness and barbarity. Their divinely ordained task of turning wilderness into paradise did not hinge on the cultivation of

[107] Medieval German vocabulary for the pagans occasionally reflects this un-humanity. The term *undît* (e.g., Nicolaus von Jeroschin, *Kronike*, lines 12,644; 26,603), which Strehlke glosses as "schlechtes Volk" (449n1), is an inversion of the word *dît* (people, nation) using the strongly negative prefix *un-*. Cf. Murray, "Heathens, Devils and Saracens," 205–6.

[108] Like the hunting motif, interpretation of the victory as a sign from God is original to Nicolaus's text.

gardens alone, but also on the eradication of weeds: to plant the faithful, the unfaithful would have to be uprooted. The next section explores how the chroniclers expressed this settler-colonial "logic of elimination" in thickly scriptural metaphors that likened the settlement of Prussia to the plantation of a Promised Land.[109]

III. A Promised Land

"Who Could Stand Against a People Able to Nourish Themselves from the Wilderness?"

Some episodes in Peter's and Nicolaus's chronicles depict the Christians and their allies as animals, reversing the expectation that such a comparison constitutes a negative portrayal of pagans. In one of these, the Christian ally in question is the same Mucke/Prewilte from the bishopric of Warmia, who hunted down a company of Lithuanian cavalry with his small contingent of Prussians. Their success nevertheless soon turns to starvation when they chance upon a large Lithuanian force, which begins a hunt of its own in pursuit of the surprised Prussian brigands.[110] Mucke and his men discard their supplies in their flight, escaping their enemies only to find themselves stranded without rations in the forest—circumstances that quickly demoralize the band.[111] Recognizing the seriousness of their predicament, Mucke makes a speech to his followers, urging them that "rather than perishing like an animal, I think it would better to die honorably, or else to procure some nourishment by turning back towards the enemy. Who knows what

[109] See "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," 387–90.

[110] See n100 above. In Peter's text, the two encounters occur independently of one another at different times (*Chronicon* 3.352, p. 190; 353, p. 190). Nicolaus elides the events into a single raiding expedition (lines 26,074-149).

[111] Nicolaus von Jeroschin, *Kronike*, lines 26,113-20: "darnâch dô sî zusamen / sich gerîfen nâch der nôt, / dô inhât ir nindirt einre brô[t] / noch keinirhande libnar. / Des wurdin sî betrûbit gar, / want sî westin keinen trôst, / der sî mochte tûn irlôst / von des hungirs ungemach."

adventures among that terrible folk might yet befall us, God willing!"[112] Luckily, the inspired group happen upon the Lithuanians in their sleep, and so manage to steal enough horses and rations to escape both the wilderness and looming starvation. Mucke and his men thus avoid a dehumanizing fate. But his speech points to the thinness of the boundary between human and animal in wild places, even for faithful Christians.

It is a recurrent theme in the chronicles that the danger of starvation in the Baltic wilderness threatens not just death, but a loss of humanity. Misfortune similar to that of Mucke and his men strikes a group of the Order's Brothers on a "very long and laborious" autumn *Reise* "through swamps and across waterways, mountains, valleys, sands, and underbrush—more difficult a campaign than any ever undertaken before from Prussia."[113] On their return, they discover that the supplies they had stowed in the woods have been stolen, and the company of men guarding them slain. On a long journey without supplies, some of the brothers are forced to eat their horses. Others grub for roots and grasses; and those "by nature too delicate" die of hunger either on the journey or after arriving home.[114] For a contingent of one raiding party under the Marshal's command in Wigand's narrative, desperate hunger sets in after the Lithuanian duke Vytautas disrupts the

[112] Nicolaus von Jeroschin, *Kronike*, lines 26,128-33: "Ê wir vorgên den als ein vî, / sô dunkit mich daz bezzir î, / daz wir êrlîch sterbin / oddir icht irwerbin, / dâmit wir den lîb irnern, / unde nâch den vîendin kêrn. / Wer weiz, waz ebbintuire / an der dît ungehuire / uns noch geschên von gote sol!"

[113] Nicolaus von Jeroschin, *Kronike*, lines 24,370-77: "ein reise zwâr vil strenge / von arbeit und von lenge / durch brûchir, uber wazzirvlût, / berg, tal, sant, durch puschis strût / und was ôt alsô herte / von manchim ungeverte, / daz nî swêrer hervart / getân ûz Prûzinlande wart."

[114] Nicolaus von Jeroschin, *Kronike*, lines 24,439-50: "durch des wegis virre / in der wildin wûsten / sumelîche mûsten / di pfert von hungir ezzin./ Manch vrechir helt vormezzin / wurzlen mûste grabin / und mit cruite labin / sin lebbin vor des hungirs nôt. / Gnûg ir ouch gelâgin tôt, / der nâtûre was sô zart, / daz sî nicht der nerde hart / gedouwin mochtin noch impfân." Cf. Peter's less detailed, if no less dramatic, account: "Some, weakened by hunger, ate up their horses; others—plants and their roots; some died of starvation, and many perished after returning, consumed by hunger" (*Quidam fame invalescente comederunt equos suos, alii herbas et radices earum, aliqui mortui fuerunt fame, multi inedia consumpti post reditum defecerunt*). *Chronicon* 3.322, p. 181. Nicolaus, as often, is more interested in the wilderness setting than Peter.

Order's supply lines during the return journey. Although Wigand credits the crisis to the tactical maneuver of the enemy in this case, it is nonetheless the paucity of resources in the wilderness that proves exceptionally dangerous to any group that loses its way or finds itself out of rations. With the reference to the Teutonic Brothers' delicate natures, Nicolaus also hints that newcomers had to acclimate to the bitter climate before their bodies would be capable of surviving the Baltic landscape at its harshest. For even the most talented brigands like Mucke and his men, wandering in the wilderness too long or too carelessly is a sure path to starvation. And to die of hunger, as Mucke assures his followers, is to die like an animal—worse than the humiliation of grubbing for roots or consuming horse flesh.

Conditioning bodies and habits capable of finding nourishment in the wilderness is, in Peter and Nicolaus's telling, another decisive sign that the Christian settlers under the Order's protection are the rightful claimants to Baltic territory—a manifestation of their capacity to render barren land fruitful. We might recall how Otto von Braunschweig's hounds and huntsmen exemplify the principle in Nicolaus's chronicle by feeding the Prussian convent-castles for generations after his departure. Nor is the practice simply, or even primarily, pragmatic. Otto's aristocratically stylized form of wilderness survival is, above all, a hallmark of courtly Christian civility, as the reaction of Pomanda (the Prussian swayed by the magnificence of Otto's retinue) suggests. Like Pomanda, in fact, it is a Baltic native who most clearly articulates the link between the ability to reap the bounty of the wilderness and the destiny of controlling Prussia. After the construction of Balga in the 1240s, relate Peter and Nicolaus, the local Sambian population grew curious about the newcomers' way of life. A Sambian elder sent to gather information on the behalf of his village finds himself welcomed by the Brothers as he inquisitively approached their new castle. He spends several days observing the Order's customs, taking particular note of their communal refectory meals and

rigorous habits of prayer. Returning to his people, he announces of the Brothers that "they are people just like we are; they have weak, soft stomachs just like you see we have!"[115] Just two practices, he goes on, set the Christians apart. First is the regularity of their prayer, for the proper observance of which they have even conditioned their bodies to wake up during the night. He laments that his own people do not do this, remarking that the Christians' prayer lends them strength in battle. The second practice, however, strikes him as even more curious than the efficacy of their religion. "I also saw them…eat grass like horses or mules," he marvels; "who could stand against these people able to nourish themselves from the wilderness, ripping out grass to eat?"[116]

It is crucial that the moment of encounter is rendered through Indigenous eyes, even as it springs from the imaginative storytelling of the two Teutonic chroniclers. In fact, it is a favorite narrative technique of all three chroniclers to issue pronouncements of Christian superiority through ventriloquized Indigenes.[117] As Rasa Mažeika has observed, the majority of direct speech in Baltic chronicles is attributed to "liminal" beings—native pagans, supernatural beings, and criminals (Christians in the act of serious transgression).[118] She argues that this prevalence demonstrates the rhetorical role of direct speech in highlighting the fragility of boundaries between

[115] Peter of Dusburg, *Chronicon* 3.70, p. 91: "Scitote, quod fratres sunt homines sicut et nos; habent laxos et molles ventres, sicut nos videtis habere." Nicolaus's version is slightly different, not fixating like Peter's on hungry stomachs, but merely noting that "the Brothers are flesh and bone like us" (*wizzit, daz dî brûdre sîn / als wîr vleisch unde bein*). *Kronike*, lines 9,854-55.

[116] Nicolaus von Jeroschin, *Kronike*, lines 9,878-84: "'Ich sach ouch sî,' sprach er, 'vor âz / zu des libis generde / gras ezzin sam dî pferde. / Davon wer mochte widirstân / dem volke, daz alsô sich kan / in der wiltnisse generen / und gras vor spîse zeren?'"

[117] The idea of "ventriloquism" acknowledges that with few exceptions, native speech in early colonial records constituted a rhetorical device rather than the documentation of a reality. See Chaplin, *Subject Matter*, 26–27.

[118] "In the liminal lands at the edge of Christendom, the line between local native and invader, pagan and Christian, even between the material and spiritual worlds was very real yet fluid, a threshold frequently crossed and perhaps signaled in Latin chronicles of the Baltic Crusade through the device of direct speech." Mažeika, "Pagans, Saints, and War Criminals," 288.

the familiar and the "other" in the Baltic. The layers of significance in the Sambian's wonderstruck report extend deeper than a binary paradigm of colonial power dynamics, however. For one, his remarks prioritize physical sameness over difference. The Brothers' bodies are just like the Sambians'. They are made from "flesh and bone," complete with "weak, soft stomachs"—a telling comparison that foreshadows the amazement regarding the Brothers' supposed ability to satiate hunger by eating "grass." The superiority of Christian bodies only manifests itself through divergent practices of prayer, on the one hand, and wilderness survival, on the other. On this point, the Sambian's ventriloquized observation becomes even more intriguing when he compares the Christians to animals (horses, asses, mules). It is a curious refraction of the normal pattern. Different from other comparisons between people and animals, this case glosses the likeness as positive. Their wilderness-proof bodies' metaphorical similarity to horses and mules is not a source of weakness, in other words, but of strength. There is a twist, however: the Sambian's observation stems from a fundamental misunderstanding—namely, that he mistakenly took the Germans' cabbage (or sauerkraut) to be wild grass.[119] His awed misinterpretation of the mundane dietary staple (perhaps gesturing to Peter's philosophy about the pagans' fundamentally flawed connection to nature) no doubt made listeners chuckle at his expense, and admittedly casts some doubt on the seriousness of the story. Still, the error does not discount his other observations, nor does it necessarily detract from his claim that the certainty of Christian lordship is predicated on a superior fitness of Christian bodies to the Prussian landscape. In sum, the playful (or mocking) story highlights a threshold, where Christians hover precipitously between the strength-conferring

[119] Macrobotanical evidence points to major differences between patterns of cultivation and consumption in pre- and post-conquest Prussia. Although evidence for cabbage itself appears scant in both contexts, relative abundance at sites like Malbork point to its attendance of German settlers. See Aleksander Pluskowski, Monika Badura, and Marc Jarzebowski, "Exploiting Plants: Macrobotanical Remains from Prussia," in *Environment, Colonization, and the Baltic Crusader States*, ed. Aleksander Pluskowski, vol. 1, 2 vols., Terra Sacra 1 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2019), 377–404.

sanctity of their mission (hence the link, in the Sambian's eyes, between the rigors of prayer and survival) and the beastliness of the physical qualities required to carry it out (the comparison to animals). To survive in the extreme conditions of the Prussian wilderness—at least, until its transformation had been effected—was to subvert, and yet also transcend, the natural limitations of the human body. Rendering a wild pagan land Christian required the conditioning of Christian bodies to resemble wild animals—or, even more alarmingly, pagans.[120]

Sacred Convergence

Before comparing the Brothers to animals in their consumption of "grass" as one of two main points of divergence, the Sambian elder asserts that other customs in the Order are familiar, observing that "the Brothers resemble us in their weapons, diet, and many other things."[121] Put another way, he seems to have thought the Christians' fighting techniques to be quite similar to the Sambians' own. Study of the Teutonic Order's military tactics and strategies, especially with the aim of identifying what was distinctive and successful about them, has been a preoccupation of modern historians. Without discounting the challenges posed by Indigenous resistance, these studies generally focus on what was distinctive (or superior) about Western technology, logistics, or resources.[122] It is nonetheless significant that when Peter and Nicolaus wrote their chronicles,

[120] Cf. Chaplin's observation that the sensitivity of European bodies to Indigenous landscapes and customs was a common anxiety among European colonists. Focusing on English colonial sources between 1500 and 1676, prevailing medical theories of bodily composition influenced colonial evaluations of the suitability of both English and Indigenous bodies to New World climes. By the mid-seventeenth century, the success of European livestock and gardens (among other things) served as proof of the affinity between the land and its English settlers, in contrast to Indian populations racked by disease. Chaplin, *Subject Matter*, esp. 116-56.

[121] Peter of Dusburg, *Chronicon* 3.70, p. 91: "in armis, cibis, et aliis satis conveniunt nobiscum." On these particular points, Nicolaus (*Kronike*, lines 9,856-58) matches his source closely: "'and [the Brothers] compare with us in their arms and food and in many other ways'" (*'und tragin mit uns ubir ein / an wâpene und an spîse / und an manchir wîse'*).

[122] See Sven Ekdahl, "Horses and Crossbows. Two Important Warfare Advantages of the Teutonic Order in Prussia," in *Welfare and Warfare*, ed. Helen Nicholson, The Military Orders 2 (Brookfield, VT: Ashgate, 1998), 119–51.

the memory and consequences of the Prussians' multiple thirteenth-century uprisings were still fresh. Furthermore, when all three chroniclers wrote, the Order was embroiled in the long, controversial crusade against the Lithuanians. Violent conflict with Indigenous populations was, especially in the minds of its ideologically sensitive chroniclers, the hallmark of the Order's sacral and political destiny in the Baltic. As such, the historicized transformation of Prussia's lands and peoples was closely associated with its identification as a destination where both human and divine actors converged in violent, and sometimes miraculous, acts of force and conflict.[123]

Most obviously, Baltic shores were the destination for vessels carrying crusaders from northern ports like Bruges, Hamburg, and even London.[124] Each chronicler was careful to reiterate the spiritual motives that drew armed pilgrims to Prussia, even if Nicolaus and Wigand catered to the interests of their knightly audiences in the lively drama of battle scenes. Wigand, for one, mixes vocabularies of honor and penitence in assuring that Western pilgrims come to Prussia for the glory of the Virgin and the forgiveness of sins.[125] As a herald, however, Wigand was accordingly less concerned or familiar with the theological underpinnings of the Prussian and Lithuanian crusades than Peter and Nicolaus, whose works programmatically justify the Teutonic Order's military activity in Prussia as biblically prefigured, papally authorized, and theologically sound.

[123] Gregory Leighton has recently argued that a network of holy sites took shape in the thirteenth century through associations with relics, visions, and martyrdoms, constituting a physical manifestation of "sacred landscape" in Prussia and attracting foreign pilgrims. Gregory Leighton, "Did the Teutonic Order Create a Sacred Landscape in Thirteenth-Century Prussia?," *Journal of Medieval History* 44, no. 4 (2018): 457–83. For other considerations of sacred Christian geography in northern European regions targeted by crusades, cf. Carsten Selch Jensen, "How to Convert a Landscape: Henry of Livonia and the *Chronicon Livoniae*," in *The Clash of Cultures on the Medieval Baltic Frontier*, ed. Alan V. Murray (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009), 151–68; Kurt Villads Jensen, "Sacralization of the Landscape: Converting Trees and Measuring Land in the Danish Crusades against the Wends," in ibid., 141–50; Marek Tamm, "A New World into Old Words: The Eastern Baltic Region and the Cultural Geography of Medieval Europe," in ibid., 11–36.

[124] Paravicini, *Preußenreisen*, 1989, 1:192–97.

[125] Wigand von Marburg, *Cronica* 40, p. 514.

They openly reference Bernard of Clairvaux's *De laude novae militiae*, for instance, writing of the "new form of battle chosen by God in Prussia" and preached in sermons across Western Europe, in accordance with papal initiative.[126] They both also attribute particular narrative importance to their descriptions of a sermon that Gregory IX delivered to prospective crusaders at the outset of the Prussian crusades. Gregory's speech follows a passage that summarizes the promise of a papal bull issued in January of 1230: namely, that the remission of sins would be granted in exchange for "restoring the land promised to Christians, but occupied by the infidels."[127] The sermon itself exhorts those gathered in his presence to be strong, courageous, and prepared for the difficulty of fighting against the pagans. Quoting Deuteronomy, he promises them that that if they should find themselves going into battle against a vast enemy force, they will not fear them or fall to them,

[126] "Cum ergo sonitus predicacionis crucis Cristi exiret in omnem terram regni Alemanie et preconizaretur novum bellum, quod elegit Dominus in terra Prussie, et novi belli indulgencia et libertas, commoti sunt illi, quorum Deus tetigerat corda, electi scilicet et incliti bellatores Alemanie, et affigentes crucem humeris suis preparant se ad arma, ut vindicent iniuriam Domini crucifixi removentes a se." Peter of Dusburg, *Chronicon* 3.8, p. 56. "Und dô der nûwe strit irschal / in der predigâte, / den got irwelit hâte / zu Prûzin in dem lande." Nicolaus von Jeroschin, *Kronike*, lines 4,404-7.

Bernard of Clairvaux's (1090-1153) theories of the "two swords" of secular and spiritual power were especially influential in Innocent IV's (r. 1243-1254) expression of papal authority to intervene in matters beyond the traditional confines of the institutional church, such as the seizure of non-Christians' land (and, crucially, to authorize others' intervention in the form of crusades). Muldoon, *Popes, Lawyers, and Infidels*, 17–18.

[127] Peter of Dusburg, *Chronicon* 3.6, p. 55: "injungens dictis fratribus in remissionem peccaminum, ut vindicarent injuriam crucifixi domini et terram Cristianis debitam recuperarent, ab infidelibus occupatam." Nicolaus von Jeroschin, *Kronike*, lines 2,004-36: "und bevûl den brûdren daz / um allir sundin ablâz, / … / und daz sî widir brêchtin / zu der cristenheit hant / dî gegenôte und dî lant, / dî von den heiden wârin / bekummirt in den jârin, / dî dî cristenen soldin hân."

Klaus Scholz and Dieter Wojtecki have identified this bull as one issued by Gregory IX in 1230 in their edition of Peter's chronicle: Peter of Dusburg, *Chronik des Preußenlandes*, ed. and trans. Klaus Scholz and Dieter Wojtecki (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1984), 65n2. Gregory IX (r. 1227-1241) was a central figure in defining an official ecclesiastical stance governing missions to non-Christians, although the policy was most fully articulated under Innocent IV. Gregory oversaw the compilation of the *Decretales*, the second major volume of medieval canon law, which was more informative than its predecessor, Gratian's *Decretum*. Without neglecting the more traditional crusading activities from Scandinavian kings and archbishops, Gregory was especially supportive of the Teutonic Order, whose crusading activities were allowed to progress essentially without papal intervention after 1236. Muldoon, *Popes, Lawyers, and Infidels*, 4.

comforted by God's presence among them.[128] Although he promises that God will see to Christian success, Gregory's comparison of Baltic pagans to the terrifying hordes of Canaan foreshadows the brutality of the violence the crusaders will confront in the north.

Prognostications of conflict could also be divinely revealed. Throughout Peter and Nicolaus's chronicles, a host of different people from across Europe receive visions that, diverging from Gregory's exhortation that crusaders be comforted by the assurance of victory to God's faithful, emphasize the spiritual rewards of dying in Baltic campaigns. Two such visions appear to female hermits in Germany. In the first, Christ himself grants a vision to the Grandmaster Konrad von Feuchtwangen's cloistered sister, who witnesses the slaughter of Christians in battle, followed by the ascent of their souls "to heaven's bosom" in the arms of joyful angels.[129] The second anchorite's vision is less encouraging. After a mighty clamor in her cell wakes her, she rises to see a great army of demons marching across the night sky.[130] Asked their destination, they reply that they are headed into battle in Prussia; and when they later return, they gleefully vaunt the Christians' defeat. The vision of the demons' strange anti-pilgrimage relays two principle messages about the nature of martyrdom. The first, and more optimistic, is that although defeats can happen on the battlefield, righteously motivated pilgrims will nevertheless rise directly to

[128] Deut. 20:1: "Si exieris ad bellum contra hostes tuos et videris equitatum et currus et maiorem quam tu habes adversarii exercitus multitudinem non timebis eos quia Dominus Deus tuus tecum est qui eduxit te de terra Aegypti." Peter's translation (*Chronicon* 2.6, p. 38) is nearly identical: "Si exieris ad bellum contra hostes tuos et videris equitatus et currus et majorem, quam tu habes, adversarii multitudinem, non timebis eos, quia dominus deus tuus tecum est." Here Peter also incorporates Deut. 20:2-4 verbatim: "Vos hodie contra inimicos vestros pugnam committitis, non pertimescat cor vestrum, nolite metuere, nolite cedere, nec formidetis eos; quia dominus deus vester in medio vestri est et pro vobis contra adversarios dimicabit, ut eruat vos de periculo." Nicolaus is faithful to Peter's text in both cases, but renders the scriptural references much more loosely. *Kronike*, lines 2,005-129.

[129] Peter of Dusburg, *Chronicon* 3.86, p. 98; Nicolaus von Jeroschin, *Kronike*, lines 10,765-86. The language of joy is Nicolaus's addition: "Ouch sach sî sêlin train / dî engele mit vroidin grôz / in des himelrîchis schôz." Lines 10,784-86.

[130] Nicolaus appears to be making a pun on the demons' "prûsin" (clamor) and the native "prussen" (Prussians). *Kronike*, line 11,217.

heaven as martyrs. The second message, however, concerns the three souls who did not achieve salvation in the demons' victory because, interested only in the glories of combat, their motives were not pure.[131] Another vision nevertheless eschews the anxiety of mixing the language of courtly and spiritual aspirations, implicitly associating courtly service for a lady with military service for the Virgin Mary.[132] In this case, a Brother named Hermann Sarrazin receives a vision before heading off on a campaign into the northern coastal region of Curonia. After seeing the Virgin, who invites him to her son's "banquet" (*convivium*; *wirtschaft*), Hermann runs to his Brothers to share the joyous news of his imminent death in battle.[133]

Another vision is revealed to a less likely recipient than the religious recluses and the Teutonic Brothers, but conveys a similar message about the glory of martyrdom. Following the story of the first anchorite's vision described above, Nicolaus told how a "simple, upright, and God-fearing grain farmer in Prussia" encounters the wondrous as he stands in front of the entryway to his dwelling.[134] Looking towards the northern sky, he suddenly sees a clear vision of the Teutonic Brothers in battle against the Lithuanians. He calls over his household (*familia*; *gesinde*) to share in the revelation, observing how the Brothers, surrounded on all sides by their enemies,

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[131] Peter of Dusburg, *Chronicon* 3.92, p. 101; Nicolaus von Jeroschin, *Kronike*, lines 11,213-50. Peter states that the three crusaders "had gone to battle not out of devotion but in order to prove their prowess in battle" (*non devocionis causa, sed exercendi miliciam suam venerant*). Nicolaus (lines 11,249-50) more specifically identifies the motives of "glory and nobility" (*sundir ir mût was geleit / ûf rûm und ûf îtilkeit*), perhaps cautious of over-scrutinizing the justifiable bounds of religious violence.

[132] For an overview of the Virgin Mary as the Teutonic Order's patroness, see Klaus Schreiner, *Maria: Jungfrau, Mutter, Herrscherin* (Munich: C. Hanser, 1994), 384–91. On the ambiguous figure of the Mary as a patroness of Iberian conquests in Europe and in the New World, see Amy G. Remensnyder, *La Conquistadora: The Virgin Mary at War and Peace in the Old World and the New* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

[133] Peter of Dusburg, *Chronicon* 3.85, pp. 97-98; Nicolaus von Jeroschin, *Kronike*, lines 10,733-64, here 10,743.

[134] Peter of Dusburg, *Chronicon* 3.87, p. 98: "quidam rusticus triturator, vir simplex et rectus ac timens deum in terra Prussie." Nicolaus von Jeroschin, *Kronike*, lines 10,787-92: "Ein semelîch gesichte / sach von der geschichte / zu Prûzin ein gebûwir / einveldig und unsûwir, / gotevorchtic, gût, gerecht / und an allin dingin slecht."

nonetheless "bravely" (*viriliter*) defend themselves. He recounts the death of those killed in the battle as the recipients of the heavenly throne worthy of the Virgin and of Christ, their souls taken to heaven by hosts of angels. Peter and Nicolaus remark of the scene that, like the first German anchorite learned from her own vision, danger and toil fortify faith, whereas security can make it lax. The principle, they continue, explains why Christ allowed the Prussian uprisings to happen, but promises that difficulty and death bring their just heavenly rewards. As proof, the chroniclers remark that one of the crusaders martyred in view of the skygazing farmer was none other than Hermann Sarrazin, the brother who learned of his destiny in his joyful vision of the Virgin.

A destination for the armed pilgrimages of Christians and demons alike, Prussia also became the terminus for holy relics making their way north and east, sometimes through licit diplomatic channels, other times through illicit, yet miraculous, means. The chronicles tell of two relics of the true cross, both sent as gifts by foreign monarchs and therefore serving as testaments of the Teutonic Order's politically and spiritually legitimate lordship in Prussia. Frederick II sent the first as an imperial gift in the early days of the Order's activity in the Baltic. They kept it in Elbing, according to Peter and Nicolaus, where it was still venerated for the miracles that God performed through it.[135] Guy de la Tremoille, an official of Charles VI of France, brought the second (which Wigand briefly mentions as "a large piece of the holy cross") to the Grandmaster at Marienburg in the late fourteenth century. It too became one of the most important sacred objects in Prussia.[136]

[135] Peter of Dusburg, *Chronicon* 1.5, p. 31; Nicolaus von Jeroschin, *Kronike*, lines 1,119-42, here 1,140-42.

[136] Hirsch notes that the relic was sent to Gdańsk in 1457, along with the relic of Saint Barbara's head, as collateral for a loan that had aided the Polish king Kasimir's purchase of Marienburg. He never did repay the loan, so the relics stayed in Saint Mary's cathedral until falling out of the record around 1577. Wigand von Marburg, *Cronica*, 575n1036.

The stories behind two saints' relics reveal a quite different picture, gesturing to the violent means by which the Order was willing to procure objects of sacral power. Wigand relates how a troop of Teutonic Brothers grew restless as they wait for an allied force. They take a detour to the episcopal Polish city of Gniezno, where they attempt to seize the relics of Saint Adalbert by force. Because the local canons have hidden them, the Brothers are unable to pry them away, but the aggressive act nonetheless catalyzes an outburst of conflict. The incident follows, in fact, upon the murder of a Polish priest by one of the Order's allies—a death that Wigand's text (perhaps following the sympathies of his Polish translator) recounts almost like a martyrdom. Whether or not Wigand intended to critique the relationship between violence and sanctity in linking these stories, the affinity is nonetheless clear in the attempted relic theft. The Order obtained the head of Saint Barbara—one of its most prized relics—in a similar scene from Peter and Nicolaus's chronicles.[137] During the capture of the Pomerelian duke Swietopelk's fortress of Sartowitz, the Brothers tie up hundreds of women and children as captives while they descend into the castle's cellar in search of valuables. In their hunt, they uncover a casket containing the relic, which they identify as such from a document attached to it. Confirmation of the discovery comes from one of the captives, an old woman who explains a graphic dream she had had of the local saint after months of prayer. She observes that Barbara's own prayers must have facilitated the fortress's capture, and that the saint would therefore no doubt be pleased once the relic was relocated to Prussia—an affair of impressive pageantry that indeed takes place soon after.

Because of the miracles performed through relics, the Order's chroniclers (especially Peter and Nicolaus) considered their accumulation a tangible sign of God's favor in the settlement of Prussia. Perhaps of even greater significance to their narratives of Christian conquest, however,

[137] Peter of Dusburg, *Chronicon* 3.36, p. 70; Nicolaus von Jeroschin, *Kronike*, lines 6,287-670.

are the miracles by which God more directly enables the Order and its allies to traverse spaces impassable or dangerous under normal climatic circumstances. Aside from occasional references to the suitability for sending out *Reisen* in a given season, the chronicles ascribe less prominence to weather and climate as distinctive features of Prussia than they do to topography. Weather is an important engine of narrative, however, almost always as a crippling hindrance, and Wigand especially uses it as an explanation for Christian failure. Accordingly, weather patterns generally receive mention only insofar as they seriously affect the mobility and logistics of armies or otherwise contravene a normal pattern. Phenomena like earthquakes, shifting mountains, and celestial events, for example, arise as the curious manifestations of natural processes, while, in other cases, such wonders are the work of miracles that interrupt, divert, or mitigate the treacherousness of wild landscapes.[138] Most commonly, as noted earlier, miracles allow Christian armies to cross wide stretches of thin ice—a hazard that frequently proves fatal to large segments of expeditionary forces. Another common occurrence is the miraculous navigation of lost armies through the forests of the *wildnis* frontier. On one occasion, God even inspires an army to get lost in the wilderness, ultimately allowing it to emerge at the opportune time to devastate the surrounding area.[139] In another similar episode, an army's guides accidentally lead it astray in the forest, but rather than a disaster, the wandering turns out to be a sign of God's prescience: had the Christians arrived at their destination as planned, they would have missed the chance to take an

[138] Earthquakes: Wigand von Marburg, *Cronica* 50, pp. 524-25; Peter of Dusburg, *Chronicon* 3.287, p. 170; Nicolaus von Jeroschin, *Kronike*, lines 22,734-49. Shifting mountain: *Chronicon* 4.16, p. 196; *Kronike*, lines 1,434-49. A comet: *Chronicon* 4.48, p. 202; *Kronike*, lines 15,577-94. Nicolaus explains in a brief etymological flourish (lines 15,577-83) that the Latin *comêtes* ("comet") is a loan word from the Greek *komē* for the tail's resemblance to hair. An eclipse: Wigand von Marburg, *Cronica* 14, p. 475.

[139] Peter of Dusburg, *Chronicon* 3.209, p. 142; Nicolaus von Jeroschin, *Kronike*, lines 17,361-420.

underdefended enemy castle.[140] By interspersing moments of miraculous triumph over the environment throughout their narratives, the Order's chroniclers thus portray Prussia's history as a manifestation of a special Christian destiny.

As a destination for armed pilgrimages, powerful relics, and miraculous interventions, Prussia—despite its location at the geographic peripheries of Christian Europe—thus becomes a point where the human and the heavenly converge. Peter, Nicolaus, and even Wigand convey the intrusion of the miraculous into their histories as a gradual, nonlinear process of conversion and inversion. Distant times and places become suddenly proximate as anchorites and farmers witness visions that blur the boundaries of the terrestrial and the celestial; righteous pilgrims and miracle-working relics fitfully transform a land without religion into one where the sacred intrudes the mundane; and faith in an all-powerful God intervenes in the deep affinity between the region's wild places and its pagan inhabitants, entrusting his people with the apostolic mission to go where Christians have not gone before.[141] Prussia's identity as a site of violent conflict and peaceful cultivation thus parallels its identity as, at once, a wilderness and a Promised Land.

In both cases, the shift from one pole towards the other manifests itself not as a process of removal, but of replacement. Christian settler-colonialists did not indulge the fantasy of a *terra nullius*, even if they played with the idea that the Baltic's Indigenous population was not fully human. Nor did they pursue a genocidal agenda to exterminate the population, even if assimilation through forced conversion and the targeted expulsion of certain non-conforming communities

[140] Peter of Dusburg, *Chronicon* 3.308, pp. 175-76; Nicolaus von Jeroschin, *Kronike*, lines 23,408-49.

[141] This apostolic image is a recurring motif in Teutonic historiography. The late thirteenth-century *Livonian Rhymed Chronicle*, for example, opens with a similar scene in which God infuses his apostles with the Holy Spirit and sends them to convert pagans in faraway lands. Their successful demonstration of God's power means that "many a land was converted / such that now one sees Christians, / where beforehand there had not been any" (*sus wart bekârt vil manch lant / dar man nû cristen lûte sicht, / dâ ir hie behvor was nicht*). *Livländische Reimchronik*, ed. Leo Meyer (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlagsbuchhandlung), lines 76-9.

constituted organized strategies of native elimination. Instead, they naturalized an image of themselves as the region's masters and purifiers, illustrating Patrick Wolfe's summation of the logic of elimination in its "positive aspect," by which "settler colonialism does not simply replace native society *tout court*…[but] maintains the refractory imprint of the native counter-claim."[142] The following sections explore this narrative of replacement further through horticultural metaphors in which ostensibly peaceful cultivation is predicated on the violent deaths of Christian and Indigenous people alike.

Sowing Weeds among Vines

Each of the synoptic gospels shares a parable about a man who goes out to sow his fields. Some of his seeds fall along the wayside or on bad, rocky ground, and consequently do not grow. Others, however, that fall on fertile ground *do* sprout, some bearing fruit a hundredfold, others sixty, and others thirty. "He who is planted in good ground," explains Christ, "is the one who hears and understands the word of God, and brings forth fruit."[143]

Peter drew on this metaphor when he wrote of the very beginnings of Christian intervention in Prussia and the aptly named Cistercian bishop, Christian.[144] In the early thirteenth century, Christian "often scattered the seed of the divine word among the Prussians, encouraging them to leave behind their idols and cultivate Jesus Christ as the true God." Peter thus begins his history

[142] This is in contrast to its "negative aspect," or the dissolution of native societies. Wolfe argues that the positive and negative aspects jointly structure the ongoing process of settler colonialism, which seeks to destroy an existing society to create a new one, which often assimilates natives in ways that legitimize their repression. Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," 389.

[143] The parable of the sower: Mt 13:1-23; Mk 4:1-20; Lk 8:4-15. The passage cited here is from Mt 13:23: "Qui vero in terra bona seminatus est, hic est qui audit verbum et intellegit, et fructum adfert."

[144] Because Nicolaus's translation of Peter's planting metaphors is nearly verbatim in most cases, and because Peter's Latin more closely reflects a scriptural vocabulary, the remainder of this chapter focuses on Peter's text. I will refer to Nicolaus's text in cases of significant divergence or special interest.

of Prussia (the second and third books of his chronicle) with an agricultural metaphor for conversion. Christian's efforts to convert the Prussians are in vain, however: "because this seed fell upon ground that was not good, it bore no fruit."[145] Nevertheless, the ensuing depiction of pagan Prussia has an Edenic aura. Almost wistfully, he writes that the Prussians had one "extremely commendable" trait—namely, "that although they were faithless [*infideles*], and worshipped [*colerent*] various gods, they nonetheless retained peace with their Christian neighbors, did not impede them in planting the living God, and did not harass them in any way."[146] Conflict only arrived with the devil, "the jealous rival of peace" (*pacis emulus*). Having "planted weeds over," the devil pitted the erstwhile peaceful Prussians against the Christian newcomers in a spate of violence that ultimately "reverted the land around Kulm…to a wilderness."[147] The devastating violence spreads in the following chapter to Polish lands, prompting Conrad of Masovia to call for aid. Such is the premise of the Teutonic Order's arrival—Prussia's relapse into a wild, pagan, and violently anti-Christian state.

It is significant that Peter opens his history of Prussia's conquest with these intersecting associations: Christian settlement as the cultivation of God and gardens; wilderness as an Indigenously (and satanically) instigated devolution of peace; and narrative as a convergence of scriptural and historical temporalities. Prussia's Christian beginnings recall the familiar story of

[145] Peter of Dusburg, *Chronicon* 2.1, p. 33: "sed quia hoc semen cecidit in terram non bonam fructum nullum fecit." Peter inverts the language of the biblical verse, most closely paralleling the vocabulary and syntax of Lk 8:8: "et aliud [semen] cecidit in terram bonam et ortum fecit fructum centuplum." Each other version is similar, however: "et aliud cecidit in terram bonam et dabat fructum ascendentem et crescentem" (Mk 4:8); "alia vero ceciderunt in terram bonam et dabant fructum" (Mt 13:8).

[146] Peter of Dusburg, *Chronicon* 2.1, p. 33: "unum tamen fuit in eis factum laudabile et multipliciter commendandum, quod licet ipsi essent infideles, et diversos deos colerent, pacem cum Cristianis vicinis nihilominus habuerunt, nec eos in cultura dei impediebant, nec aliqualiter molestabant."

[147] Peter of Dusburg, *Chronicon* 2.1, p. 33: "sed hoc inimicus humani generis, pacis emulus, non diu sustinens superseminavit zizania…Prutheni terram Colmensem penitus destruentes in solitudinem redegerunt."

Edenic expulsion, but with the twist that paradise and wilderness, although ostensibly antitheses, nonetheless share the quality of being both the premise of historical time and somehow outside of it. Peter's fable for the Teutonic Knights' destined arrival in Prussia relies, moreover, upon the logic of the theoretical basis of pagan religion that he propounds towards the beginning of the chronicle's third book. The pagans' irrational rootedness in wild, uncultivated places as loci of the sacred necessitates conversion as a prerequisite for peaceful settlement. Beyond its long-standing recurrence as a scripturally resonant Christian literary motif, therefore, the association between the cultivation of land and the cultivation of faith bore a historical and theological relevance to the arrival of Christians in Prussia and the nature of the lands and people they encountered there.

To return to the parable of the sower, Prussia's settlement required, first and foremost, more thorough priming of its soil for cultivation than Bishop Christian had accomplished prior to the Order's arrival. In chapters describing the early activities of the Order, Peter and Nicolaus relate stories that exemplify a categorically different relationship to the land from what previous incomers had had. From the start, the Order's Brothers are planters of gardens as exemplified by its first Master, Henry Walpot, who took over the eponymous hospital in Jerusalem from the German crusaders after they returned to Lübeck and Bremen. Henry establishes the Order's first hospital outside of Jerusalem in the city of Acre. After its Christian capture, he purchases a plot by the walls, upon which he constructs a church, a hospital, and living quarters.[148] Both Peter and Nicolaus call the plot a "garden."[149]

[148] Peter of Dusburg, *Chronicon* 1.2, p. 30; Nicolaus von Jeroschin, *Kronike*, lines 901-78.

[149] Peter of Dusburg, *Chronicon* 2.2, p. 34: "sed post captionem civitatis Achonensis predicte idem frater Henricus emit quendam ortum infra muros"; Nicolaus von Jeroschin, *Kronike*, lines 941-46: "darnâch dô Akirs dî stat / widir ûf dî cristnen trat, / dî sî gewunnen crefticlîch, / dô koufte brûdir Henrîch, / der selbe meister gehûre, / einen gartin bî der mûre."

The planting of gardens was a common hagiographic topos, which later medieval hagiographers adapted to situate their subjects in a traditional framework of ascetic sanctity.[150] Numerous *Lives* of the desert fathers depict their saintly protagonists cultivating gardens in the desert, representing their withdrawal from the world and their superhuman ability to overcome ecological and spiritual obstacles.[151] Gardens also accumulated further theological significance as terrestrial paradises. Walled gardens served as symbols for the Virgin Mary's fertile, yet enclosed, womb, for example—an association with the Order's patroness that its chroniclers do not seem to have made explicitly, but with which they were certainly familiar. Furthermore, the cultivation of gardens was a convenient metaphor for settlement in the context of later medieval expansion. Gardens symbolized an ordering and instrumentalizing of nature in the service of terrestrial communities and in the image of celestial paradise. By transforming barren desert or tangled overgrowth into productive landscapes—a process entwined with the conversion of inhabitants—human beings aligned agricultural activity with divinely ordained design.

The foundation of Prussia's first Teutonic town follows a similar pattern to the hospital in Jerusalem, although it does not spring from a garden, but from a tree. In the opening story of the chronicles' third book, Peter and Nicolaus describe the initiative of Hermann Balk, the first Master of Prussia, to venture out from Vogelsang and Nessau across the Vistula. On the far bank, they find an enormous oak tree standing on a hill, and in its branches, they construct elaborate defenses that morph into the castle of Thorn—itself the seed of the Prussia's first Teutonic town.[152] At the

[150] Lisa J. Kiser, "The Garden of St. Francis: Plants, Landscape, and Economy in Thirteenth-Century Italy," *Environmental History* 8, no. 2 (2003): 233–34.

[151] Kiser observes that Anthony, Paul the Hermit, Jerome, Felix, Romanus, Aemilianus, Phocas, Godric, Hilary, and Fiacre were all desert fathers depicted as gardeners. Kiser, 233.

[152] Peter of Dusburg, *Chronicon* 3.1, pp. 49-50; Nicolaus von Jeroschin, *Kronike*, lines 3,685-738.

start, only seven brothers are said to hold their arboreal post against the Prussians' frequent attacks, and the chronicles hail their success as nothing short of the miraculously powerful proof of God's favor.[153] Despite being heavily outnumbered, the Brothers "cast them out [*exterminaverunt*] within just fifty-three years, such that not one remained who did not bend his neck to the yoke of faith, thanks to the help of the Lord Jesus Christ."[154] The Brothers thus lay the foundation for the conversion of Prussia's people by transforming its wild landscape.

Another miracle story similarly testifies to the hallowing effect of Christian presence upon Prussian soil. Peter and Nicolaus tell of a foreign pilgrim who dies during his journey returning from Prussia, prompting his son to come searching for his father as a pilgrim himself. The son, to this point unsuccessful in his search, comes across a bishop in a certain churchyard who, as he consecrates the ground, sees a man spring suddenly from his grave. The dead man explains that although he was once a pilgrim, he would only be able to reach heaven by atoning for a sin he had committed during his lifetime, namely the wrongful seizure of his neighbor's fields. At first visible to the bishop alone, the dead man is only revealed to everyone around at the bishop's request. The young pilgrim immediately recognizes the dead man as his father and promises to rectify the injustice upon his return home, which allows the restless sinner to return to his repose, comforted by the hope of salvation.[155] Remarking on the event, the chroniclers observe the efficacy of

[153] Peter of Dusburg, *Chronicon* 3.3, p. 52: "vide ergo signa Dei magna et mirabilia forcia." Similarly, Nicolaus: "nû merkit al hîrundir / wî grôz sîn gotis wundir / unde wâ sîne zeichin." *Kronike*, lines 3,831-33.

[154] Peter of Dusburg, *Chronicon* 3.3, p. 52: "in processu temporis infra LIII annos exterminaverunt eas sic, quod unus non remansit, qui iugo fidei non subiceret collum suum, auxiliante Domini Iesu Cristo." Peter's use of the term *exterminare* here is striking, conveying the spatially descriptive process of removal echoed in episodes throughout the chronicles in which regions empty of their inhabitants turn to wilderness. Nicolaus renders the forceful displacement of the Prussians with less spatial specificity: "all the pagans were so overcome that not one could be found anywhere in all the land who had not been bent under the yoke of faith." *Kronike*, lines 3,846-51.

[155] Peter of Dusburg, *Chronicon* 3.54, p. 80; Nicolaus von Jeroschin, *Kronike*, lines 8,155-264.

pilgrimage to Prussia as a means of atonement; but the story also encapsulates several other theological and historical themes. First, the event signals that the impact of Christian settlement—here, the presence of a church, a cemetery, and a bishop responsible for its consecration—is capable of priming Prussia's soil such that it can yield the miraculous. Second, Prussia's identity as a destination for pilgrimage ties it more closely to Christian territory elsewhere. Both pilgrims travel long distances to reach Prussia, but the son's act of pilgrimage ultimately enables him to rectify a past injustice in his homeland. With a similar effect to that of the visions, links of kinship and prayer thus collapse physical distance. Finally, the bishop's ability to make the dead man's presence visible to those around him, including (crucially) the man's son, mirrors the chroniclers' intent to broadcast the Order's history in the new land. Although Prussia's miracles may at first be concealed, it is revelation of these signs to a broader audience that unlocks their salvific potential.[156]

With the Baltic landscape likened to the soil in Peter and Nicolaus's rehashing the parable of the sower as an extended metaphor for Christian settlement, Christ is the sower and the Teutonic Order the produce issuing from the seed. Quoting Paul's letter to the Corinthians, they affirm that although it is God alone who allows the planted seed to grow, it is a human responsibility to care for new plants bearing their first fruits so that, in time, their produce might become richer.[157]

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[156] Cf. Wüst, "Entstehung und Rezeption der 'Chronik des Preußenlandes,'" 202–7.

[157] In fact, the chroniclers muddy their metaphors somewhat in quoting Paul (1 Cor 3:6-8), who portrays God not as planter, but as life-giver: "ego plantavi Apollo rigavit sed Deus incrementum dedit; itaque neque qui plantat est aliquid neque qui rigat sed qui incrementum dat Deus." Cf. Peter: "ego plantavi, Apollo rigavit, dominus autem incrementum dedit; ex quibus verbis liquide licet appareat, quod neque is qui plantat, neque is qui rigat, aliquid sit, sed qui incrementum dat, deus; *tamen humana diligencia impensionis cure sollicitudinem debet impendere circa plantas, que adhuc novelle fructus uberes afferunt et uberiores suo tempore repromittunt*" (*Chronicon* 1.1, p. 27); and Nicolaus: "ich habe pflanzin gesazt; / dî hât Apollo genazt; / abir got hât mit genucht / sî tûn wachsin zu der vrucht;" / swî an den wortin sich entslûtzt, / daz "noch der, der dâ begûzt, / noch der dâ pflanzit, sullin icht / zu achtene sîn in der geschicht, / sundir der alleine ôt, / der daz wachsin gibit, got. / *Doch sol menschlîch vlîz sich wegin / darûf, daz er rûche pflegin / der pflanzin, dî in nûwir stift / brengin rîchir vruchte gift / und hernâch in rîfin tagin / rîchir vrucht gelobin tragin*" (*Kronike*, lines 409-24, emphases added).

Nicolaus in particular propagates the young crop's tenderness as a metaphor for the Order's vulnerable beginnings in the Baltic, juxtaposing the "ever so delicate vineyard chosen by the Lord" with the might of the God, "the Lord of Hosts," who has brought it into being.[158] As the passage goes on, Nicolaus continues to soften its imperious edges with words of tenderness. Unsatisfied with Peter's militaristic Sabaoth alone, Nicolaus addresses Christ in the following line as "you, sweet God"; and, concluding his description of the Order's germination in Prussia, refers to its extension to the sea as the growth of "its branch in sweet blossom."[159]

The image of the branch is, in fact, crucial to the metaphor of the Order's growth as a process of propagation.[160] Peter and Nicolaus credit God not only with planting the vineyard's roots, allowing it to fill the earth, but also with transferring it to Prussia and Livonia, where it "extended its young branches all the way to the sea, its offshoots to the waves."[161] Peter refers to

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[158] Nicolaus von Jeroschin, *Kronike*, lines 585-86: "diz ist der vil zarte / irwelte wîngarte." The description of the vineyard as tender or delicate is original to Nicolaus. Both Peter and Nicolaus refer to God here as "the Lord Sabaoth" or Lord of Hosts—a sacred name of God associated with his Old Testament role as a general of both heavenly and terrestrial armies.

[159] Nicolaus von Jeroschin, *Kronike*, lines 587-89; 605-6: "des hêrrin von Sabbaôt, / den dû, Criste, sûzir got / has gestiftit und irlesin…und bis an des wâgis vlût / sînen zwîc in sûzir blût." The fruit-bearing branch is a recurring metaphor in Nicolaus's translation. Although fitting with broader agricultural motifs, it appears to have been particularly handy as a rhyme with the *-wîc* ending common in German names. Later in the narrative, for example, he likens Otto von Braunschweig's aid and comfort to the Brothers to a "sweet, fruit-bearing branch," playing on the duke's toponymic surname: "Herzoge Otte von Brûnswîc, / der alse ein sûze vruchtic zwîc / dî brûdre in der zît so matte / mit trôste wol irlabit hatte" *Kronike*, lines 5,453-56. He employs the same rhyme for Otto's descendent Luther von Braunschweig, Grandmaster of the Order (and Nicolaus's patron), whom he calls "a princely branch of the line of Braunschweig" (*Brûdir Lûdir, von Brûnswîc / des stammis ein vurstlichir zwîc*) as well as for the heroic Brother Ludwig von Liebenzell, "a branch nobly sprouted" (*Dirre brûdir Lûdewic / von Libinzelle was ein zwic / intsprozzin von edilre art*). *Kronike*, lines 6,435-36; 17,421-23.

[160] Liz Herbert McAvoy, Patricia Skinner, and Theresa Tyers have recently analyzed sexually charged metaphors of grafting in late medieval visionary texts, through which female monastics united a mystic expression of divine fusion, horticultural language from scripture (e.g., the *hortus conclusus* of the Song of Songs, and the image of Christ as a vine in Jn 15:1-2), and the richly symbolic contemplative space of the monastic garden. Liz Herbert McAvoy, Patricia Skinner, and Theresa Tyers, "Strange Fruits: Grafting, Foreigners, and the Garden Imaginary in Northern France and Germany, 1250–1350," *Speculum* 94 (2019): 471–83.

[161] Peter of Dusburg, *Chronicon* 1.1, p. 28: "plantasti radices ejus et implevit terram, transtulisti eam postea… et plantasti eam ibi et sic extendit palmites suos usque ad mare et usque ad flumen propagines ejus." Nicolaus von Jeroschin, *Kronike*, lines 592-606: "dû snit abe sîne sturziln / und pflantztis sîne wurziln; / des hât er lustlîche / irvullit daz ertrîche. / Darnâch tructis dû in vort / in daz lant zu Prûzin dort / unde zu Lîflande, / … / und pflantztis in aldâ. /

the mother-plant's "offshoots" (*propagines*), while Nicolaus specifically describes the action of "cutting from its stem" (*Dû snit abe sîne sturziln*).[162] Altogether, the texts employ a carefully controlled vocabulary rooted in scripture to depict the Order's planting in Jerusalem, its germination in the Holy Land, and its propagation across the world all the way to the Baltic as both an organic process of growth and a curated process of replication. By employing this particular metaphor, the chroniclers diverged subtly from the late antique and early medieval tradition of identifying sites whose topographic similarities to Jerusalem and the Holy Land offered a vicarious experience of pilgrimage.[163] The crusading movement intensified the immediacy of Jerusalem as an objective of Christian pilgrimage and control, and proponents of the northern crusades could echo the Bishop of Magdeburg's appeal to the princes of northwestern Europe in 1108 to free "our Jerusalem" from the attacks of Baltic pagans.[164] The Teutonic chroniclers evidently chose not to suggest that Jerusalem was anywhere other than the Holy Land; nor did they employ rocky imagery to create a topographical link between the Baltic and the Levant. Instead, they represented the Order's fledgling settlement in Prussia as an entirely independent entity, even if its Holy Land derivations gave it special distinction.

Pleasant evocations of tender vines and perfumed gardens notwithstanding, planting fruitful gardens in the chroniclers' agricultural metaphor has darker, more aggressive implications.

Alsus hât er vil ebin / gestrackit sîne rebin / in gar wunniclîchir kêr / manchirwein unz an das mer / und bis an des wâgis vlût / sînen zwîc in sûzir blût."

[162] Peter of Dusburg, *Chronicon* 1.1, p. 28; Nicolaus von Jeroschin, *Kronike*, line 591.

[163] John Charles Arnold, for example, has shown how pagan sites—especially in liminal places like crags and caves—and their associated stories were adapted into late antique and the early medieval pilgrimage sites with help from new Christian idioms emphasizing, for example, the rocky nature of Jerusalem and its surrounding countryside. John Charles Arnold, "Arcadia Becomes Jerusalem," *Speculum* 75 (2000): 581–88.

[164] Jensen, "Crusading at the End of the World: The Spread of the Idea of Jerusalem after 1099 to the Baltic Sea Area and to the Iberian Peninsula," 168–70.

When he transfers the Order to Prussia and Livonia, God ejects the people already there. Planting Christian settlers in Prussia, it follows, necessarily implies supplanting its Indigenous inhabitants.[165] Vines, in the chroniclers' biblically inspired vocabulary, replace weeds.

Weeds, however, resist eradication. In their descriptions of the first Prussian rebellion in the early 1240s, Peter and Nicolaus set the scene with the observation that the Brothers' neighboring peoples had submitted to the faith and to the Order, "but not without the tremendous slaughter of their people and the spilling of much Christian blood."[166] Unlike the Edenic coexistence after the Order's mythicized arrival, the peaceful state at the outset of the Prussian rebellions is itself the product of extreme violence. The disturbance of peace has the same catalyst in both cases, however. Incited by the devil's wish to see the Christians' "new wonders" (*nûwe wundir*) undone, their enemies (in the first instance, the Prussians and their Pomeranian allies) band together, and hard-won peace dissolves.[167] Peter and Nicolaus render the beginning of the Prussian rebellions' cyclical pattern of conflict through a horticultural metaphor in which the persistent harassment of weeds endangers the cultivation of plants, necessitating vigilance and, at times, aggression. With language drawn from Matthew's version of the parable of the sower, they describe how the devil—"that old serpent, that poisonous dragon, that enemy of the human race"—jealously "began to think of a thousand ways and schemes to pour forth his deadly poison into

[165] Peter of Dusburg, *Chronicon* 1.1, p. 28: "transtulisti eam [vineam] postea et ejecisti gentes de terra Prussie et Lyvonie et plantasti eam ibi." Nicolaus von Jeroschin, *Kronike*, lines 595-600: "darnâch tructis dû in vort / in daz lant zu Prûzin dort / unde zu Lîflande, / darûz dû manchirhande / heiden has vorwurfin sâ / und pflantztis in aldâ."

[166] Peter of Dusburg, *Chronicon* 3.31, p. 66: "et vicine gentes in circuitu durissime cervicis colla fidei et fratribus submisissent, *non tamen sine ipsarum gencium strage maxima multaque Cristiani sanguinis effusione*." Nicolaus von Jeroschin, *Kronike*, lines 5,891-901: "und dî dît gesezzin nâ / in dem lande alumme dâ / ir helse vil zangir doch / undir des geloubin joch / und der brûdre getwanc / gebogin hattin sundir wanc, / darzû sî doch nicht wârin brâcht, / ân der iren grôze slacht / *noch âne michil blût / daz vil manic cristin gût / hatte darumme vorgozzin*" (emphases added).

[167] Nicolaus von Jeroschin, *Kronike*, line 5,923.

God's new foundation and completely destroy the noble, tender, divine vineyard, robbing it of all its fruit; and to sow his own weeds in God's fruitful field."[168]

The reference to Matthew solidifies the significance of the parable in the chroniclers' conceptualization of Christian settlement as well as the foundational role of scripture as a template for Christian history. More subtly, it develops the motif of wilderness beyond a kind of space into a kind of temporality. As expressed in Christ's own words, the sowing of the faith is the transformation of a wilderness state, which Peter and Nicolaus, in turn, understand in their theory of paganism as both the beginning and end of consequently ahistorical (if not strictly static) Indigenes. The planting of weeds, moreover, represents a reversal to wilderness not through negligence, but intentional dereliction. Thus the idea of wilderness as both the absence and perversion of religion mirrors the cyclical temporalities of conversion and apostasy, settlement and decimation, and peace and conflict that shape the chroniclers' narrative of the Order's conquest of Prussia, a place itself unstably oscillating between cultivation and desolation. The parable helps convey, moreover, that paradise and wilderness are not opposite conditions per se, but competing paradigms coexisting in tension with one other. Although intent on suffocating the Christian sower's garden, the devil does not simply destroy it, but sows seeds of his own, which sprout up as weeds among the vines they strive to supplant.

[168] Peter of Dusburg, *Chronicon* 3.31, pp. 66-67: "serpens antiquus, draco venenosus, humani generis inimicus…cepit mille modis cogitare et variis machinacionibus procurare, qualiter venenum suum posset latenter infundere, vineam domini demoliri, et in agro domini zizaniam superseminare." Peter's draws language from Mt 13:24-25: "simile factum est regnum caelorum homini qui seminavit bonum semen in agro suo; cum autem dormirent homines *venit inimicus eius, et superseminavit zizania* in medio tritici et abiit" (emphasis added). Nicolaus's translation follow's Peter's text closely, with some characteristic elaboration, including again his description of the Lord's vineyard as "delicate": "dâvon er ouch begunde / irsûchin in der stunde / mêr wen tûsintleige list / in vêrlîchir mittewist, / wî er mochte schîzin / geluppe unde gîzin / sîne mortlîche vorgift / in daz nûwe gotisstift / *und den edlin zartin / gotlîchin wîngartin* / mochte gar vorterbin / und allir vrucht interbin, / (darûf sô was er wackir), / und wî er in den ackir / gotis alsô vruchtsam / gewurfe sînes trespis sam." *Kronike*, lines 5,929-44 (emphasis added).

Irrigating the Lord's Vineyard

In the contest to cultivate Prussia or return it to a wild state, violence was the engine of change. The chroniclers depict its landscapes, especially during the Prussian rebellions, as being rife with conflict and running with blood. In the wake of Swietopelk's incitement of the first major rebellion, Peter and Nicolaus recount that the rebels "at that time committed such slaughter everywhere in Prussia that both hill and dale seemed to have turned red with Christian blood."[169] Nor is the flow of blood ever quite stanched. An episode discussed earlier in which the ambushed townspeople of Elbing retreat to a fortified mill, for instance, ends in "the outpouring of so much Christian blood that the adjacent millstream"—that constant emblem of Christian progress—"lost the natural color of its waters, its course appearing fully blood-red all day long."[170] In contrast with the tragic sentimentalism with which they lamented Christian bloodshed, Peter and Nicolaus depicted parallel pagan images with often callous banality. In an especially gruesome scene, the chroniclers describe a Barthian rebel, accused by the chroniclers of having captured and killed two Commanders, who is eaten by his own dog while dying on the battlefield:

> There he lay dead in his blood and filth, when his dog came up to him, paying no mind to the many open wounds he had on his body except for his left side, where it bit him ferociously with a fierce growl, gnawing and tearing flesh from his body…until he bit right through. Afterwards, he tore out the heart that had set forth so much deceitful falsehood, and hungrily ate it up in front of the Christians, who took note of this marvel as they hunted down their enemies [*jaiten*] all around the battlefield.[171]

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[169] Peter of Dusburg, *Chronicon* 3.35, p. 69: "sic quod tota terra Prussie videbatur Cristianorum sanguine rubricata." Nicolaus von Jeroschin, *Kronike*, lines 6,270-73: "sî ûbetin dô sulchin mort / in Prûzinlande ubiral, / daz man beide berc und tal / mit cristinlichim blûte sach / gerôtit."

[170] Peter of Dusburg, *Chronicon* 3.170, p. 130: "tantus ibi sanguis Cristianorum fusus fuit, quod fluvius vicinus amisso colore naturali sanguineus apparebat." Nicolaus von Jeroschin, *Kronike*, lines 15,182-88: "Crîstenlîchis blûtis / wart vorgozzin alsô vil / … / daz aldâ der mulin vlîz / sîne wazzervarwe lîz / und irschein den tac vil gar / in sinem vluzze blûtgevar."

[171] Peter of Dusburg, *Chronicon* 3.223, p. 147: "in hoc territorio fuit occisus quidam Barthensis, qui…in ultima apostasia commendatores de Cristburgk et Elbingo cum eorum familia captivavit. Quem sic interfectum canis eius diris morsibus est aggressus et aperiens latus eius sinistrum cor eius, quod tot prodicionum et fraudum conscium fuit,

While the Barthian's gruesome death is a spectacle for the vengeful Christians in both versions, Nicolaus is especially clear in aligning it with his history's many miraculous signs.

Christian settlers slain in the recurring conflicts with Prussia's native people hover between victimhood and heroism, and Teutonic Brothers' deaths are regularly cast as martyrdoms, often as graphically depicted as the Barthian's demise.[172] Teutonic chroniclers joined a long tradition of sensationalizing pagan violence and resultant martyrdoms as a means of justifying and heroizing Christian persistence in non-Christian milieus.[173] Late antique Christian authors commonly depicted martyrdoms as pagan sacrifices—a trope that reoccurs in Teutonic sources about Baltic pagans, who probably did sacrifice some Christian captives.[174] John Tolan has argued that crusade chroniclers revived the Late Antique tradition in order to frame persecution by "Saracens" as the continuation of a heroic Christian narrative, effectively identifying new Muslim enemies as the idolatrous successors of ancient Roman oppressors.[175] The groups encompassed by the term "Saracen" expanded significantly in the twelfth century, and idolatrous pagan practices were muddled with Muslim beliefs: Muhammad became a Roman idol. Baltic pagans were also included

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de corpore extraxit et in presencia Cristianorum plurium devoravit." Nicolaus's decidedly more graphic version is the basis of my translation: "in dem gebîte vorgenant / ein Barte wart geslagin, / … / Dô er lac besulwit tôt / in sînis blûtis sudde, / dô quam ob in sîn rudde / nicht râminde der wundin, / der er gnûc offen vundin / hette an im in den zîtin, / sundir der linkin sîtin; / dâ beiz er în mit grimme / in grêzlîchir stimme / vast allumme gnarrinde / und doch dî wîle zarrinde / des vleischis von dem lîbe gnûc. / … / unz er im den lîb durchbeis. / Darnâch er im daz herze ûzreiz, / gerichtit hatte vor der vrist, / und iz vraz nâch hungirs pflicht / den cristenin zu angesicht, / dî alumme jaitin dar / und des wundirs nâmin war." *Kronike*, lines 18,445-46; 18,463-74; 18,476-83.

[172] On the centrality of crusade and martyrdom to the long discourse of Christian violence from Late Antiquity to the Iraq War, see Buc, *Holy War, Martyrdom, and Terror*.

[173] Cf. Lipton, "Christianity and Its Others: Jews, Muslims, and Pagans," 13.

[174] Bartlett has interpreted the grisly fascination with pagan sacrifice as a sort of Christian self-reflection, hypothesizing that "in a sense the distinction between Christianity and paganism is not between a non-sacrificial and a sacrificial religion but between two rival conceptions of sacrifice." One twelfth-century theologian, Baldwin of Ford, even saw in pagan blood sacrifice a preconditioning for adopting Christian practice. Bartlett, "Reflections on Paganism and Christianity in Medieval Europe," 65–67, here 66. Cf. n50 above.

[175] Tolan, *Saracens*, 105–34.

in the spectrum of Saracens, and their distinctive ways of killing and torturing Christian martyrs figure prominently in the Teutonic chronicles.

Disembowelment was one particularly common form.[176] Peter and Nicolaus recount how one brother caught in a Natangian treachery is tied to a tree by the Prussians, who cut open his belly and force him to run around until his intestines unravel. With no one to bury him properly, his body is left to the appetites of wild birds and beasts. In all the martyrologies, they aver, never did Christians suffer such torment.[177] This Brother's death at the hands of the Natangians, if unusually gruesome, is representative of the character and role of martyrdom throughout the texts. Of particular note is the use of dehumanizing language to describe his torment reflecting vocabulary and motifs more typically associated with the pagans themselves. The Brother's body (similar to the Barthian's) is left to wild animals, and Nicolaus likens the Natangians' method of execution (forcing him to run around a tree) as a hunt: "They began to hunt [*jagin*] him all around the tree until his entrails unwound, sticking to it."[178] Inverting the normal implications, however, such dehumanizing violence has a purifying effect, as expected in accounts of martyrdom: Peter lauds the Brother as a "witness of true faith," while Nicolaus calls him a "pure" victim of "the atrocities against the martyrs."[179] Prussia's martyrs consequently share with their pagan tormenters a sort of corporal, animal wildness at the moment of their deaths, if only as a means of spiritual

[176] Disembowelment was one of the pagan atrocities cited in the Bishop of Magdeburg's 1108 letter. Cf. n102 above.

[177] Peter of Dusburg, *Chronicon* 3.66, p. 88: "volve et revolve omnia scripta martirologii, non occurret tibi tale genus martirii." Nicolaus von Jeroschin, *Kronike*, lines 9,115-21: "wend und widir / wende von ende unz zu ende / durchsûchinde dâ und hî / dî schrift des martilogii, / dunvindist nînder drinne sîn, / daz in martilîchir pîn / î kein heilig irsturbe sus."

[178] Nicolaus von Jeroschin, *Kronike*, lines 9,105-10: "darnâch mit hartin pflâgin / begoundin sî in jagin / den boum alum und umme, / unz in manevaldir crumme / dî derme sich ûzreiftin / und um den boum becleiftin."

[179] Peter of Dusburg, *Chronicon* 3.66, p. 88: "et sic in confessione vere fidei reddens deo spiritum expiravit." Nicolaus von Jeroschin, *Kronike*, lines 9,111-14: "alsus der brûdir reine / in der martir meine / mit des geloubin volleist / gab ûf gote sînen geist."

transcendence. Parallel with the tactical mastery of wild landscapes, descending into wilderness becomes in some sense a salvific prerequisite of ascending into paradise.

Blood flows freely through these scenes of martyrdom.[180] In the wake of the Brother's death at the hand of the Natangians, for instance, the chroniclers lament how "the wicked race…poured out [their victims'] blood like water, so that it gushed across the entire land."[181] Another scene confirms the potential for wounds and bloodshed to be not only spiritually, but also medically, purifying. Grievously wounded and left for dead in the snow, Brother Ludwig von Liebenzell—a hero of several anecdotes—finds himself loaded onto the back of a horse by the enemy Sudovians. The bumpy ride causes his wounds to reopen, but the effect is rejuvenating rather than deadly, allowing him to recover from his injuries.[182] According to the chroniclers' narrative imagination, the pagans themselves go about their bloodletting fully (if facetiously) aware of its link to Christian beliefs in sanctity and martyrdom. On an appointed day during the second major rebellion of the 1260–1270s, the Prussian rebel leaders unleash a wave of destructive assaults on Christian settlements and churches with the intention of "killing anyone professing the Christian faith, slaughtering them to the point of annihilation."[183] During the course of the attacks, the rebels kill or enslave many settlers; desecrate sacraments, unguents, vestments, vessels, and other liturgical accessories; and trigger a spate of martyrdoms among the Brothers and the clergy.

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[180] On the special significance of blood as a medium for and signifier of holiness in the later Middle Ages, especially in Germany, see Caroline Walker Bynum, *Wonderful Blood: Theology and Practice in Late Medieval Northern Germany and Beyond* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007).

[181] Peter of Dusburg, *Chronicon* 3.66, p. 88: "effuderunt enim gentes sanguinem ipsorum tanquam aquam in circuitu terre." Nicolaus von Jeroschin, *Kronike*, lines 9,131-33: "dî arge dît nâch wunschis lôz / ir blût sam wazzir dâ vorgôz, / daz is daz lant al um bevlôz."

[182] Peter of Dusburg, *Chronicon* 3.212, p. 143; Nicolaus von Jeroschin, *Kronike*, lines 17,512-73.

[183] Peter of Dusburg, *Chronicon* 3.90, p. 99: "quoscunque fidei Cristiane professores occiderent et usque ad internecionem delerent." Nicolaus follows Peter's language closely.

As an illustration of their callousness, Peter and Nicolaus include a scene in which a company of Sambians murder a priest by crushing his neck between two wooden planks. They remark in mockery at the scene's climax that "this kind of martyrdom should suit holy people, since we would not [dare] spill their consecrated blood."[184]

From the veins of the martyrs, Christian blood irrigates the Lord's vineyard as it periodically washes across Prussia's landscape. Upon reconciliation with Swietopelk at the close of the first Prussian rebellion, the chroniclers remark that the duke was simply suspending his plan "to despoil and lay waste to the faith…all across Prussia that was newly planted there with Christian blood, so much of which the wicked one himself…had spilled."[185] Echoing Nicolaus's descriptions of the "tender vineyard," both chroniclers depict the vulnerability of the faith (and, in Peter's text, the Brothers themselves) "newly planted" in Prussia—an image that resonated with the Western nobility, encouraging them to lend their aid as crusaders. At the outset of a later rebellion, the princes and kings of Germany react quickly to their alarm "that through the devil's envy, the Christian faith might be rendered barren and torn asunder in Prussia, where it had been planted with such initial difficulty, with such a terrible flow of Christian blood."[186] This outpouring

[184] Peter of Dusburg, *Chronicon* 3.90, p. 100: "asserentes, quod tale genus martirii competeret viris sanctis, quorum sanguinem fundere non auderent." Nicolaus's translation follows Peter's text closely, with one main point of difference being the added description of the blood as "consecrated" (*gewîtis*): "sî sprâchin: 'Heiligin lûtin / vûgit sulchir martir schicht, / sint daz wir inturrin nicht / gîzin ir gewîtiz blût.'" *Kronike*, lines 11,038-41.

[185] Peter of Dusburg, *Chronicon* 3.56, p. 82: "querens quomodo fratres et novellam fidem cum magna et multa Cristiani sanguinis effusione plantam in terra Prussie destrueret." Nicolaus von Jeroschin, *Kronike*, lines 8,487-93: "wî er den geloubin / vorterbin und beroubin / mochte ubir Prûzinland, / der dâ nûwelîch was geplant / mit cristinlîchim blûte, / des der ungûte / selbe durch des tûvils spil / vorgozzin hatte sêre vil."

[186] Peter of Dusburg, *Chronicon* 3.125, p. 113: "commoti sunt reges et principes, et ut ecclesia dei in Prussie partibus per multam cristiani sanguinis effusionem complantata omnino non deficeret." Nicolaus von Jeroschin, *Kronike*, lines 12,864-71: "daz durch des tûvils nîdin / der cristinegeloube / solde wêrdin toube / zu Prûzin und vorschranzit, / der dâ her gepfplanzit / was sô swêrlich von begunst / mit vil manchir vreisin runst / cristinlîchis blûtis."

of crusading spirit parallels an earlier moment following the outbreak of the 1261 rebellion (in which the priest met his bloodless end). Hearing of the violence in Prussia, Germany's lords "were moved to lamentation and commiseration that the new planting of the faith should, at the devil's whim, be so pitifully obliterated—faith that had been so painfully brought forth into joyful bloom through the spilling of so much Christian blood."[187] As would happen again decades later, Germany's crusading elite is pressured into action by overwhelming compassion for fellow Christians in Prussia.

That Nicolaus and Peter employ the extended agricultural metaphor of irrigating the plantation of faith with Christian blood at two of the most crucial moments in their chronicles demonstrates its centrality to their conceptualization of Prussia's history. Each foreign intervention, moreover, is closely followed by parallel miracles—the appearance of snow-white doves at the death of a martyred crusader, manifesting God's transformative presence in Prussia.[188] At the intersection of elaborate motifs, vivid imagery, dramatic scenes, and often shocking juxtapositions, Peter and Nicolaus convey the dependency between colonization and extreme violence as a central theme of their histories.

Nicolaus characteristically diverges from Peter's text by inserting the devil as an instigator of conflict. He also plays to the nobility of his subjects by remarking on the *minne* (courtly love) that Germany's kings and princes cultivate for God (e.g., line 12,861).

[187] Nicolaus von Jeroschin, *Kronike*, lines 11,052-61: "zu jâmirunge sî irwûc / und zu mitlîdunge, / daz dî nûwe pflangzunge / des geloubin solde / als der tûvil wolde, / sô jâmirlîch werdin vornicht, / dî dâ sô pînlîch ûfgericht / was in lustsame vrûte / mit manchis cristnen blûte, / daz dâ was vorgozzin." The horticultural metaphor is less pronounced in Peter's text: "unde…multi nobiles de aliis Theutonie partibus, compacientes fidei et fidelibus, quod novella plantacio ecclesie in partibus Prussie, per multorum fidelium sanguinis effusionem erecta, deberet tam miserabiliter interire." *Chronicon* 3.91, p. 100.

[188] First episode: Peter of Dusburg, *Chronicon* 3.91, p. 101; Nicolaus von Jeroschin, *Kronike*, lines 11,199-212. Second episode: *Chronicon* 3.281, p. 167; *Kronike*, lines 22,298-309.

A New Promised Land

In some contrast to the seeds that Bishop Christian had sown, which failed to take root in the region's unforgiving soil, the Teutonic Order's heartier Prussian branch does not arise autochthonously in Peter and Nicolaus's histories, but as the grafted outgrowth of sturdy Jerusalem roots. On an even grander scale, moreover, the chroniclers frame the history of Prussia's conquest and settlement within a typological metanarrative. Through pointed references to Old Testament books like Deuteronomy, Judges, and 1-2 Maccabees, they cast the history of the Teutonic Order to recall and, in a sense, to repeat the history of God's chosen people as they struggled to implant themselves among Canaan's wild inhabitants and transform the region into the land promised to them.

Grandmaster Hermann von Salza articulates this idea when, in response to Conrad of Masovia's call for aid, he sends Hermann Balke to the Baltic as the first Master of Prussia. To convey this critical transfer of Prussia's lordship and destiny to its new Master, Peter and Nicolaus choose to directly reference a pivotal moment in scripture, when God authorizes Joshua, as Moses' successor, to lead Israel across the Jordan into the land promised to their ancestors. "Just as the Lord [said] to Joshua," the Grandmaster tells Hermann: "take comfort and have strength, for you will lead the sons of Israel—that is, your Brothers—into the land that the Lord has promised them, and the Lord will be with you."[189] This is not the first time Joshua hears these words, however, Moses already having relayed the message earlier; and although the chroniclers gesture to God's proclamation specifically, Moses' senior relationship to Joshua resembles the Grandmaster's

[189] Peter of Dusburg, *Chronicon* 2.11, p. 47: "dicens ad eum, sicut dominus ad Josue: confortare et esto robustus, tu enim introduces filios Israel i.e. fratres tuos in terram, quam pollicitus est eis dominus, et deus erit tecum." Nicolaus's translation is virtually verbatim. Cf. Dt 31:23: "praecepitque Iosue filio Nun et ait, confortare et esto robustus, tu enim introduces filios Israhel in terram quam pollicitus sum et ego ero tecum."

relationship to Hermann Balke.[190] Moreover, the passage's language reverberates throughout both Deuteronomy 31 and Joshua 1.[191] Each passage sharing the language recites some iteration of God's promise that he will accompany and strengthen the Israelites as they prepare, under Joshua's leadership, to cross the Jordan, occupy the Promised Land, and subdue its peoples. On the one hand, the allusion invites the chronicles' scripturally literate audience to imagine the first Brothers in Prussia as new sons of Israel (*filios Israel*, *fratres tuos*) who themselves crossed the threshold of a mighty river to confront the hostile inhabitants of a desert wilderness destined to become a "land flowing with milk and honey."[192] On the other hand, Peter and Nicolaus doubtless recognized the passage's subtle admonitory implications. Before God speaks to Joshua, he fulminates to Moses that his laws should be kept as a future reminder of the covenant that his people will break, with dangerous consequences, as soon as they have gorged themselves upon the prosperity of their Promised Land.[193] In this scripturally allusive framework of historical time, points of origin and destiny, of past and future, elide, such that the Order's mission in Prussia—as the reflection of an older pattern—is at once ancient and also entirely new.

A key pattern reiterated in the Order's history is its terrible conflict with the inhabitants of its Promised Land—an ongoing present struggle that the chroniclers ground in the distant Old Testament past. Among the dense scriptural allusions in the chronicles' opening chapters (Peter's

[190] Dt 31:7: "vocavitque Moses Iosue et dixit ei coram omni Israhel, confortare et esto robustus, tu enim introduces populum istum in terram quam daturum se patribus eorum iuravit Dominus, et tu eam sorte divides."

[191] "Confortare et esto robustus" appears a total of five times between the two chapters: Dt 31:7, 23; Jo 1:6, 7, 9. "Tu enim introduces…in terram quam" appears, with some variation, in Dt 31:7, 21, 23.

[192] Dt 31:20: "introducam enim eum [populum] *in terram pro qua iuravi patribus eius lacte et melle manentem*, cumque comederint et saturati crassique fuerint, avertentur ad deos alienos et servient eis et detrahent mihi et irritum facient pactum meum" (emphasis added).

[193] Dt 31:16-22, esp. 20.

first chapter after the introductory epistle and lines 331-900 of Nicolaus's translation) are a series of references that cite particular Old Testament conflicts prefiguring the Order's Prussian crusades. They point, for example, to the "knights of God" under the rule of Moses, Joshua, and the Judges, who, taking up "the new wars chosen by the Lord, drove out from their roots the race of Enachim and other hostile inhabitants of the Holy Land."[194] New wars to drive out the Canaanites foreshadow new wars against the Prussians. The Order's intervention in Prussia is itself a prefiguration of the apocalypse, moreover. Peter and Nicolaus compare the Knights' protection of Christendom to the angels' descent from heaven to fight against the devil in John's apocalyptic vision of the church militant.[195]

Other allusions likening Prussia to the Old Testament Promised Land fixate on Moses' parting of the Red Sea. Peter and Nicolaus compare Gregory IX's rousing speech in support of the new crusade to Judas Maccabeus' words to his own men, urging them not to fear the enemy, but to "remember how our fathers were saved in the Red Sea, when Pharaoh pursued them with his great army."[196] Much later in the chronicles, they call the audience's attention to "a remarkable

[194] Peter of Dusburg, *Chronicon* 1.1, p. 28: "nam sub Moyse et Josue et aliis judicibus Israel milites dei nova bella, que elegit dominus, eligentes, stirpem Enachim et ceteros iniquos terre sancte inhabitatores gygantee malicie coheredes leonum more inadventes funditus exterminaverunt." Nicolaus von Jeroschin, *Kronike*, lines 695-713: "sich vûgit ouch gewisse / daz wol zu gezûgnisse / Prûzinlande, daz dort ê / undir Moysê und Josuê / und andrin richtêrin geschach, / dî man der Judin waldin sach, / bî der richtêre jârin / gotis rittere wârin, / dî stritten als dî helde / strîte, dî got irwelde / und wol gevilen im. / Daz geslechte Enachim / und andre ungewêre / vermeinte inwonêre / des heiligin landis sî bestritten / wol nâch der kûnen lewin sittin / und ubir alle dî gebîte / vortilgtin sô gar dî dîte / von grund ûf, daz ir nicht inbleib." Cf. Gn 6:4, preceding the story of the flood: "gigantes autem erant super terram in diebus illis, postquam enim ingressi sunt filii Dei ad filias hominum illaeque genuerunt, isti sunt potentes a saeculo viri famosi" and Jgs 5:8: "nova bella elegit Dominus et portas hostium ipse subvertit, clypeus et hasta si apparuerint in quadraginta milibus Israhel."

[195] Peter of Dusburg, *Chronicon* 1.1, p. 28; Nicolaus von Jeroschin, *Kronike*, lines 665-94. The reference is to Apoc. 3.

[196] 1 Mc 4:8-9: "et ait Iudas viris qui secum erant ne timueritis multitudinem eorum et impetum eorum ne formidetis; mementote qualiter salvi facti sunt patres nostri in mari Rubro cum sequeretur eos Pharao cum exercitu." Peter quotes the text nearly verbatim: "ne timueritis multitudinem eorum et impetum eorum ne formidetis. Mementote, qualiter salvi facti sunt patres nostri in mari rubro, cum persequeretur eos Farao cum exercitu multo." *Chronicon* 2.6, p. 38. Nicolaus follows Peter closely (lines 2,080-86).

miracle" performed for a campaigning army as it returned home across the river Nemunas from the Lithuanian frontier in late spring, when the combination of sunshine and turbulent waters normally made frozen rivers unstable.[197] Despite the thinness of the ice, the army manages to cross unharmed with all its spoils and equipment. When they notice that all the ice has melted the next morning to reveal the churning river beneath it, the army instantly recognizes the work of God:

> And so God worked an especially wondrous miracle. The same strong God whose almighty command led the Israelite army through the Red Sea from Egypt without one foot becoming wet, the water standing instead on each side like a wall until they had crossed over and it came back together into its original position—in the same way, he guided his troops safely across the current.[198]

Whether the chroniclers intended to compare the Lithuanians to the massive army of the Egyptians is not clear. More important, in any case, is their likening of the passage across the Nemunas's melting surface—that iconic image of Baltic crusading—to one of the most significant biblical events, in which God transforms the natural world to save his people in their transit to the Promised Land.

Frequent references to Old Testament books like Deuteronomy and Joshua notwithstanding, Peter and Nicolaus typologize the Teutonic Order in Prussia most systematically with allusions to the books of Maccabees.[199] A number of themes converge in references to the

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[197] Nicolaus von Jeroschin, *Kronike*, lines 20,166-67: "nû merket hî ein wundir / sunderlîchin undir." Cf. Peter of Dusburg, *Chronicon* 3.256, p. 158.

[198] Nicolaus von Jeroschin, *Kronike*, lines 20,186-201: "dêswâr daz wundir wundirlîch / worchte got dô sundirlîch. / Der selbe got, der starke got, / der got, des almechtic gebot / dâvor daz Israhêlische her / vûrte durch das rôte mer / von Egipten alsô, daz / sî nî vûz gemachtin naz, / sundir zu iclichir hant / stûnt in daz wazzir sam ein want, / unz sî ubbirquâmen, / dô trat iz zusamen / in sîn erste sâze; / in semelîchir mâze / leitte got wol sîne trucht / an dirre vlûte ubirzucht." Nicolaus's translation elaborates freely on Peter's more subdued reflection: "who could have done these things other than him alone, who ordered the sea to stand like a wall on the right and the left so that the Israelites could pass through on dry foot?" (*quis hec facere poterat, nisi ille solus, qui imperavit mari, ut tanquam murus staret a dextris et a sinistris, et sicco pede Israeliticus populus pertransiret?*). *Chronicon* 3.249, p. 156.

[199] See Mary Fischer, "The Books of the Maccabees and the Teutonic Order," *Crusades* 4 (2005): 59–71; Mary Fischer, "Biblical Heroes and the Uses of Literature: The Teutonic Order in the Late Thirteenth and Early Fourteenth Centuries," in *Crusade and Conversion on the Baltic Frontier, 1150-1500*, ed. Alexander Murray (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2001); Mary Fischer, *Di Himels Rote: The Idea of Christian Chivalry in the Chronicles of the Teutonic Order*

story of the Maccabee family's resistance to the Seleucid kings of the second century BCE, whose desecration of the Temple in Jerusalem and introduction of Hellenic customs prompted some Jews to soften in their faith and others to join in rebellion. Gregory IX picks up on several of these themes in his sermon on behalf of the new crusade in a series of references to Judas Maccabeus' own speech to his men, including the reminder that God had parted the Red Sea to save his people. Gregory thus appears as a modern Maccabee, urging his troops to gird themselves fearlessly against the strength and numbers of the enemy in the assurance that they are enacting God's will in the struggle to expel the heathen occupiers of their Promised Land.[200] Such heavy reliance on the Maccabean motif to rhetorically convey the crusades' papal authorization suggests its fundamental role in chronicling Prussia's history.

Three chapters following Gregory IX's speech shift from the narrative to the theoretical, citing strings of scriptural references as rational justifications for violent conquest. Two of the three chapters develop the classic trope of the spiritual and physical arms in the "new wars" for the faith. Peter and Nicolaus compile a list of armaments, explaining both the tactical and metaphorical significance of each. The shield, for example, represents the protection of faith and the link between prayer and victory, even of the few against the many—connections again made through reference to Jonathan and especially Judas Maccabeus, whose success in battle depended

(Göppingen: Kümmerle, 1991), 95–124; Buc, *Holy War, Martyrdom, and Terror*, 95–105. Nicholas Morton has suggested the intriguing idea that the crusading orders articulated a "Maccabaean frontier" in both the Baltic and the Latin East. Nicholas Morton, "The Defence of the Holy Land and the Memory of the Maccabees," *Journal of Medieval History* 36, no. 3 (2010): 275–93.

[200] Peter's adaption (*Chronicon* 2.6, p. 38) of the following citations is verbatim or nearly verbatim in each case: 1 Mc 2:50-51, 62-63, 64 (with language loosely adapted from Dt 5:32), 67-68; 1 Mc 4:8-9, 10-11. Two further references to Deuteronomy (Dt 20:1, 2-4) echo the message. Nicolaus translates Peter's text very closely. *Kronike*, lines 2,004-129

on whether he had prayed beforehand.[201] Explanations of the sword, buckler, and breastplate each similarly gesture to moments emblematizing the relationship between faith and righteous conflict.[202] The last of the three chapters outlines six reasons for the use of these spiritual and material weapons. Maccabean references again supply scriptural precedents for the application of violence as a means of arming oneself against the machinations and assaults of a wily enemy and, ultimately, as a means of winning back lost property.[203]

While a great variety of scriptural passages can serve this rather general purpose of justifying violence as a tool of the righteous, the Maccabean motif expresses a distinctively Teutonic idiom. The chroniclers imagined the Order, like the Maccabees, as a vastly outnumbered army of zealous brothers surrounded on all sides by their enemies, forced to physical and spiritual extremes, but armed with faith and trusting in miracles. Unlike the barbaric Canaanites in the historical books of the Old Testament, the Maccabees' heathen enemies are Hellenes whose cosmopolitan culture proves an alarmingly attractive alternative to Jews, whose adherence to Mosaic law—recalling God's premonitory words to Moses before Joshua's assumption of leadership—consequently slips. It is fitting, then, that aside from more generic references to infidel hordes, the Seleucid king Antiochus IV Epiphanes is likened not to any leader of the Prussians but to the Lithuanian duke Vytenis. In the wake of Vytenis's destructive raid through Teutonic

[201] The shield metaphor: Peter of Dusburg, *Chronicon* 2.8, p. 40; Nicolaus von Jeroschin, *Kronike*, lines 2,340-460. Cf. 1 Mc 3:18, 23. Regarding Judas' pre-battle prayers, Peter and Nicolaus do not cite particular passages, but refer more broadly to the events of 1 Maccabees: Peter of Dusburg, *Chronicon* 2.7, p. 39; Nicolaus von Jeroschin, *Kronike*, lines 2,130-273.

[202] The sword: Peter of Dusburg, *Chronicon* 2.8, p. 41; Nicolaus von Jeroschin, *Kronike*, lines 2,461-505; cf. 2 Mc 15:16. The buckler: *Chronicon* 2.8, p. 41; *Kronike*, lines 2,542-99; cf. 2 Mc 15:11. The breastplate: *Chronicon* 2.8, pp. 41-42; *Kronike*, lines 2,600-651; cf. 1 Mc 3:3.

[203] Peter of Dusburg, *Chronicon* 2.9, pp. 44-45; Nicolaus von Jeroschin, *Kronike*, lines 3,058-92. Preparation against enemy trickery: 2 Mc 14:22. Open warfare: 2 Mc 11:4, 6-7. On winning back lost property, the chroniclers recall how "the armed sons of Israel ascended into the land of promise that God had given their ancestors, and rescued it from its occupation under the hands of the enemies."

territory, the chroniclers implicitly compare the duke's arrogant confidence in his massive army to the vainglory of the Seleucid king, whose failure to recognize the power of God proves his undoing.[204] The dramatic inversion of momentum, which Nicolaus recounts through the extended hunting metaphor discussed earlier in the chapter, is a miraculous sign that the Teutonic forces, inferior in numbers but superior in faith and cause, fight with God's favor against a sophisticated heathen enemy. At the very beginning of the chronicles, moreover, the miraculous survival of the Order in the Baltic wilderness reflects the Maccabees' flight from the Seleucids' corrupting influence. In order to uphold their righteous mission, the Maccabees escape into the desert where, near starvation, they consume wild grasses. Not only does the reference foreshadow the history of Teutonic Prussia as a struggle in and against wilderness, it also presages the words of the Sambian elder who himself remarked that it would be futile to resist a people able to nourish themselves from the wilderness.

IV. Conclusion: A Promised Wilderness

Projecting Prussia's history as the making of a Baltic paradise appears, on the surface, to suggest an optimistic metanarrative. The image of the Maccabees grubbing for wild grasses, recalling the patient sufferings of the early Brothers, nevertheless hints at the critical edge underlying Peter and especially Nicolaus's depiction of their softer, greedier contemporaries. Figures from the early days of Prussia's settlement, imagined as hardy pioneers, serve as a foil to greedy contemporaries.

[204] Peter describes how Vytenis's trust in his powerful army outweighs (unsurprisingly) his trust in the power of the Christian God: "et ecce rex iste blasphemus nominis Jesu Cristi, dum veniret in solitudinem ad terram Barthensem in campum dictum Woyploc, *mente effrenatus gloriabatur, quasi potens in potencia exercitus sui, nunquam recogitans potestatem dei*." *Chronicon* 3.310, p 176 (emphasis added). Peter's language matches the description of the arrogant Seleucid king Epiphanes in 2 Mc 11:4: "nusquam recogitans Dei potestatem sed mente effrenatus in multitudine peditum et in milibus equitum et in octoginta elefantis confidebat." Nicolaus departs from Peter's text somewhat, with dramatic focus instead on Vytenis's mockery of his Christian prisoners. *Kronike*, lines 23,600-654.

One of Peter's stories idolizes Henry, the first bishop of Warmia, for his devotion to his newly consecrated see despite its complete lack of rents or income.[205] Nicolaus, in a biting epilogue appended to the anecdote, declares that "if prebends were as meager now as they were then, I am inclined to believe that no jurist, lawyer, or learned man would come here in search of his profit—I'd put *my* money on it!"[206] Elsewhere, both chroniclers venomously inveigh against a Commander who, out of love for material gain, shows himself to be excessively merciful to his enemies at the expense of his own men.[207] Like the Hellenized Jews of the Maccabees' times or the Israelites of God's premonition to Moses, contemporaries in Prussia would seem to have grown fat and faithless from the milk and honey now flowing through their Promised Land.

Pride, too, is the undoing of sinful people past and present. In the second anchorite's vision of the demons' pilgrimage to Prussia, all the souls of fallen Christian soldiers rise to heaven except for those fighting only out of love of glory rather than love of God.[208] Most apropos, Nicolaus blames pride for the expulsion of humanity from Eden at creation and, in recent times, for the fall of Acre and the consequent exodus of Christians from the Holy Land:

> The third cause was certain participants' pride, which spoils all that is good: pride was the tipping point in the greatest angel's fall from heaven into the bottomless abyss; pride also led mankind astray out of paradise into the lure of avarice, into death though not yet dead. Pride drove the Christians shamefully out of the Promised Land, which they had held until today. Pride fills God with wrath, infuriates him to the point of agony…So God's patrimony has become fit for

[205] Peter of Dusburg, *Chronicon* 3.140, p. 119.

[206] Nicolaus von Jeroschin, *Kronike*, lines 13,687-92: "wêrn dî prêbendin sô / magir, als sî wârin dô, / ich wêne, kein juriste, / legiste noch artiste / impetrîrte darîn; / des wolde ich wol ein burge sîn!" Nicolaus's adaption of the Latin verb *impetrire* (to seek gain or profit) as *impetrîrte* adds to the anti-scholastic flare.

[207] Peter of Dusburg, *Chronicon* 3.192, pp. 136-37; Nicolaus von Jeroschin, *Kronike*, lines 16,541-734.

[208] Peter of Dusburg, *Chronicon* 3.86, p. 98; Nicolaus von Jeroschin, *Kronike*, lines 10,765-86.

> nothing, as barren as desert, stripped of all grace. We cry this to you, sweet God; change the course of this suffering, as only you can![209]

In both texts, moreover, an extended apostrophe to the lost Holy Land follows the explanatory chapter. "You, oh Holy Land," begins Peter, "beloved and promised by God, revered by the blessed angels and wondrous to the entire world, chosen by God…you have been made barren and consumed by grief."[210] Nicolaus elaborates Peter's address with imagery of verdure laid to waste: "Oh mistress of all lands, oh bliss-bringing river banks, you empress of plains, site of heroes' victories, noble orchard, sweet ploughland, earthly paradise—how the treasure of your joys has been dried up and woefully destroyed."[211] Pride unleashes God's wrath upon humanity, a punishment that the chroniclers characteristically portray as the desertification of a wondrous garden. Weeds quickly overrun the poorly managed vineyard, even though it has been irrigated with decades of Christian blood. Once gained, paradise is easily lost. A strange episode featuring a certain "anti-miracle" tells a similar story. Before the Brothers' arrival, so the story goes, Rus' attackers besieged a Scalovian stronghold near the frontier convent-castle of Ragnit for nine years.

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[209] Nicolaus von Jeroschin, *Kronike*, lines 21,907-33: "sô was dî dritte sache / begebner luite ubirmût, / want der vorterbit alliz gût; / ubirmût was der swengil, / der den hôestin engil / von dem himele pralte / und mit valle valte / in den grundlôsen luf; / hômût den menschen ouch vorschûf / an des gîzis rîse / und ûz dem paradîse / untôtlîch in tôtlîch beschreib; / alsus ouch ubirmût vortreib / dî cristnen mit schanden / ûz den irweltin landen, / des sî unz huite hân imporn; / ubirmût tût gote zorn / in irgremzende zu vreist / und an munchin allirmeist, / want dî hân alle guft vorsworn / und joch eigenin mût vorkorn. / Alsus daz gotis erbe / ist wurdin umbederbe / und sôr alsam ein bûste, / allir genâdin wûste; / daz sî dir, sûzir got, gecleit; / wandele, want dû macht, daz leit!" The excursus on pride is original to Nicolaus; Peter's two explanations for the fall of Acre both relate to the confusion of leadership and command caused by the number of lords in the crusading armies. *Chronicon* 4.78, pp. 206-8.

[210] Peter of Dusburg, *Chronicon* 4.79, p. 208: "sic ergo tu o sancta terra promissionis deo amabilis et angelis sanctis venerabilis et universo mundo admirabilis a deo electa et preelecta…posita es desolata et merore consumpta." Peter's identification of the Holy Land as both "chosen and pre-chosen" (*electa et preelecta*) by God lends a sense of temporality (a predetermined timeline of salvation) and also atemporality (insofar as God determined a timeline *before* its beginning) to its place in Christian history. It exists inside and outside of time. Nicolaus's translation is theologically simpler, but echoes Peter's language (*electa*, *irwelte*) with characteristic dexterity: "ûz al der werlde irwelte." *Kronike*, line 21,949.

[211] Nicolaus von Jeroschin, *Kronike*, lines 21,934-43: "Ô allir lande vrouwe, / ô wunnenbernde ouwe, / ô dû keisirlîchir plân, / ô der recken siggeban, / ô eddelir boumgarte, / ô ackir sûzir arte, / ô irdischez paradîs, / wî gar ist dînir wunnen prîs / vorselwit und vorsôrit / und jêmerlîch zustôrit!"

When they finally relented in their unsuccessful assault, they asked their enemies inside how they had survived for so long. The Scalovians explained that the castle's fishpond was so teeming with fish that it provided the garrison with a meal every day. Although the pond miraculously provided for its pagan stewards, however, the chroniclers remark that once the Christians had taken over, the pond only ever contained frogs. Why should a fishpond suddenly fail righteous Christians after nourishing the pagan Scalovians for so long? "I do not know," Nicolaus admits; "God alone knows, whose judgments are inscrutable, whose ways unnavigable."[212]

Even if the episode stands as more of a curiosity than a serious reflection, it prompts a certain wonderment at the Baltic environment's occasionally inscrutable resistance to colonization. Keeping with the other criticisms that Nicolaus and Peter levied against Prussia's spiritual malaise in their own time, the story cautions that the planting of Christian society could yield unexpected consequences, while the pagan population could, conversely, continue to reap unexpected windfalls despite their incapability to develop the land into a prosperous one. The story of the fishpond recalls the Edenic state of Prussia when the Order first arrived, before the violent chaos supposedly wrought from Satan's envious instigation. Together, the episodes exemplify the intersection of landscape and temporality in the chronicling of colonization. In both cases, the ahistorical Baltic landscape, in spite of its wildness, miraculously provides for its inhabitants, such that a static, seemingly irrational equilibrium exists between passive non-development and bountiful produce. At the beginning of Prussia's history—like at the beginning of human history—paradise and wilderness are coexistent forms of the same landscape. Accompanying the Order's

[212] Peter of Dusburg, *Chronicon* 3.181, p. 133: "cur hoc sit, nescio; deus scit, cuius incomprehensibilia sunt judicia, et investigabiles vie." Nicolaus von Jeroschin, *Kronike*, lines 16,075-78: "wâvon daz sî, des weiz ich nicht; / got der weiz iz; des gericht / unbegrîflîch alle vrist / mir und allin sinnin ist." Peter alludes to Rom 11:33: "O altitude divitiarum sapientiae et scientiae Dei, quam inconprehensibilia sunt iudicia eius, et investigabiles viae eius" (O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!).

arrival, however, is the intrusion of time. Unlike earlier missions like Bishop Christian's, the Order's introduction of Christianity catalyzes a reaction that brings instability to the equilibrium, and changes in the land become both linear and circular. On the one hand, the planting of Christianity initiates a struggle to shape the landscape in opposite directions—the Christian directive to tend its garden, and the pagan directive to return to wilderness. Both directives, however, are processes of *re*-making, of return to the pacific equilibrium of time's beginning. In the elision of arrival and return, beginning and end, wilderness and paradise, history is a spiral—at once linear and cyclical—and the history of Prussia replicates the history of humanity. The planting motifs prevalent throughout Peter and Nicolaus's chronicles represent historical processes following this same model, vines and weeds alike growing and contracting between annual cycles and longer-term maturation. Prussia exists in the chroniclers' imagination somewhere (and some when) between wilderness and paradise as both places and temporalities, as a promised wilderness of convergent contradictions. In this constantly changing landscape, Peter and Nicolaus inscribe the history of Christian colonization as the tangling of metaphysical design and human agency.

Lorenzo Veracini has identified variations in narrative form as one principal distinction between the ideological structures of colonialism and settler-colonialism. Colonial narratives, on the one hand, are circular. "Cycles of opposition between civility and barbarism," he argues, ironically affirm the permanence of the separation between colonizer and colonized. Settler-colonial narratives, on the other hand, are linear, "[mobilizing] peoples in the teleological expectation of irreversible transformation."[213] In the case of medieval Prussia, however, Peter and Nicolaus's chronicles illustrate how these historical metanarratives overlapped, rendering time and

[213] Veracini, *Settler Colonialism*, 99–100, here 99.

its relationship to space as something both linear and cyclical, and as something rooted in colonized landscapes both real and imagined.

The role that the chroniclers attribute to the Teutonic Knights and to Prussia's Christian settlers also resembles patterns of thought among European colonizers that environmental historians have identified as post-medieval. Richard Grove has influentially argued that this "idea of man as a geographical agent," in which "man, through his arts and inventions, was seen as a partner of God, improving and cultivating an earth created for him" was one essential component in Western scientists' justification of colonial imperialism as the improvement of rich, but untamed tropical landscapes into Edenic gardens. Although nascent in classical antiquity, the idea was not fully realized "until professional natural historians and scientists began to appreciate the full impact of western economic penetration on colonial and largely tropical environments" in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Medieval narratives of colonization likewise situated colonial objectives within a totalizing framework of environmental and humanistic improvement—albeit one rooted in universal Christian ideals more than scientific empiricism. To what degree post-medieval naturalists and imperialists were indebted to medieval ideas is unclear, if they were at all; and it is likely, as Grove emphasizes, that the radically unfamiliar ecologies that Europeans encountered in tropical climes prompted a radically different approach.[214] Nevertheless, Teutonic narratives of colonization espouse a comparable rhetoric to justify Westerners' reconfiguration of the ecologies and populations they encountered at the edges of the world as they knew it.

As for Wigand, the near total absence of the Promised Land motif from his chronicle—yet continued centrality of the wilderness motif—likely speaks to the maturation of a more cynical outlook by the later fourteenth century, the beginnings of which are detectable in the critiques of

[214] Grove, *Green Imperialism*, 24–25.

Peter and Nicolaus over sixty years earlier. By the time Wigand composed his chronicle in the 1390s, the Lithuanian wars had not only dragged on for nearly a century, but had also become the focal point of an international controversy widely condemning the Teutonic Order. Despite the still relatively recent loss of the Holy Land in the 1320s-30s, conversely, the early settlement of Prussia against the combined resistance of its Indigenous lands and peoples, represented a miraculous victory for Peter and Nicolaus and, consequently, a cause for optimism about the vitality of Christian colonization. The degree to which the historical imagination of the chroniclers corresponds to the realities of Prussia's fourteenth-century settlement is the subject of the following four chapters. Whatever the divergence between imagination and administration, however, the rhetorical power of the promised wilderness is evident from the very beginning of Peter and Nicolaus's chronicles. In the prologue original to his translation, Nicolaus states that with his German translation of Peter's Latin original, his patron wishes him to "convey to all German people God's miracles and signs that have appeared in Prussia according to the goodness of his command, so that wherever they are heard they bring more praise, glory, and honor to God."[215]

Peter presented these signs and miracles as proof that overcoming hardship in God's name, as the Order's brothers have done in their colonization of Prussia, is ultimately worth the reward. Nicolaus likens the early Brothers' entry into Prussia to how Daniel and his companions were thrown into Nebuchadnezzar's furnace: they "uncomplainingly endured heat, frost, hunger and thirst, wounds, chains and bitter death, so that their manly courage in the fires of martyrdom was

[215] Nicolaus von Jeroschin, *Kronike*, lines 161-68: "ûf daz er sus bedûten / mug allen dûtschin lûten / dî wundir unde zeichin gots, / dî nâch gûte sîns gebots / in Prûzinlande sîn geschên, / und wâ man ir hôrt vorjên, / daz sich dâ gote mêre / lob, wirdekeit und êre.".

never tainted by unbecoming behavior."[216] It is a message that recurs throughout the texts in the direct words of the chroniclers as well as through scriptural motifs, such as the allusion to Daniel above or the more systematic typological framework of the Maccabean revolts. The chroniclers assure their contemporaries that although initially horrified at being stranded in a desert wilderness, the heroic Brothers of the Order's early foundations took comfort in the promise of their mission.[217] Even in moments of greatest duress with imprisonment or death imminent, under assault by the wild inhabitants of a wild land,

> with graceful patience, the Brothers and also other Christians all across Prussia at that time bore such plentiful hardships, great scarcity (that, too hard and bitter for human nature, was indeed like death), and unspeakable pain with just as much lightheartedness…Never were they seen lamenting, grumbling, or resentful, but instead mild and soft in disposition, acting in every respect as if they were in paradise.[218]

Fifty years after the last Prussian rebellion, the long history of Indigenous resistance to the Teutonic Order's lordship lingered as a reminder that the region's repressed native population had not been so inclined to see their invaders as the cultivators of an earthly paradise. In the insistence that this paradise was born from violence and the latent anxiety that it could likewise be easily unmade through violence, the Order's historical narratives offer a clear example of how the

[216] Nicolaus von Jeroschin, *Kronike*, lines 133-39: "'hitze, vrost, durst, hungirsnôt, / wundin, bant, den bittrin tôt / dem oven sî inmitten / durch got mit willen litten, / alsô daz ir menlîchir mût / in der mertirlîchin glût / nî wart vorsêrt mit ungedult.'" Nicolaus attributes these words to the Grandmaster Dietrich von Altenburg (r. 1335-41). Preceding this passage, the chronicle paraphrases the martyrial experiences of Daniel and his comrades (Dn 3-4), when they defy King Nebuchadnezzar's order of execution, walking unharmed through a flaming furnace, to royal consternation. Nicolaus additionally draws on the book's language of the miraculous to describe God's hand in the history of Prussia.

[217] Peter of Dusburg, *Chronicon* 2.10, pp. 46-47; Nicolaus von Jeroschin, *Kronike*, lines 3,393-512.

[218] Peter of Dusburg, *Chronicon* 3.145, p. 122: "in tanta paciencia et mansuetudine tolerarent, quod non sicut tristes, sed quasi semper gaudentes credebant se paradisi deliciis interesse." Nicolaus von Jeroschin, *Kronike*, lines 14,050-70: "mit gnâdinrîchir gedult / dî brûdre in den vristin / und ouch andre cristin / nicht alhî alleine, / sundir ouch gemeine / ubir alle Prûzinlant, / daz sî dî nôt sô manchirhant / unde mangil alsô grôz, / der joch dem tôde was genôz / und menschlîchir nâtûre / zu herte und zu sûre, / und unsprechlîche smerzin / mit alsô sûzin herzin / lidin unde trûgin / und sô geringe wûgin. / Nicht sach man sî trûrin, / noch murmeln noch sûrin. / sundir in semftmûtikeit / zu allin zîtin sîn gemeit / und gebârn in allir wîs, / als sî wêrn in paradîs."

ongoing repression of an Indigenous population, even once it has been nominally assimilated, structures settler-colonial societies. The promise of Prussia's transformed wilderness was contingent on the vigilance of its Christian faithful.

CHAPTER THREE: TO RULE BY STRAIGHT LINES

I. Partitioning Paradise

By the time Peter of Dusburg and Nicolaus von Jeroschin cast the German colonization of the Baltic as the cultivation of a new northern Promised Land, much of Prussia would have probably been almost unrecognizable to the native population that Christian foreigners had first encountered a hundred years earlier. The Teutonic Order and its neighboring bishops oversaw the transformation of the region on a mass scale, especially in the first half of the fourteenth century, as wetlands were drained, forests cleared, new villages settled, red-brick castles built, and huge swathes of reclaimed farmland planted with wheat and rye.[1] While Christian colonizers relied on the special technical expertise of some migrant settlers, they sourced the bulk of the heavy manual labor for these projects from its unfree population.[2]

As for the work of cultivation, the Order meted out plots in its Baltic garden using two principal units of area. Tenants in German-law communities, on the one hand, received property

[1] Pluskowski, *The Archaeology of the Prussian Crusade*, 196–246; Alexander Brown, "Vegetation Change in Prussia: The Palynological Data," in *Environment, Colonization, and the Baltic Crusader States*, ed. Aleksander Pluskowski, vol. 1, 2 vols., Terra Sacra 1 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2019), 293–332; Daniel Makowiecki et al., "Farming, Hunting, and Fishing in Medieval Prussia: The Zooarchaeological Data," in ibid., 333–76.

[2] On Flemings as drainage experts, see Bartlett, *The Making of Europe*, 111–16; Erlen, *Europäischer Landesausbau und mittelalterliche deutsche Ostsiedlung*, 248–56. The manual labor dues owed by unfree subjects were termed *Scharwerk*, exemption from which constituted a principal advantage of free status. For unfree Prussian peasants, annual labor dues do not seem to have been too strenuous, mainly entailing haymaking and timber hauling. They do not seem to have been preferred laborers for construction projects, which required some expertise and long periods of time away from agricultural work. See Vercamer, *Komturei Königsberg*, 346–47.

measured in Hufen, while tenants under Prussian law received property divided into Haken. The precise difference between Hufen and Haken (and the respective settlement structures that suited them) has long been a matter of debate, but the general consensus holds that it is essentially a technological one: while German settlers brought the heavy plow with them in their Eastward migrations, Prussian farming communities used a lighter scratch plow both before conquest and, in many cases, long afterwards.[3] Since the Order assessed the terms of each property grant based on the taxable yields it expected annually from the beneficiary, the different units supposedly reflected its recognition that the Prussian plow lent itself to less extensive cultivation than its heavy counterpart. Whether this indicates an effort to evaluate the dues of its settler and Indigenous populations on an equitable basis remains an open question; but the average area of Hufen- and Haken- properties amounted to around the same.[4] Either way, it is clear that the Order systematically partitioned Prussia, at least in theory, according to the common medieval estimation of how large a slice of paradise the average plowman could cover in a day's hard labor.

The previous chapter argued that Teutonic chroniclers framed the Order's history in Prussia as a typically settler-colonial narrative of territorial and cultural transformation, rooted in scripturally infused metaphors of cultivation. The following two chapters build on this ideological foundation to explore the settlement processes that shaped the Prussian landscape under the lordship of Christian colonizers. Each chapter approaches this task from opposing ends of an analytic scale. The current chapter begins with a regional approach, looking at how the Teutonic Order and its episcopal neighbors attempted to systematize land tenure according to centralized

[3] It is difficult to assess how widely Prussian farmers adopted the heavy plough, which was not necessarily cost-effective for holders of small property plots (1 *Hufe*/1.5 *Haken*). Half-*Haken* plots were often granted to existing single-*Haken* plots to facilitate three-field rotation. Vercamer, *Komturei Königsberg*, 198.

[4] For Sambia, at least (16.8 hectares). Vercamer, 197–98.

principles that reflected an ideological mission to form a productive, orderly, and peaceful society. In particular, this chapter tracks patterns in the boundary-clauses of local property grants in order to assess the impact of regularized survey practices on the partition of rural space. Chapter four, on the other hand, will look more closely at local contours of authority, use, and possession by investigating a collection of records related to the resolution of a property dispute between a Teutonic village and episcopal town towards the end of the fourteenth century. Together, these chapters make two principal arguments. The first is that although Prussia's colonizers did possess a state-like capacity to shape large swathes of territory through a centralized network of officials, according to the demands of a centrally formulated institutional agenda, they nonetheless relied on local patterns of knowing, working, and dwelling in the environment to exercise this power. In other words, Prussia's colonized landscape bears the imprint of Western forms, negotiated and improvised through encounters between officials and inhabitants (both Indigenes and settlers).[5] Second, the language of the Order's administrative records reflect the narratives of its historical texts, suggesting a telling relationship between the "culture" of colonialism and its practice.[6] In each case, we see a telling link between the epistemological and material structures of colonialism.

II. Colonial Land Surveys and the *große maße*

Historians of the Teutonic Order have often viewed its methodical distribution and management of land as prime evidence of its preternatural capacity for systematic administration. Hans Mortensen, for one, argued that even if the Order lacked a unified plan for the division of land, the

[5] As Bartlett, for one, has argued. Bartlett, *The Making of Europe*, 306–14.

[6] Cf. Roman Czaja's observation that the Teutonic Order expressed an institutional *Selbstbild* not only in imaginative texts and decorative architectural motifs, but also in the administrative documents that accumulated during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Czaja, "Das Selbstverständnis der geistlichen Ritterorden im Mittelalter: Bilanz und Forschungsperspektive."

multiplicity of administrative policies they developed essentially worked together as if there were such a degree of central planning as would be familiar to modern states.[7] For Peter Thielen, the leading story of the fourteenth century was the assimilation of local administrative tasks and offices into a centralized, regular "Territorialpolitik." Planned settlements marched "like clockwork" from West to East, replacing the "more motley arrangement" of existing settlements with a unified network of towns and villages.[8] The impetus for this centralization, suggested Thielen, sprang from the *Amtsdenken* at the heart of the Order's institutional structure—the "administrative mentality" that he believed fostered an institutional identity grounded in the value of office-holding and rule by council, leading the Order to "organically" transpose its rules for internal life (as expressed in its founding statutes) onto the state level. Thus, Thielen argued, the Order preceded and even surpassed the bureaucratic apparatuses of early modern states in a way that was, nevertheless, "typically medieval."[9]

More recent historians have departed from such mechanistic thinking, but have continued to frame the history of settlement in Prussia as a narrative of centralization and thus as an anticipation of the modern state. In his extensive study of settlement in the Commandery of Königsberg, for example, Grischa Vercamer uses the rivalry between the Grandmaster and the Marshal over the competency to endow free tenants with grants of land and privileges as an index for Marienburg's growing influence across the entirety of Teutonic Prussia.[10] Processes of

[7] Hans Mortensen, "Landesplanung im ordenszeitlichen und herzoglichen Ostpreußen," *Neues Archiv für Landes- und Volkskunde von Niedersachsen* 7/8 (1948): 439–59.

[8] Peter G. Thielen, "Landesplanung im Ordensstaat Preußen," in *Raumordnung im Aufbau des mittelalterlichen Staates* (Bremen: Walter Dorn, 1961), 47–48.

[9] Thielen, 43.

[10] Vercamer, *Komturei Königsberg*, 112–16.

settlement and land distribution, it follows, serve as proxies for centralization. Those processes deemed especially significant have acquired special labels in the course of technically oriented settlement historiography, such as *Verdorfung* (the consolidation of existing Prussian villages to make room for the settlement of new, taxable German villages) and *Verhufung* (the reorganization of highly variable Prussian Haken into Hufen, the latter of which more readily lent itself to a regularized system of administration).[11] Even Haken plots (and the nuclear village, for that matter) were a German convention, however. It is difficult to determine how closely they mapped onto Indigenous settlement patterns, which are themselves devilishly tricky to recover from the fragmentary evidence of both textual and archeological sources.[12] Whatever more precise forms it took, Christian colonization entailed the replacement of Indigenous patterns and the displacement of Indigenous people within a reorganized cadastral landscape, illustrating Patrick Wolfe's maxim that invasive colonial encounters extend beyond initial contact deep into the structures of settler society.[13]

Colonial surveys have long been recognized as points of convergence among ideologies and practices of land reform. Surveys take on special significance as rituals of possession in settler-colonial contexts, where exogenous newcomers are involved in the double task of not only

[11] Vercamer argues that neither process was as widespread as previously thought, but that they nonetheless embody the strategically centralizing nature of the Teutonic Order's colonization practices. Vercamer, 191–200.

[12] The so-called *moter*, for example, refers to a (rather theoretical) arrangement by which Prussian settlements (belonging variously to estates that could in fact be in conflict with one another) lay dispersed either as individual properties or as small property groups. Strongholds supposedly lay not at the center of the *Moter*, but at its forested edges. Reinhard Wenskus, "Beobachtungen eines Historikers zum Verhältnis von Burgwall, Heiligtum und Siedlung im Gebiet der Prußen," in *Ausgewählte Aufsätze zum frühen und preußischen Mittelalter: Festgabe zu seinem siebzigsten Geburtstag*, ed. Hans Patze (Sigmaringen: J. Thorbecke, 1986), 299–304. Cf. Aleksander Pluskowski, who has suggested that pre-conquest Prussian strongholds, especially in more densely populated regions like Sambia, served not just military functions, but also as centers of production, agricultural management, and trade. Pluskowski, *The Archaeology of the Prussian Crusade*, 51–62, esp. 59–62.

[13] Wolfe, *Settler Colonialism and the Transformation of Anthropology: The Politics and Poetics of an Ethnographic Event*, 163.

disavowing Indigenous sovereignty, but also reinventing themselves as the rightful inhabitants of newly acquired territory.[14] As one historian of South Africa has recently summarized, settler societies seek "to determine what, if any, 'native title' existed on the land before their arrival; by extinguishing, dismissing, or otherwise reorganizing it, they [lay] the foundations for the legitimacy of their own legal and spatial orders."[15] To conduct a large-scale survey is to collect information with a specific aim—the systematic reconfiguration of claimed territory in alignment with the colonizer's own structures for seeing and manipulating the world. It thus constitutes both an ostentatious expression of power and the creation of particular forms of knowledge, each oriented towards the reification of the colonizer's fundamental claim of territorial suzerainty within an officializing paradigm of administration. This capacity to decode foreign places and people—rendering them legible subjects to define, classify, and control in accordance with Western customs and forms of knowledge—underlies Bernard Cohn's identification of the survey as one type of "investigative modality," or the identification, collection, and codification of a body of knowledge in order to repurpose it as an instrument of rule.[16] British governors accordingly commissioned surveys in India to generate a massive amount of information about native landscapes and people. These "facts" were then reconstituted in a variety of written media, from

[14] On such "ceremonies of possession" in the European conquest of the Americas, see Patricia Seed, *Ceremonies of Possession in Europe's Conquest of the New World, 1492-1640* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 1–16.

[15] Lindsay Frederick Braun, *Colonial Survey and Native Landscapes in Rural South Africa, 1850-1913: The Politics of Divided Space in the Cape and Transvaal* (Boston: Brill, 2014), 4. On land surveys within the broader scheme of European colonialism of the New World, see John C. Weaver, *The Great Land Rush and the Making of the Modern World, 1650-1900* (Kingston, ON: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003).

[16] Bernard S. Cohn, *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 3–5.

encyclopedias and gazetteers to the records and reports of state archives—the nerve centers of colonial rule.[17]

The objectives of surveying in medieval Prussia bear striking resemblances to these modern examples—not least, the fulfillment of the Christian narrative casting native landscapes as savage wildernesses destined to be conquered and transformed into new promised lands.[18] What is glaringly lacking, of course, is the production of maps. Why exactly cadastral maps were so rare in medieval Europe is still something of a puzzle. One theory holds that most medieval people's perceptions of space were essentially too localized to conceptualize and represent the environment using an abstract schema at a supra-local scale.[19] Others have claimed that there was simply little need for cartography in a pre-capitalist world where local traditions were sufficient to maintain long-standing boundaries, and competition for resources remained low enough that the drawing of a map to settle property disputes remained the exception rather than the rule.[20] Both explanations hinge on the assertion that it was not until the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries that states had acquired the territory, means, and incentive to force the myopic medieval gaze to adjust to a new way of seeing the world.[21] Only in the modern era, in other words, have states sufficiently

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[17] Cohn, 8–9.

[18] The European settlers of South Africa attributed particular significance to the undertaking of surveys as instruments in a transformation narrative. Braun, *Colonial Survey and Native Landscapes in Rural South Africa*, 19–20. Cf. F. A. Van Jaarsveld, *The Afrikaner's Interpretation of South African History* (Cape Town: Simondium Publishers, 1964), 1–33.

[19] See, for example, Mary Elizabeth Berry, *Japan in Print: Information and Nation in the Early Modern Period* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 54–103.

[20] Roger Kain and Elizabeth Baigent, *The Cadastral Map in the Service of the State: A History of Property Mapping* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 4–8.

[21] A notable synthesis of astronomy, navigation, and surveying European dedicates one short paragraph to the medieval land survey, sandwiched between ancient techniques and "the early influence of geometry" in the sixteenth century. J. A. Bennett, *The Divided Circle: A History of Instruments for Astronomy, Navigation, and Surveying* (Oxford: Phaidon, 1987), 39.

monopolized geographic knowledge and cartographic expertise as instruments of power.[22] Some medieval historians have countered that it is misleading to essentialize the utility of cadastral maps as a modern phenomenon, since medieval states (or, more precisely, the representatives acting in their employ) nonetheless manipulated space to facilitate the exercise of authority over people, places, and resources within its territory, even without producing pictorial maps.[23] In any case, although Prussia's colonizers produced records that served some of the same functions as cadastral and navigational maps, this is ultimately rather secondary to the main argument of this chapter. With or without modern maps, medieval colonizers manipulated the Baltic landscape in tellingly deliberate ways.

German historians of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, unperturbed by this cartographic absence, saw the seeds of modern state administration in the surveying practices of late medieval Prussia, where specialized techniques and personnel assumed a regularized and even professionalized form by 1400, well before they did in other German lands.[24] The earliest

[22] On land tenure practices and cadastral mapping as modern strategies for rendering state property "legible," see Scott, *Seeing like a State*, 35–45. On maps as tools of power, see J. B. Harley, "Maps, Knowledge, and Power," in *The Iconography of Landscape: Essays on the Symbolic Representation, Design, and Use of Past Environments*, ed. Denis Cosgrove and Stephen Daniels (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988); Valerie A. Kivelson, *Cartographies of Tsardom: The Land and Its Meanings in Seventeenth-Century Russia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006), 27. The Middle Ages are, of course, known for the production of sumptuous, symbolically rich world maps. David Woodward, "Medieval Mappaemundi," in *Cartography in Prehistoric, Ancient, and Medieval Europe and the Mediterranean*, ed. J.B. Harley and David Woodward (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 286–370.

[23] Daniel Lord Smail, *Imaginary Cartographies: Possession and Identity in Late Medieval Marseille* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000), 1–20.

[24] H. Roedder, "Zur Geschichte des Vermessungswesens Preußens, insbesondere Altpreußens, aus der ältesten Zeit bis in das 19. Jahrhundert," *Zeitschrift für Vermessungswesen* 36, nos. 28–35 (1907): 689–712, 721–45, 753–68, 785–801, 817–32, 849–65, 881–96, 913–27. Roedder's technically detailed study of the surveying profession in Prussia from the time of Teutonic Order through the nineteenth century remains, to my knowledge, the most thorough treatment of the subject. He himself was the Head Surveyor of Königsberg at the time the study was published. Cf. D.J. Price, "Medieval Land Surveying and Topographical Maps," *Geographical Journal* 121 (1955): 1–10. Price seems to have been unaware that more advanced surveying techniques may have been in use in medieval Prussia than elsewhere in medieval Europe.

references to what might be called professional surveyors relate primarily to the negotiation of "outer" boundaries shared with neighboring lords and to the construction of large-scale projects like defensive fortifications. Interior boundaries dividing towns, villages, and individual property-holders, in contrast, were the province not of specialized officials, but of local administrators. Formulaic language in the Handfesten often references the formal act of boundary-making in its first instance, when specially appointed Teutonic Brothers rode along the perimeters of a newly granted property alongside its beneficiary—a routine medieval practice that we will return to later in this chapter. Maintenance subsequently fell to local administrators (primarily Schulzen) or estate proprietors and, less formally, to local smallholders and unfree tenants. The set of regional administrative regulations (*Landesordnung*) established by Grandmaster Siegfried von Feuchtwangen (r. 1303-1311), for example, stipulated that village Schulzen were expected to perambulate their boundaries on horseback every year, seeing as they went that damaged boundary markers were mended or replaced—an arrangement entirely typical of land tenure elsewhere in medieval Europe.[25] Whereas the sensitive diplomatic nature of external boundaries afforded close attention from a variety of trained officials, therefore, internal boundaries largely remained a parochial matter, more or less outside the purview of central administrators.[26]

By 1400, however, an expanding cadre of specialized officials had come to assume more responsibility in the management of interior boundaries in addition to the more politically contentious outer borders. Some clues into the identity of members constituting this group come from the so-called *Marienburger Tresslerbuch*, a financial register that details thousands of cash

[25] Roedder, "Geschichte des Vermessungswesens," 723–24. Cf. Kain and Baigent, *Cadastral Map*, 5.

[26] As we have seen, scholarship on boundaries in medieval Prussia has largely reflected this preferential interest in the determination and adjustment of politically charged external boundaries, even after World War II. See especially Hans-Jürgen Karp, *Grenzen in Ostmitteleuropa während des Mittelalters; ein Beitrag zur Entstehungsgeschichte der Grenzlinie aus dem Grenzsaum* (Cologne: Böhlau, 1972), 3–64.

transactions in and out of the Order's central treasury at Marienburg between 1400 and 1407.[27] At least eleven such entries detail payments awarded for the provision of "measuring" services all across Prussia.[28] A few administrators or their subordinates are named as recipients, but several others are specifically called "surveyors" (*messer*, *lantmesser*). A certain Hannus von Thomaswalde, for example, was named at least twice, receiving three Marks on March 8, 1404 and five on April 11, 1407.[29] Besides the *Tresslerbuch*, the Handfesten themselves include records of dedicated surveyors, such as the Prussian Hans Ferdemen, who received four Haken from the bishop of Sambia for his service as a *terrimensor*.[30] And in the adjudication of one of the property disputes discussed in the next chapter, a man named "Tilo the Surveyor" was called as the first witness to testify on behalf of the village of Plausen.[31]

We should be more cautious in evaluating the systematization of surveying than H. Roedder, who enthusiastically claimed that a professional class of lay surveyors took shape by around 1400, employed and salaried by the Teutonic Order and its episcopal neighbors.[32] Nevertheless, it is clear even from scattered evidence that the array of people appointed to carry out surveys in an official capacity came to follow more precise and regular methods over the course of the fourteenth century, no longer just for the measurement of external political boundaries, but for internal property boundaries as well. This effort to oversee the performance of surveys more

[27] *Das Marienburger Tresslerbuch*, ed. Erich Joachim, facsimile of first edition (1896; repr., Bremerhaven: Otto Knieß, 1973).

[28] Roedder compiled a convenient list in "Geschichte des Vermessungswesens," 724-25. Joachim's 1896 edition of the text includes two rich indices to aid searching the dense text, but it is occasionally inaccurate or incomplete.

[29] *Tresslerbuch*, 301, 423.

[30] Roedder, "Geschichte des Vermessungswesens," 726.

[31] See **Table 1**, on p. 270 below.

[32] Roedder, "Geschichte des Vermessungswesens," 726.

closely thus attended a larger trend towards systematizing the procedures of colonization and centralizing the management of rural settlements.[33]

This attention to the management of internal property boundaries emerged from the ambitious project to survey all settled land in Prussia, which began in 1380 at the initiative of Grandmaster Winrich von Kniprode (r. 1351-1382). Like other famous medieval surveys from Charlemagne's capitularies to William the Conqueror's Domesday and on to the far-reaching inquests of later medieval monarchs, this so-called "great survey" (*große maße*) constituted a grand gesture of authority over conquered or contested territory, by which enterprising rulers sought to consolidate property claims *en masse* according to regularized legal paradigms favorable to central administration.[34] The power projected by large-scale surveys often proved, of course, more fictive than binding, or at least more ephemeral than their monumental written records asserted. As Carol Symes has persuasively argued about Domesday, this power did not only (or even principally) lie in the legal prescriptions of the document itself, the authority of which quickly eroded in the face of baronial contestations, but in the spectacle of its production—from the local performance of surveys by specially appointed agents to the mass butchery involved the procurement of parchment.[35]

Prussia's "great survey," like Domesday, entailed a considerable investment of dedicated personnel, technical expertise, and administrative resources, and resulted in a massive output of written records. Surveyors required specific tools and training suited to the task, while central

[33] Ralph Päsler has suggested that some land surveyors also acted as scouts and guides (leitsleute; see chapter six). *Sachliteratur*, 312, 334n5.

[34] Among the vast scholarship on Domesday, see especially Colin Flight, *The Survey of the Whole of England: Studies of the Documentation Resulting from the Survey Conducted in 1086* (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2006); Carol Symes, "Doing Things beside Domesday Book," *Speculum* 93 (2018): 1048–1101.

[35] Symes, "Doing Things beside Domesday Book," 1070–72, 1096–1101.

chanceries and smaller local offices alike were charged with the equally onerous responsibility of commuting the results of fieldwork to updated and reissued records of property tenure, which often proved inconsistent or altogether missing. A flurry of documentation ensued in what has been identified as an especially significant catalyst for the expansion of administrative machinery in Prussia. Once officials at the Commandery level had verified the terms of a property holder's Handfeste, they issued a new parchment deed to the tenant. With few exceptions, these original recipient copies have not survived.[36] In addition to the parchment document, however, chancery scribes also created two paper copies, intended for inclusion in compilations kept, respectively, at the local and central level.[37] The resulting *Handfestenbücher* (regional compilations from the time of Conrad von Jungingen [1393-1407] and beyond) and, later, *Amtsbücher* (leather-bound codices compiled in the sixteenth century at the behest of Prussia's Protestant dukes) thus grew quickly into the distinctively fat registers that occupy the shelves of modern archives, prompting their compilers to develop schemas of varying sophistication to organize the contents.[38] At the most basic level, most registers grouped acts by region, while some went further, including lists of villages and property-holders for each respective administrative district (GStA PK, XX. HA OF

[36] Martin Armgart, *Die Handfesten des preußischen Oberlandes bis 1410 und ihre Aussteller: diplomatische und prosopographische Untersuchungen zur Kanzleigeschichte des Deutschen Ordens in Preußen* (Cologne: Böhlau, 1995), 47–51.

[37] Standalone copies do exist independently of such compilations. Most of these are post-medieval, kept in a slew of scripts dating anywhere between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries, but some are datable to the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

[38] Bernhart Jähnig, "Die Bestände des historischen Staatsarchivs Königsberg als Quelle zur Bevölkerungs- und Siedlungsgeschichte des Preußenlandes," in *Aus der Arbeit des Geheimen Staatsarchivs Preußischer Kulturbesitz*, ed. Jürgen Kloosterhuis (Berlin: Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preußischer Kulturbesitz, 1996), 278–79. *Handfesten*- and *Amtsbücher* are primarily held in the GStA PK's *Ordensfolianten* (OF) collection. On the Handfesten in this collection in general, see Armgart, *Die Handfesten des preußischen Oberlandes*, 53–55.

107, for example).[39] Aside from minor differences in form and content (such as dating formulas and certain types of collectable dues), the episcopal chanceries of Sambia, Pomesania, Kulm, and even the more independent Warmia followed the same principals, procedures, and diplomatic formulas as the Order in the production of Handfesten and in the compilation of registers.[40] Given the overlap between Teutonic and episcopal bureaucracies (which, excepting Warmia, were largely staffed by Teutonic priests), I will consider the Handfesten issued across Prussia by both institutions together.

The Handfesten as they survive today largely owe their existence to the fourteenth-century surveys. They collectively constitute the principal source base for the region's rural history, encompassing most scraps of information about the survey.[41] Although they are not pictorial maps,

[39] Vercamer has identified OF 107 as a particularly well-suited register for the analysis of land distribution patterns in Sambia. Vercamer, *Komturei Königsberg*, 104–5.

[40] On the organization of the episcopal chancery in Sambia, see Heinz Schlegelberger, "Studien über die Verwaltungsorganisation des Bistums Samland im Mittelalter," in *Die Domkapitel des Deutschen Ordens in Preußen und Livland*, ed. Radosław Biskup, Mario Glauert, and Radosław Biskup (1922; repr., Münster: Aschendorff, 2004), 119–21; Erich Weise, "Das Urkundenwesen der Bischöfe von Samland," *Altpreußische Monatsschrift* 59 (1923): 1–48, 157–209.

[41] Jähnig, "Bestände des historischen Staatsarchivs," 278–81; Wenskus, "Preußen als Territorialstaat," 370–71.

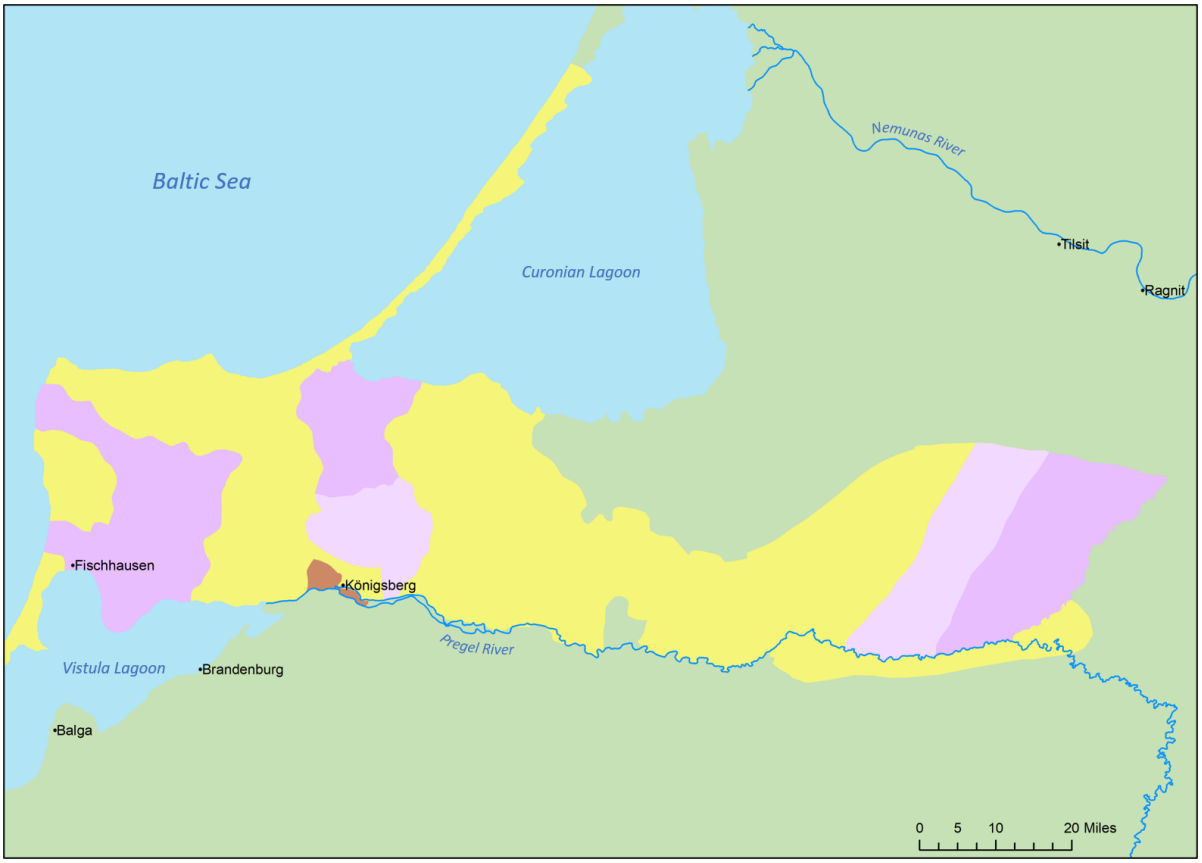

Figure 7. Map of the Sambian peninsula in the fourteenth century. Areas shaded purple represent territory under the lordship of the Sambian bishop (dark purple) and cathedral chapter (light purple). All other territory lay within the jurisdiction of the Teutonic Order.

moreover, the Handfesten amount to what geographer Matthew Edney has termed a "geographical archive": a body of official knowledge available to facilitate any number of "territorial imperatives" to enrich or otherwise benefit the state.[42] The majority of this chapter will draw on the Handfesten from the northeastern region of Sambia, a sheltered peninsula close to the Lithuanian frontier whose small area belies the topographic and demographic variety (**Figure 7**). The Teutonic and episcopal competencies that shared its territory both conducted a raft of surveys that informed the renegotiation and reissue of thousands of property grants in the fourteenth

[42] Matthew H. Edney, *Mapping an Empire: The Geographical Construction of British India, 1765-1843* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 39–41.

century. These make up one of the more extensive regional collections to survive from medieval Prussia.[43]

Before turning to an analysis of the Handfesten in earnest, however, we will focus first on another important text to emerge from the land reform fervor of the late fourteenth century: a handbook of surveying techniques called the *Geometria Culmensis*. The Order commissioned this work as a theoretical manual for surveyors whose work as officially appointed boundary-makers underlay the terms outlined in each Handfeste.[44] The *Geometria* asserts that the land survey, as a fundamental tool in the realization of a prosperous and peaceful Christian order in Prussia, must be meticulously undertaken according to precise mathematical principles. By articulating this link between administrative practice and the historical narratives explored in the previous chapter, the *Geometria* serves as a starting point for linking the epistemological and material structures of colonialism in Teutonic Prussia.[45]

III. The Dimensions of Prosperity

The *Geometria Culmensis* was commissioned during the tenure of Grandmaster Conrad von Jungingen, who energetically continued to support the surveying project spearheaded by Winrich von Kniprode over a decade earlier. It is to Conrad, "great prince and illustrious lord of all the regions of Prussia," that the anonymous author dedicated his work, praising him as the arbiter of

[43] Most of these are held compactly in a small number of registers: five Teutonic (GStA PK, XX. HA OF 105, 107, 111, 112, 113), and two episcopal (GStA PK, XX. HA OF 103, 104). Altogether, these seven registers comprise approximately 1,630 Handfesten.

[44] Hans Mendthal, ed., *Geometria Culmensis: Ein agronomischer Tractat aus der Zeit des Hochmeisters Conrad von Jungingen (1393-1407)* (Leipzig: Duncker & Humblot, 1886).

[45] Albeit within more provincial frameworks, both Vercamer and Thielen have argued that the "great survey" was not only a product of wider administrative reform, but also an instrument in the pursuit of a broader colonial agenda. Vercamer, *Komturei Königsberg*, 185–89; Thielen, "Landesplanung," 49.

peace against twin dangers: the designs of pagan enemies threatening to overrun Prussia from the outside, and the persistence of territorial disputes threatening to dismantle its foundations from within.[46] Although the *Geometria* was originally composed in Latin in the mid-1390s, it was quickly translated into vernacular German sometime at the beginning of the fifteenth century. Observing that the older of two extant manuscripts contained both the Latin and German texts copied by the same hand, Hans Mendthal reasoned in the introduction to his edition that the German version closely followed the original composition.[47] The text thus had something of a dual nature. On the one hand, it was a learned Latin clerical repository of mathematical knowledge firmly rooted in the academic world by way of its principal source, Dominicus Parisiensis' *Practica Geometria*.[48] On the other, it was commissioned as a practical manual to teach techniques and principals directly applicable to the survey work of laymen in the field. Altogether, it poses a quiet challenge to the widely held supposition that medieval Europeans lacked the mathematical sophistication required for the precise measurement of land.[49]

Contradiction between pure scholastic knowledge and the unlearned minds of its intended audience imparts a subtle tension into the text, which has invited scholarly disappointment given its preference for mathematical theory over practical application. Mendthal himself complained that it "offers nothing new; we learn nothing more about how a survey was carried out or about

[46] Geometria Culmensis. Ein agronomischer Tractat aus der Zeit des Hochmeisters Conrad von Jungingen (1393-1407), ed. Hans Mendthal (Leipzig: Duncker & Humblot, 1886), 12-13.

[47] *Geometria Culmensis*, 7-10. The *Geometria*'s MHG translation is accepted as the oldest known German text of its kind. For more on the text's transmission, see Menso Folkerts, "Geometria Culmensis," in *Die deutsche Literatur des Mittelalters: Verfasserlexikon*, ed. Burghart Wachinger et al., 2nd ed., vol. 2 (New York: De Gruyter, 2004), 1194–95.

[48] *Geometria Culmensis*, 6; Helm and Ziesemer, *Die Literatur des Deutschen Ritterordens*, 138–39. The *Geometria*'s composer occasionally extracted selections directly from his source text, especially in moments of particular technical specificity, such as the definition of the *kathetus*, or altitude, of a triangle (p. 25).

[49] Cf. Kain and Baigent, *Cadastral Map*, 6; Kivelson, *Cartographies of Tsardom*, 13–17.

the officials thus entrusted, among whom the distinction is made between *mensores litterati* or *layci* only in the most general sense."[50] To be sure, the *Geometria* moves abruptly from brief introductory reflections to the technical discussion of angles, square roots, and methods for areal calculations, which it organizes into five parts: the area of triangles (1) by usual and (2) other means; (3) the area of quadrilaterals; (4) of polygons; and (5) of circles and other round shapes. Accompanying diagrams illustrate important or complicated principles, but substantive descriptions of the survey in practice are virtually absent.[51]

To assume the author's interests lay exclusively in the realm of pure math at the expense of its application is, however, premature. References to the problems of application occasionally punctuate the steady crawl through definitions and theorems, laced with subtle criticism of the error-prone laymen employed in the precise art of surveying. The author observes, for example, that many such surveyors calculate the total area of all triangles using a method applicable only to right triangles (half the product of the two shorter sides), failing to understand that different types of triangles require different, more involved approaches. "I advise whole-heartedly," he warns, "that no laymen act as a surveyor unless he has sure familiarity with the skills of calculation, instrument use, straight conveyance of the *corda*, and calculation of the *kathetum* [the altitudinal measurement required to calculate the area of non-right triangles correctly]."[52] The editorialization is typical of the author's posture throughout the work. To ensure quality results, surveyors must

[50] *Geometria Culmensis*, 4.

[51] On the diagrams' split character as representations of abstract geometric principles and illustrations of concrete metric practice, see Christina Lechtermann, "Die geometrischen Diagramme der 'Geometria Culmensis,'" *Das Mittelalter* 22, no. 2 (2017): 314–31. That most diagrams were not drawn to scale, Lechtermann argues, suggests a more concrete, practical purpose for their conclusion than a purely mathematical one.

[52] *Geometria Culmensis*, 31-32: "Consula bona fide, quod nullus laycus sit mensor, nisi habeat certam et bonam noticiam artis numeratorie, instrumentum applicandi, cordam trahendi in directum et kathetum inveniendi."

not only be equipped with precise tools—they must also be thoroughly versed in the fundamental principles of geometry. Another example related to triangles illustrates how such knowledge was not just a guard against basic errors, but was essential for improvising solutions to complex problems encountered in the field where property tracts do not resemble the clearly drawn diagrams of the handbook. When acquiring measurements for a scalene obtuse triangle, the *Geometria* describes a technique involving the use of a physical landmark to visualize the largest angle. Given a flat, ideally treeless space, the savvy surveyor can use this landmark to identify the point at which the *kathetum* dissects the side opposite the angle, essentially creating two readily measurable right triangles. And even if this method cannot be used for one reason or another, the *Geometria* goes on to describe another, more complicated workaround that avoids the need of finding the *kathetum* altogether.[53] Other examples are little more concrete than these. There are no recommendations for the assembly of a team, step-by-step instructions for the proper use of particular instruments, or other suggestions for best practice. The text's theoretical bent nevertheless responds to a distinct lack of technical expertise among an increasingly specialized cadre of officials. If it is laymen who are to carry out operations of such mathematical finesse, we can almost hear the *Geometria*'s author grumble, they must be as versed as clerics in the relevant mathematical principles.

Even before principles, the *Geometria* devotes several pages to a thorough appraisal of the units for measuring and recording lengths and areas. The use of a distinctive set of units among the Teutonic Order and its neighboring bishoprics in Prussia made the inclusion of such a section especially important in the growing body of regional technical literature.[54] The production of an

[53] Geometria Culmensis, 27-29.

[54] As Päsler has noted. Sachliteratur, 350.

accurate vernacular translation makes the section all the more useful as a bridge between two sets of specialized vocabulary. The extensive list of length units ranges from finger-widths to feet to miles, and the two principal areal units are defined as the *iugum/morgen* (an area of three square cord-lengths) and the *mansum*/Hufe (thirty *iugera/morgen*).[55] *Perticae/messeruten* and *cordae/seyle* are specially noted as "well-known quantities by which we measure our fields in Prussia," although smaller Prussian Haken are left conspicuously unmentioned.[56] A singsong Latin verse concludes the summation:

> Four fingers make a palm, four palms a foot;
> Five feet make a pace, one hundred paces
> And twenty-five a furlong; if you should give a
> mile,
> Eight furlongs it will make; double that, a league.[57]

Where the *Geometria* revels in the equivalencies among various units, it shows somewhat less interest in the design or use of tools calibrated accordingly. The author did, however, expect that surveyors be properly equipped, for example explaining how to use a "specially suited instrument" (*per instrumentum ad hoc aptum*) to calculate triangular and quadrilateral areas "skillfully and geometrically" (*artificiose et geometrice*).[58] Although the explanation reveals little about the tool or even its method of use, it does lend an insight into the character of the surveyors themselves. Elsewhere in the text, the *Geometria*'s author asserts an epistemological distinction between the "lay surveyor" (*mensor laycus*) and the "learned geometer" (*geometra litteratus*).

[55] Geometria Culmensis, 21-22.

[56] Geometria Culmensis, 21: "Nota, quod pertica et corda cum suis partibus sunt communes famose et note quantitates, quibus in Prusia agros mensuramus."

[57] Geometria Culmensis, 21: "Est quater in palma digitus, quater in pede palma, / Quinque pedes passum faciunt, passus quoque centum / Vigintiquinque stadium, si des miliare / octo facit stadia, duplicatum dat tibi leucam."

[58] *Geometria Culmensis*, 34-35.

Laymen, he explains, are manual workers by nature. They laboriously take their measurements by walking back and forth through the fields with their cords and rods. Geometers, conversely, can readily determine the same measurements "solely through the consideration of lines and the arrangement of angles," provided they have the proper tools and training. More literally, each "knows" (*scit…sciat*) by different means.[59] At first glance, the aside seems to be a typically self-satisfied celebration of clerical superiority—the learned cleric can comfortably acquire the same information for which the layman is obliged to trudge through the dirt. Such a distinction could be taken to reflect a contemporary division of labor in which laymen performed manual work in the field on behalf of conventual superiors who could use their measurements for more involved calculations.[60] The *Geometria*'s author defies the expectation, however, taking the opportunity instead to advise that "the lay surveyor ought to be a practitioner of geometry; no one should be a surveyor—neither cleric nor layman—unless he already knows how to compute using both whole numbers and fractions."[61]

Rather than reifying a division of labor between the learned and the unlearned, the *Geometria* advocates the opposite. It asserts that accurate surveying depends on manual measurements and abstract calculations in tandem. The author complains in the prologue, for example, that "it often happens that laymen and surveyors unskilled in both calculation and geometry are often put in charge of the measurement of farmland." Other times, he repeats that an

[59] *Geometria Culmensis*, 46-47: "laycus scit cum cordis et perticis eundo et discurrendo in latera campi, geometra sciat stando ex sola liniarum consideracione et protraccione nec non angulorum disposicione, que mensor laycus perquirit campum transcurrendo."

[60] Päsler has interpreted the passage in this way, adding that what limited sources exist on the subject suggest that surveying was a form of feudal service. "Ein unbekannt gebliebenes Fragment der 'Geometria Culmensis,'" *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum und Literatur* 128 (1999): 432.

[61] *Geometria Culmensis*, 46-47: "ideo laycus mensor debet esse minister geometre. Consulo quod nullus sit mensor tam clericus quam laycus, nisi prius in algarissmo tam de integris quam minuciis sciat computare."

understanding of principles allows for accurate calculations, even when instruments are insufficient, whereas ignorance will lead to "great error."[62] Geometric principles underlie the methods of fieldwork and the correct use of tools, while features of the landscape itself can serve as invaluable points of reference in the collection of data, as the above example involving the obtuse scalene triangle demonstrates. Abstract learning and practical expertise reinforce one another as the foundation of good practice in a profession that ultimately blurs the distinction between the lay and clerical spheres.

This intersection of specialties in surveying procedure served the practical purpose of refining and regularizing a sector of administration that was invested with particular significance at the time of the *Geometria*'s composition. As noted earlier, the author expresses his wish from the outset that his work will stem the divisiveness that has arisen between Prussia's lords and inhabitants through disputes over land rights, which he attributes to the errors of ignorant surveyors. Conflict over the division of territory is not just an earthly misfortune, moreover, but a disturbance of cosmic harmony. The *Geometria* begins with a reflection on God's division of the world among lords—kings, princes, dukes, and so on—with the intent that their respective territories should be "ruled deliberately and governed in the interest of human well-being."[63] What at first appears to be a rhetorical pedestal upon which to place the work's patron (Conrad is said to be an upright prince whose mild temperament and outstanding benevolence make him a shining example of such governance) deepens into a meditation on the purpose of the work itself. Upright

[62] The ability to reckon square roots, for example—which is presented as the key to determining the area of isosceles triangles—"is very difficult for laymen who have not learned Arabic notation and do not know how to calculate well" (*hoc est valde difficile apud laycos, qui algarismum non noverunt, nec sciunt bene calculare*). *Geometria Culmensis*, 41. The "great error" (*magnus error*) quoted here refers to the admonition of surveyors unable to calculate the *kathetum* (ibid., 31); cf. the discussion of triangular areas above, p. 208.

[63] *Geometria Culmensis*, 12: "consulte regi…ac salubri regimine gubernari."

conduct on earth is rewarded in heaven—a maxim that the author illustrates by adapting a passage from Christ's Sermon on the Plain "to give a good measure…[because] the same measure with which you will be measured in the temporal life shall be returned to you in the eternal life."[64] Recasting the concept of personal moral "measurement" within the concrete realm of administration, the author praises Conrad for his vigilant stewardship of the territory in his care, especially regarding the measurement of land.[65] Nor was the linguistic connection between straight lines and upright rule lost on the *Geometria*'s author: to rule in the image of God is to rule "straight."[66] Seeing how "disputes continue to arise among the officials, knights, vassals, and other people" because of lay surveyors unversed in arithmetic and geometry, the Grandmaster wisely recognized the need for the work at hand.[67] By focusing on the provision of a remedy for the ignorance of the surveyors, the author thus manages to point out a moral and practical deficit of regional administration while still praising his vigilant patron's recognition of the need for change. The *Geometria*, in other words, is a text that not only advocates reform, but also constitutes an instruction manual for carrying it out.

The final section of the preface further develops the association between good governance, spiritual uprightness, and regional survey practices by introducing a more specific historical

[64] *Geometria Culmensis*, 14: "date mensuram bonam, refertam, coagitatam ac supereffluentem, eadem quippe mensura, qua mensi fueritis scilicet temporali, remecietur vobis in vita eterna." Cf. Lc 6:38: "date et dabitur vobis, mensuram bonam confersam et coagitatam et supereffluentem dabunt in sinum vestrum, eadem quippe mensura qua mensi fueritis remetietur vobis."

[65] *Geometria Culmensis*, 14-15: "cumque magnificus princeps…sollicita cura circa negocia terre sue vigilancius operam adhiberet et presertim circa mensuram agrorum."

[66] E.g., *Geometria Culmensis*, 14: "ordinata itaque recte principia sub timore dei et vehiculo *directe* iusticie prosperis solent gaudere successibus et exitus sortiri perfelices, aditus quidem aperitur ad graciam, cum a via *rectitudinis* non erratur, et qui fundamento veritatis innititur, procedit viriliter regnoque securus" (emphasis added).

[67] *Geometria Culmensis*, 15: "non pauce inter preceptores, milites, vasallos ac ceteros popullares concertaciones et contraversiae oriuntur sepius et exurgunt."

element. Just as the work began with a general overview of the whole world's division into territories, it concludes with a gesture to God's partition of the Holy Land for the newly arrived Israelites:

> When, therefore, God almighty led the Israelites into the Promised Land after they had crossed the Red Sea and dwelt in the desert, he conferred that Promised Land on them, subdivided by boundaries [*terminis et graniciis*] in order to distinguish the possessions of each individual tribe, so that they would not get mixed up with one another, and so that there would be no disorder in the allocation of their farmland; but so that instead, each tribe, satisfied within its own limits [*metis*], could carry out their cultivation individually.[68]

Just so, it follows, has Prussia been neatly divided into territories, districts, and individual properties. By alluding to the special relationship between Prussia and the biblical Promised Land, the author of the *Geometria* places the survey at the center of a divinely initiated historical process, elevating geometric precision from a mathematical trivium to a spiritual and administrative imperative.[69] And it is the surveyors, furthermore, who principally bear the burden of maintaining regional concord in their unique capacity as liaisons between the worlds of settlement and administration, just as their work must bridge the spheres of clerical learning and temporal application.

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[68] *Geometria Culmensis*, 16: "cum igitur omnipotens deus populum Israeliticum per mare rubrum transvectum et post deserti incolatum ad terram promissam induxisset, eandem promissionis terram sub distinctis terminis et graniciis singulis tribubus tradidit divisim possidendam, ne tribuum permixtio fieret confusioque agrorum, sed quelibet suis contenta tribus metis agriculturam singuli singulariter exercerunt." It is striking here how the author rendered "boundaries" both with a common Latin term (*terminus*) and with the regionally prevalent Slavic term (*granicia*). For further etymological discussion of the term *granicia*, see pp. 239-42 below.

[69] Scholars of the castle-convents' architectural designs have similarly noted that "sacral architecture" comprised not only decorative elements like sculptural motifs, but also the geometric precision with which the structures were laid out. See, for example, Kazimierz Pospieszny, "Die Architektur des Deutschordenshauses in Preußen als Ausdruck- und Herstellungsmittel der Ordensmission und Herrscherpolitik," in *Die Architektur des Deutschordenshauses in Preußen als Ausdruck- und Herstellungsmittel der Ordensmission und Herrscherpolitik*, ed. Roman Czaja and Jürgen Sarnowsky (Toruń: Uniwersytet Mikołaja Kopernika, 2005), 227–41.

IV. Boundary Descriptions in the *Handfesten*

The recognition that surveys and surveyors filled roles of fundamental importance to regional governance offers a valuable insight into the administrative culture of the Teutonic Order at the height of its power in the Baltic. Like the chroniclers Peter of Dusburg and Nicolaus von Jeroschin, the tract framed the purpose of its subject matter within a deliberately crafted institutional mythology that cast Prussia as a new Promised Land and colonization as the mimetic fulfillment of a divine plan. But also like the earlier chronicle tradition, the question of its larger impact beyond clerical ideologues remains largely open-ended. The *Geometria*'s survival in only two complete manuscripts has prompted the general consensus that its circulation was, at best, limited. Extensive marginal notation in both manuscripts does, however, suggest that the text remained relevant into the sixteenth century; and Ralf Päsler's identification of a previously unidentified parchment fragment as the relic of an otherwise lost third manuscript also indicates a somewhat wider circle than once thought.[70] Still, it is difficult to gauge how successfully the *Geometria*, as a prescriptive text, achieved its aim of reforming contemporary surveying practices according to regularized guidelines. Although texts like the *Geometria* directly offer so little substantive detail about the operation of surveys, we can look instead to the extensive trail of records they left in their wake. Deposited into colonial archives as tangible witnesses to the individual acts of partition taking place across Prussia, the Handfesten collectively offer the best sense of what contemporary surveys did and how they changed over the course of the region's settlement. It is to these records that we now turn.

[70] Comprising just twenty-five lines of German on two folios and dating to around 1400, the segment was once held in the former Thorner Ratsbibliothek. Päsler, "Ein unbekannt gebliebenes Fragment der 'Geometria Culmensis'."

The Handfesten themselves are highly formulaic documents that generally follow the template employed in private charters across Europe for over five hundred years.[71] Its diplomatic components are instantly recognizable: a brief *protocol* (invocation, address, and salutation), *corpus* (a *narratio*—rarely preceded by an *arenga*—and a variably arranged list of clauses), and *eschatocol* (the *subscriptio* of principal, witnesses, and attendant officials as well as the date of issue).[72] Some clauses appear with more or less frequency and specificity than others, which lends considerable variety to an otherwise formulaic source base. For example, the stipulation that a beneficiary is obligated to contribute, when called, to all future military campaigns and construction projects appears in virtually every Handfeste issued to a free property holder. Other common, though not universal, clauses include the condition that legal altercations with native Prussians be brought for resolution to a district administrator (Commander, Advocate, bishop, episcopal chapter, and so on) or his court; the qualification of where and with what types of equipment the recipient is licensed to fish; and the proviso that adjustments will be made should a later survey find more or less area in the property limits than initially accounted for.[73] As these selected examples demonstrate, the type of property granted (most commonly parcels of land, but also entire settlements, or economic structures like taverns and mills) and, where applicable, the

[71] For a detailed overview of the diplomatic structure of the Handfesten, see Armgart, *Die Handfesten des preußischen Oberlandes*, 71–117.

[72] On the matter of dating specifically, note Erich Weise's observation that the date on which the act was issued (*datum*) occasionally differs from the date on which it was put into effect (*actum*). In some cases, this meant that the document went into effect under a new official who had taken over after the original donor had died or left office. See Erich Weise, "Actum und datum in Ordenshandfesten," *Preußenland* 2 (1964): 72–74.

[73] Examples of Handfesten with clauses on jurisdiction of disputes with Prussians include: GStA PK, XX. HA OBA 287, 343, 465; on fishing rights: GStA PK, XX. HA OBA 360, 417, 864; and on subjectivity to the adjustment of property area: GStA PK, XX. HA OBA 331, 386, 392.

nature of its topography (woodland, arable, pasture, fishing grounds) shaped each record's individual contents.

One Handfeste issued to a certain Luprecht in August of 1328 serves as an example of the structure and components of a typical record, and illustrates the insights that these documents offer into the study of land partition as a form and site of colonial encounter.[74] Luprecht's Handfeste constitutes one of approximately 420 records in a register of deeds issued by the Teutonic Order to free-status beneficiaries in the Sambian peninsula. It begins with a typical salutation to all present and future viewers in the voice of its donor, Grandmaster Werner von Orseln, and continues with a summary of its legal background. Luprecht is not the first recipient of this property, it explains, but his father Gedete, who originally received it "in the time of Meinhard von Querfurt," thirty to forty years prior.[75] We will return shortly to the illuminating circumstances of this initial donation to Gedete, but it is, in any case, in token recognition of his family's continuous friendship and service to the Brothers that the Grandmaster expresses his agreement to honor Luprecht's request that the property's terms of possession be reassessed and reconfirmed. Thus, again addressing "those future and present," he formally gifts Luprecht the property "in the district [*territorio*] of Wargen, near the village of Medeniken, just as Brother Hugo of beloved memory, former Advocate of Sambia, designated it."

The next major segment of the record outlines the specific terms and conditions governing possession of the estate. It starts with a detailed description of the boundaries, within which the

[74] GStA PK, XX. HA OF 107, fols. 139r-140r (1328).

[75] Meinhard von Querfurt served as Master of Prussia from 1288 to 1298, shortly before the Order's High Officials permanently relocated to Marienburg. A summary of the original grant, based on the content of Luprecht's 1328 grant, appears as document 704 in *Preußisches Urkundenbuch* 1, ed. Rudolf Phillippi and Carl Peter Wölky (Königsberg: Hartungsche Verlagsbruderei, 1882), p. 440. The editors mistakenly dated Luprecht's grant to 1338 (the scribe originally wrote 1338, but a line underneath the third *x* seems to have indicated that this was an error). Phillippi and Wölky also

Figure 8. Map of Luprecht's estates at Medeniken and Metkaym, in the *Kammerämter* of Wargen and Caymen.

beneficiary is granted usufruct of all "fields as well as pastures, streams, and woodlands." Perhaps most importantly, the Handfeste forbids that Luprecht or his heirs be coerced into any "special service" (*speciale servicium*)—a restatement of their coveted free status. A brief summary follows regarding two relevant property transactions in which Luprecht was also evidently involved. First, he would receive an open field of three Haken in the region of Medeniken in exchange for a plot of the same area in the field called Slakalauken, which he and his father had possessed. Second, the Brothers also granted him four Haken of farmland that they had shown him in the field called Metkaym, which the Order had recently acquired in an exchange with the bishop of Sambia (see **Figure 8**).[76] Although Luprecht's Handfeste offers no finer detail about this particular transaction,

[76] This seems to relate to a complaint levied by the bishop against the Order in 1321 for land and fiefs forcefully and unjustly held, including the land of Sabenow listed here, which evidently had coveted access to amber. It is an instructive example of the tensions that often strained the relationships between bishoprics and the Order, which could erupt in disputes over property. On relations between the Sambian bishop and the Order, see Vercamer, *Komturei*

it anticipates the focus of the next chapter, hinting at how the quaking fault lines of possession along Prussia's internal borders continuously remade local environments, shuffling patterns of daily life for property holders like Luprecht and, perhaps even more pressingly, for the peasants dwelling and laboring on their estates.

The remainder of the document delineates more technical information about Luprecht's rights and obligations as a property holder. Most relevant to the land itself, the donor formally exempts the beneficiary and his successors from the payment of tithes and the performance of *Scharwerk* (or, here, the *iug*[*um*] *rusticalium operum seu laborum*), obligating them instead to the standard provision of service in military expeditions and contributions to construction projects "whenever they should be requested by our Brothers." One of the Handfeste's most intriguing segments—the rights of the property holder to oversee jurisdiction on his estate—is also its most cryptic. It not only grants Luprecht and his heirs the authority to adjudicate "both the major and the minor offenses…of the peasants [*rusticorum*] they have settled [*locaverint*] on the farms of the aforesaid property." This is a common privilege conferred to local property holders, but the document also specifies that they may adjudicate these matters "according to the law and custom of the ancient *witinge*." By the end of the fourteenth century, *witing* designated a certain Indigenous service class associated with the convent-castles; before Christian conquest, it seems to have originally conferred legal and perhaps spiritual authority.[77] This nesting of pre-Christian

Königsberg, 116–23. On the region's rich amber resources and its trade, see ibid., 31–34; Audronė Bliujienė, *Northern Gold: Amber in Lithuania (c. 100 to c. 1200)* (Boston: Brill, 2011), 5–13.

It is also worth noting that Mettkaym is about thirty-fives miles northeast of Medeniken, which says something of the resources and personnel Luprecht (and Gedete before him) must have commanded in the management of these estates.

[77] Johannes Voigt in fact cited Luprecht's Handfeste in his monumental history of Prussia to illustrate major and minor jurisdiction as one common element of so-called "Witingsrecht." Johannes Voigt, *Geschichte Preußens: von den ältesten Zeiten bis zum Untergange der Herrschaft des Deutschen Ordens*, vol. 3 (Königsberg: Gebrüder Bornträger, 1827), 431n1.

customs within the charter of a crusading order hints enticingly at the complex social and legal structures of colonial Prussia. But it is, in any case, with eminently familiar formulas that the record closes, listing nine witnesses (all Teutonic Brothers) and giving the date of issue as the Assumption of the Virgin (August 15), 1328.

We can gain a clearer sense of how the Handfesten illuminate the processes of land partition that prescriptive texts like the *Geometria* largely disregarded by examining the description of Luprecht's property boundaries in more detail. Every Handfeste contains a clause pertaining to the boundaries of the property principally concerned.[78] Most of the time, these clauses amount to cursory formulas stating that the named property is situated within certain boundaries that agents of the donor have shown the beneficiary. One in about ten records, however, expands on this formula, including a description (in more or less detail) of these boundaries.[79] Luprecht's Handfeste offers a typical example of a descriptive boundary clause, even if it is something of an exception for containing one at all:

Prima vero granicies de strata publica per villam Medeniken transeundo versus Konigsberg addextris usque ad quendam palum in quodam prato defixum et circumfossum	The first *granicia* [proceeds] from the public road, passing through the town of Medeniken towards Königsberg on the right-hand side, up to a certain post placed and surrounded with a ditch in a certain meadow.
postea per transversum declinando usque ad campum plebani de wargen per alium similiter palum de quercu bene lapidibus circumvolutum	Thereafter moving downwards towards the field belonging to the parish priest of Wargen, by another post of oak likewise carefully surrounded with stones.

[78] Properties that did not primarily comprise land, like mills and taverns, stand as something of an exception, although even these usually include some amount of appurtenant land.

[79] I am unsure of the reason for this low percentage, but a likely explanation is that only boundary disputes like those discussed in this chapter prompted officials to record descriptive clauses, as Hanna Vollrath has argued in an earlier medieval context. Hanna Vollrath, "Rechtstexte in der oralen Rechtskultur des früheren Mittelalters," *Historische Zeitschrift* 20 (1995): 329–30.

Item a predicto palo ambulando usque ad viam molendarem	Then walking from the aforesaid post up to the mill road.
Item in eodem latere pergendo usque ad piscinam molendini super nominati	Then continuing all the way along that same side up to the pond of the aforementioned mill.
insuper a quibus pascuis ville Medeniken procedendo quendam viam nomine Skerpincz per silvam nomine Algasis transeundo usque ad aquam molendarem superius memoratam	Thereupon proceeding by the pastures of the town of Medenikin along a certain road called Skerpnicz, passing through a wood called Algasis up to the millpond mentioned above.
postea aquam iam tactam descendo usque ad piscinam molendini sepedicti.	Thereafter descending, now along the water, to the pond of the oft-mentioned mill.

Much about this boundary description is not only typical of the Handfesten, but will also look familiar to a broad array of scholars who have studied charters in any number of medieval contexts, from royal diplomas of the eighth century to private charters of the fifteenth. Discussion of such descriptions as subjects of study in themselves has generally focused on two related themes: the intersection of vernacular orality, diplomatic formula, and written documentation, on the one hand; and on the other, the deep-rootedness of formalized and authoritative legal practices in local contexts far removed from royal courts and chanceries.[80] Observing patterns in the charters of select Benedictine monasteries, Ellen Arnold has proposed a variation at the intersection of these themes, differentiating between boundary clause definitions for internal audiences (defined by local place names and topographic features) and for external audiences (defined by more legible

[80] On vernacular orality, see especially Hanna Vollrath, esp. 325-34; Patrick Geary, "Land, Language and Memory in Europe 700-1100," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 9 (1999): 169–84; M. T. Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record: England, 1066-1307*, 3rd ed. (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 86–87, 254–55, 272–78. On the codependency between local communities and state officials in the exercise of rural property law, see Tom Johnson, *Law in Common: Legal Cultures in Late-Medieval England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 153–83; Ian Forrest, *Trustworthy Men: How Inequality and Faith Made the Medieval Church* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018), 285–306.

"standard" measurements and by other properties).[81] Once boundary lines had been long established in local memory, she argues, property descriptions became less topographically specific and more sensitive to the constant shifts in possession effected by increasingly common alterations and donations. This trend continued until two centuries of disputes had so altered the landscape that topographic descriptions resurfaced in order to render its divisions legible again.

The practice of perambulation, by which a designated party walked or rode around the perimeters of a property to formalize and reaffirm its boundaries (and to perform routine maintenance on physical markers like stones), has invited particular attention as local sites for the continuous inscription of boundaries into law, memory, and the landscape itself. Vividly distinctive descriptions in insular sources have lent perambulation rituals special significance within English historiography, as has the appearance of notably rich boundary descriptions in Anglo-Saxon charters.[82] Annual perambulation rituals held a place of importance in the liturgical calendar for their association with Ascension week both in England and on the continent since at

[81] Arnold, *Negotiating the Landscape*, 86–93.

[82] Robert Bartlett has observed that boundary-making practices constituted one element in the importation of Western patterns to areas of settlement in Europe's peripheries in *The Making of Europe*, 139–41. Scholarship on boundaries in the Baltic, however, has typically focused on political borders, especially those with Poland. Two classic descriptions of beating the bounds are George Caspar Homans, *English Villagers of the Thirteenth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1941), 368; Ronald Hutton, *The Rise and Fall of Merry England: The Ritual Year 1400-1700* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 34–36, 52. More recently, see Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England: c. 1400 - c. 1580*, 2nd ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005), 136–39; Alexandra Walsham, *The Reformation of the Landscape: Religion, Identity, and Memory in Early Modern Britain and Ireland* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 252–53.

For pre-conquest England, Susan Kelly has argued that the proliferation of vernacular boundary descriptions in the ninth century indicates a significant shift in the utility of charters as authoritative documents. Susan Kelly, "Anglo-Saxon Lay Society and the Written Word," in *The Uses of Literacy in Early Medieval Europe*, ed. Rosamond McKitterick (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 46–47. The gravity of Domesday in English historiography no doubt influences the draw of pre-conquest charters; but a fascination with the composition and character of regional landscapes has also long been a distinctive feature of English scholarship. See, for example, W. Hoskins, *The Making of the English Landscape* (Harmandsworth: Penguin, 1954); Oliver Rackham, *The History of the Countryside* (London: J. M. Dent, 1986); Della Hooke, *The Landscape of Anglo-Saxon England* (London: Leicester University Press, 1998).

least the eighth century, commonly taking place on the Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday preceding Ascension Thursday.[83] In England, priests led processions along local parish boundaries, carrying a cross, relics, hand-bells, and banners and blessing crops and boundary markers as they went. The close association between these so-called "Litany" or "Rogation Days" with the walking of boundaries also lent them the name "walking days," an Anglo-Saxon convention.[84] Whether these events tended more towards solemnity (the beating of young boys in attendance to impress upon them the location of each boundary marker has been cited as one possible source of the English term, "beating the bounds") or revelry (the beating of instruments being another possible explanation) invites rather entertaining conjecture, but communal feasting and games on the parish's dime do seem to have been an expected culmination to the Ascension Day activities. Eamon Duffy, for one, has claimed that "Rogationtide observances were, with the exception of the annual Eastern communion, the most explicitly parochial ritual events of the year."[85] In any case, the religious and explicitly ecclesiastical nature of the processions came under the scrutiny of sixteenth-century Protestants, who, despite their suspicions of anything smacking of popishness, nonetheless recognized their utility for maintaining local boundaries in a changing countryside, settling property disputes, and reaffirming cadastral geography. Elizabeth I's injunctions against Rogationtide perambulations accordingly avoided banning them outright, but in fact made them compulsory, with certain changes to form.[86] Nor did the injunctions even strip

[83] On the early development of "Litany" or "Rogation Day" rituals in both the Anglo-Saxon and Gallican churches, see Joyce Hill, "The *Litaniae maiores* and *minores* in Rome, Francia and Anglo-Saxon England: Terminology, Texts and Traditions," *Early Medieval Europe* 9, no. 2 (2000): 211–46.

[84] Hill, 212.

[85] Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*, 139.

[86] Walsham, *The Reformation of the Landscape*, 254–55; Steve Hindle, "Beating the Bounds of the Parish: Order, Memory, and Identity in the English Local Community, c.1500-1700," in *Defining Community in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Michael J. Halvorson and Karen E. Spierling (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2008), 208–10. Hindle argues

the processions of their religious character entirely, but continued to promote them as a venue for parishioners to give thanks to God. English particularities aside, property perambulations on mainland Europe also shared similarities in form and function with their insular counterparts, and even underwent similar injunctions in Reformation Germany.[87] Regularly performed, they "adapted fluidly to the changing landscape while helping to elide such change," as Tom Johnson has recently argued, serving as a principal means by which "people sought to make legal interventions through the ways that they moved through, interpreted, and transformed the landscape."[88]

Perambulations outside the specific ecclesiastical context of Rogationtide processions likewise facilitated the co-production of landscapes of possession between specially appointed officials, property holders, and local communities. This brings us back to Luprecht's Handfeste, which conveys the sense of purposeful movement that Johnson suggests through its neat division of the estate's boundaries into steps proceeding from one terminus to the next. Words and phrases like "thereafter" (*postea*) and "further along from which [preceding terminus]" (*insuper a quibis pascuis*) emphasize the continuity from one step to the next as the audience is directed to walk,

against Keith Thomas's theory that the ritual's importance underwent a long, stead decline in *Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century England* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1971), 62–65.

[87] Robert Scribner has situated German Rogationtide (*Kreuzwoche*) perambulations within the broader landscape of sacral, apotropaic, and social rituals (often featuring some kind of public procession) that made up the liturgical year in late medieval Germany. Robert W. Scribner, "Ritual and Popular Belief in Catholic Germany at the Time of the Reformation," in *Popular Culture and Popular Movements in Reformation Germany* (Ronceverte, WV: Hambledon Press, 1987), 34–35. For a broader European context, cf. Edward Muir, "The Ritual Calendar," in *Ritual in Early Modern Europe* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 73–74. For descriptions of episcopal Rogationtide processions in Germany comparable to English parish perambulations, see Emil Joseph Lengeling, "Die Bittprozessionen des Domkapitels und der Pfarreien der Stadt Münster vor dem Fest Christi Himmelfahrt," in *Monasterium. Festschrift zum siebenhundertjährigen Weihegedächtnis des Paulus-Domes zu Münster*, ed. Alois Schöer (Münster: Regensberg, 1966), 151–220.

[88] Johnson, *Law in Common*, 156–58, 163, here 163.

move downwards, proceed forward, and cross over. *Item*, which marks the beginning of steps three and four, reinforces the repetitive, list-like nature of the verbal depiction, while backwards-looking words like *similiter* and *predicto* assert the visual regularity of the physical features marking the way through the landscape. A closer look reveals more about the features themselves, of which there are four distinct types. Two different roads, two wooden posts, and a millpond are named as endpoints (and, until the sixth and final step, subsequent start points), while the millpond and a road called "Skerpincz" are said to be connected by way of a certain wood whose name, "Algasis," likely evoked its past as a pagan cult site.[89]

As a picture of the landscape begins to emerge at this more granular level of detail, so too does a faint glimpse at the stories underlying its colonization. For one thing, the particular assortment of terminuses indicates that this was no "wilderness," but a well-developed and even wealthy locale. The public road would have facilitated the safe transport of people and goods from the hinterlands to growing markets in nearby Königsberg, an increasingly important center of control for the region's new lords. In keeping with this image of local prosperity, a mill dominates the countryside around Luprecht's property, with its pond and "mill-road" furnishing half of the listed boundaries. These places' proximity to the property belonging to a local parish priest, moreover, intensifies the sense of cultural interpolation throughout the document, as Luprecht's distinctive judiciary privileges illustrated earlier. Considered together, the description's individually disparate features gesture to the encounters that unfolded in the course of the region's colonization, leaving traces not only in the landscape itself, but also in the administrative documents that sought to control and record the processes of its inscription.

[89] Old Prussian *alk*-, detectable in numerous place names especially in East Prussia, is related to Lithuanian *elkas*, *alkas* (holy grove or idol) and Latvian *elks* (idol). See E. Šturms, "Baltische Alkhügel," in *Pirmā Baltijas vēsturnieku konference: Rīgā, 16.-20. VIII 1937* (Riga: Latvijas vēstures institūta, 1938), 116–32.

Piecing together details about the history of the estate and about Luprecht himself deepens the impression left by the Handfeste's boundary description, and more firmly identifies the survey process that prompted its recording as an instrument of colonial empowerment. Luprecht's Germanic name belies his Indigenous heritage, which the document nonetheless clearly signals. It expresses all measurements of area in Haken, for example; stipulates that the beneficiaries will hold their property by "hereditary law" (as opposed to German law); empowers them with judiciary privileges according to "*witing* law"; and specifies that they attend calls to martial service "with Prussian horses and arms." By placing Luprecht and his family squarely within an Indigenous legal category, the Handfeste thus circumscribed their agency as subjects of the Order and as manorial lords themselves, according to a set of rules and expectations distinct from those afforded more or less automatically to German settlers. To what degree we should recognize Prussian legal status as a disadvantage raises a more complicated set of questions, but in Luprecht's case we can at least see a form of segregation that—with its direct bearing on matters of property and inheritance—gestures tellingly to the thorny relationship between ethnicity, property, and legal status that has so ubiquitously fueled the social anxieties of colonial regimes.[90]

All but the most abbreviated Handfesten clearly indicate the legal status of the beneficiary, but what is unusual about Luprecht's is the amount of detail it offers about the circumstances in which his father Gedete first received the property. Gedete, the *narratio* elaborates, was "a Prussian from the lands of Sudovia" (far to the East of Sambia) who chose to side with the Order. At great risk, he brought over one thousand followers with him from their native territory, accepting baptism and Teutonic lordship—a heroization of Indigenous submission seemingly drawn straight from the pages of the chronicles. In exchange for his loyalty, Gedete was granted

[90] Stoler, "Rethinking Colonial Categories: European Communities and the Boundaries of Rule."

property to possess in perpetuity and given a document marked with the seal of Meinhard von Querfurt, the Master of Prussia at the time. Now, a generation later, Grandmaster Werner von Orseln wishes to confirm the grant on behalf of Gedete's son, Luprecht, giving two reasons for doing so. For one, Werner von Orseln portrays the confirmation as a munificent gesture recognizing the longstanding amity between the Order and Luprecht's family, evidently of some stature. This is closely followed, however, by a more technical concern—namely, the correction of errors made in the course of surveying the property when it was initially granted. The Order claims that Hugo, the Advocate of Sambia who oversaw the property's original survey, had had the boundaries determined "not with measuring cords, but by perambulating it on horseback" (*non funibus sed circumequitando*). Thus it is in the interest of "squaring away all present and future ambiguity with more certain boundaries [*sub certioribus graniciis*]" that Henry Stouff, the current Advocate, ordered a new survey of the property to be undertaken.

The adjustment of the property's boundaries soon after its bequest seems a bit suspicious. Viewed cynically, the dual pretense of amity and clarity disguised a more devious design to restrict tenurial privilege and to maximize dues. But given the Order's still-tenuous authority in the wake of a century of war and rebellion, cementing strong relations with local magnates is a more likely motive than veiled extortion. Likewise, it was certainly in the interest of Indigenous recipients to shore up the legal foundations of their property lines against oncoming waves of German settlers. Furthermore, it bears repeating that Luprecht and his family were themselves recent arrivals—not Sambians but Sudovians, whose status as landholding freemen openly advertised a dynastic history of collaboration with the region's new German lords. What the Order called friendship, the peasants working Luprecht's estate could just as easily have seen as complicity. For the Prussian

elite, good relations with the Brothers were not just a matter of obeisance; they too had their own power to retain.

If Luprecht recognized that there was something to be gained in claiming that his property had been inadequately measured and requesting a reappraisal, he would have most likely approached Henry Stouff, whose appointment as Advocate of Sambia put him in charge of adjudicating the legal affairs of non-German subjects in the province. And this seems to be exactly what Luprecht did, finding in Henry a receptive audience no doubt interested in securing loyalty among the local elite (and a nominal payment for his patronage).[91] In this case, the new survey would have in fact aligned closely with the Handfeste's self-ascribed purpose of stabilizing relations between Teutonic lords and their relatively recent subjects. It is probably impossible to know with certainty which interpretation of the new survey's initiation is the more fitting. Although the matter generated a detectable paper trail over the course of more than fifty years, the original Handfeste issued to Gedete does not appear to have survived, precluding the comparison of respective areal measurements, privileges, and dues. But both readings ultimately illustrate the power of the survey as a rhetorical device, as an administrative instrument, and as a venue for mediating the relationship between central authority and local subjects through the co-production of space.

Luprecht's Handfeste reaffirms the observations of other medieval scholars that boundary descriptions should not be mistaken for overly contrived products of record-keeping, divorced from the living landscape. Taken individually, as above, they offer glimmers of insight not only

[91] Advocates' courts were the prescribed jurisdictional venue for both free and unfree Prussians, whereas Germans settled under Kulm Law were obliged to bring disputes to the courts of the Schulzen for adjudication. Prussians could go to the Advocate to request transfers or new grants, so almost all Handfesten issued by Advocates accordingly had Prussian recipients and concerned small properties (a few *morgen* or one to two Haken). The vast majority of Handfesten in Sambia were issued by the Marshal and Grandmaster. Vercamer, *Komturei Königsberg*, 105–8.

into the character of the landscape—the types of features marked as boundary points, for example, or the comparative frequency with which cultivated and uncultivated spaces appear—but also into the backgrounds of the people claiming rights to its possession.[92] As written manifestations of orally kept knowledge, moreover, they allow us to sketch the lines and spaces within which Christian colonizers sought to circumscribe life in the countryside, as its inhabitants would have recognized them. Just as each survey actualized a unique legal contract between donor and beneficiary, each boundary description rendered this process both legible and repeatable using a systematic structure and vocabulary. Luprecht's Handfeste thus illustrates with particular clarity how the surveys—which I mean here to encompass both the geometrically precise measurement of land area and the broader array of medieval perambulatory practices—that prompted the creation of these documents can be understood as a primary form of colonial encounter. Analyzing these clauses on a larger scale accordingly enables a sort of archaeology of the survey itself—not primarily as a material process (clues about which are more readily excavated elsewhere), but as a cognitive one emerging from the entanglement of administrative officials with inhabitants. The results are not meant to reconstitute a map of the cadastral landscape that Prussia's colonizers envisioned, but to reveal traces of the region's shifting topographies of memory and possession—traces that suggest, nevertheless, the growing influence of the regularized practices over the course of the fourteenth century.

[92] See Ellen Arnold, who has argued that "appurtenance lists" allow historians to determine property uses and divisions as well as the features of the landscape that owners deemed most important. She emphasizes that because these legal lists and phrasings were not boilerplate, they illuminate the mental maps of rural space. Arnold, *Negotiating the Landscape*, 73. For the mental maps of local urban spaces as rendered in late medieval notarial records, cf. Smail, *Imaginary Cartographies*, 5–10.

V. The Primacy of Straight Lines

The fundamental principle of survey work, according to the *Geometria Culmensis*, is to break the geometrically irregular shapes of property plots into easily measurable components, especially triangles.[93] Even if the world cannot be made of simple squares and rectangles, clearly marked linear boundaries constitute the theoretical basis of an administrative paradigm that partitions a landscape and extracts its resources in proportion to precisely quantifiable areas.[94] Prussia's colonizers clearly recognized the efficacy of this paradigm as a means of reaping the fruits of their newly acquired Baltic garden. They also realized, of course, that crop yields varied not just by land area but also by soil quality. My goal here, in any case, is not to argue that there was a regular or mechanistic equation for calculating appropriate dues, but that there was a distinct change in the cognitive apparatuses underlying official paradigms of land division. Surviving boundary descriptions offer an aggregate body of evidence for evaluating the primacy of straight lines as a theory in practice.

Analyzing the changing nature of boundary descriptions involves, first and foremost, breaking them down into component parts.[95] Because the vast majority of Handfesten with descriptive clauses follow the step-by-step formula we saw in Luprecht's case, this is relatively straightforward. To take his grant as an example again, its description of the Wargen estate's boundaries comprises six distinct steps. Each of these steps, moreover, has its own set of components: directions, locations, objects, features of topography, contextualizing information, and so on. In Luprecht's description, most of these components are rather simple terminuses

[93] Cf. Roedder, "Geschichte des Vermessungswesens," 736.

[94] Scott, *Seeing like a State*, 29–33.

[95] Vercamer has similarly noted that the easily separable and comparable nature of the Handfesten distinguishes them as a rich and quantitatively evaluable dataset in *Komturei Königsberg*, 104–5.

(wooden posts, roads, woodland, and a millpond) accompanied by varyingly detailed directions for moving among them (walking along a road, descending along the millpond, passing through a wood) as well as indications of sequence. This dissection into components says little (if anything) new about Luprecht's clause on its own. But if the same process is repeated across a larger body of records, a dataset takes form in which patterns across time and space can be more readily detected and analyzed. To evaluate the impact of regularized survey techniques, for example, we would expect to see an appreciable rise (or fall) in the number of components signaling the precisely mathematical techniques explained in the *Geometria*—what we might call "linearity."

Take, for example, the following two Handfesten. Although they share a common structure and syntax, they describe their respective properties' boundaries in markedly different ways. The first, from a 1369 grant by Bishop Bartholomew of Sambia to a vassal named Lupertus and his wife Gertrude, reads in much the same way as Luprecht's Handfeste issued a few decades earlier:

> The first boundary [*limes seu granicies*] begins from the oak that divides the property of Sencketen the Kämmerer and the aforementioned Lupertus; it is encircled with soil.
>
> From that oak, down to the valley up to the river that likewise divides the property of the aforesaid *Kämmerer* and Lupertus, it [the *limes seu granicies*] continues further to the *granicia* of the Marshal.
>
> Then it proceeds to the trees that are marked there and encircled with soil, and which stand near Poleypen by the large stone that stands around there as a mark [*signum*] of the *granicia.*
>
> Further along from the stone it proceeds to the posts and to the trees behind Poleypen, which are marked to signify it [*ad hoc signate*], all the way up to the old ditch.
>
> Then it proceeds to the post that stands on the hill.
>
> Then from the post it proceeds up to the stone that is called Absdausil and is encircled with soil.

> Then it proceeds from the aforesaid stone to the *granicia* that divides [the properties] of the residents of Schoditen and Lupertus, [crossing] over stones and posts that are marked to signify it.
>
> And then it proceeds to the aforesaid oak between Sencketen and Lupertus.[96]

Just as in Luprecht's grant, the assigned boundaries proceed along a series of marked trees, posts, stones, and other landscape features, which divide the beneficiary's property from that of his neighbors. In contrast to the specificity of these points, there is little description of the spaces between them or definition of their orientation to one another. A second description, from a grant of six Haken gifted to a certain Hans Nadraw in 1447, is markedly different in this respect:

> The first *grenicze* is an encircled oaken post near the stone bridge.
>
> Proceed from the post two cord-lengths through the wood to an oak tree on a hill, which is also encircled.
>
> From there to another oak tree in a marsh, and ahead along the same side to a second encircled oak tree that stands ten cord-lengths away.
>
> Proceed along the side that divides us from the [canons of the chapter], to an oak tree.
>
> And three cord-lengths and several rod-lengths along that same side straight to four alders growing from a single trunk.
>
> From the four alders back along the second side, going straight back to three encircled oak trees.
>
> To an encircled alder post that stands in the marsh.

[96] GStA PK, XX. HA OF 103, fols. 187v-188r (1369): "Primus limes seu granicies incipit a quercu que dividit bona Sencketen camerarii et Luperti predicti [*sic*] est terra circumfussa, ab eadem quercu est descendendum ad vallem usque ad flumen et similiter dividit bona camerarii et Luperto predictorum et transit ultra ad graniciem marschalci, item transit ad arbores que ad hoc sunt signate et terra circumfusse que stant versus Polepen ad magnum lapidem qui circa stat in signum granicie, ultra a lapide transit usque ad palos et ad arbores ad hoc signatas retro Poleipen usque ad antiquum fossatum, item a fossato transit usque ad palum que stat in monte, item a palo transit usque ad lapidem qui dictur absdausil qui terra est circumfussus, item transit a predicto lapide usque ad graniciem que dividit illorum de Schoditen et Luperti super lapides et palos qui ad hac similiter signati, insuper transit ad predictam quercum que est inter bona Sencketen et luperti sicut…signa ad hac deputata." For discussion of the semantically and morphologically similar terms *circumfodere* and *circumfundere*, see n121 below.

> Back towards the first oaken post by the stone bridge, a straight distance of three cord-lengths.[97]

The boundary points themselves do not vary much from those described in the first example—a typical mixture of trees and posts, whose locations are given in reference to bridges, hills, woods, and so on. Its step-based structure is also essentially the same. Where it differs markedly from the 1369 Handfeste is in the deliberately geometric nature of the property edges it delineates. It does not just list a loosely connected series of points, but follows a sequence of lines, employing the same term (*wandt*) that the *Geometria*'s German translator used for the "sides" of a geometric figure (Lat. *latus*). In some cases, a side's length is given in cord-lengths (*seyle*) as the distance traveled from one point to the next, adding a degree of metric precision to the boundaries' polygonal perimeter. For good measure, directions to proceed "directly ahead" (*gerichte*) or "straight across" (*in die twer*) are sprinkled throughout. It is possible that the first description meant to imply the existence of such straight, demarcated lines among the boundary points it delimits, but it lacks the substantively linear language of the later grant. Despite the lack of a single direct reference to the survey process and the geometric principles underlying its revamped professional practice, its impact on the partition and representation of rural space is evident.

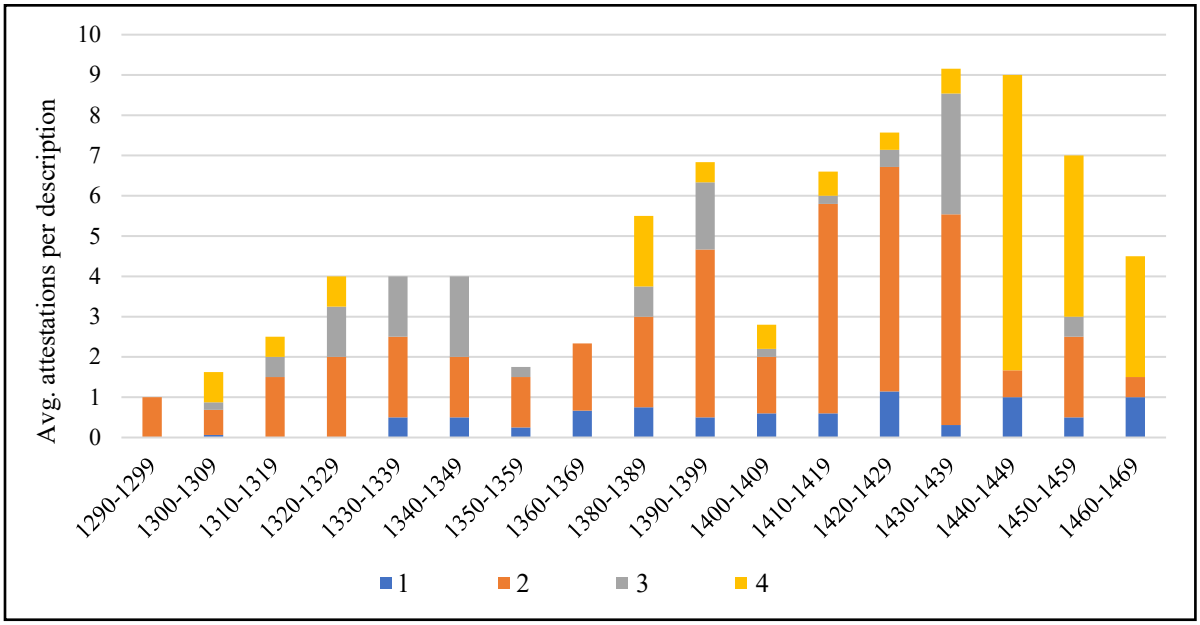
To ask whether property boundaries on the whole grew more "linear" as survey techniques were refined over the course of the fourteenth century, numeric values can be assigned to certain reoccurring elements. Each "linearity index" represents the certainty (on a scale of one to four)

[97] GStA PK, XX. HA OF 104, 58v-59r (1447): "Die erste grenicz ist eyn eichen pfol bey der steynbrocke umbegeschottet; und von dem pfol vort uffczugehen in dem walde czwey seyl off eyne eiche uffim berge ouch umbeschottet, und von danne uff eyne andere eiche yn eynem bruche vort an derselbigen wandt ouch uff eyne andere eiche die czehen seyl dovon steht und umbschottet ist, und vort uffczugehende an die wandt die uns mit der Probeste scheidet uff eyne eiche, und an derselbigen wandt die uns scheydet drey seyl und eczliche rutten in die twer uff vier erlen uff eynem stamme, von den vier erlen widder an der anderen wandt gerichte wydder czugeende uff drey eichen umbbeschottet, uff eynen erlen pfol der do steht in dem bruche und ist umbgeschuttet, gen dem ersten eichen pfol bey der steynbrucke czwisschen denselbigen czwen pfelen seyn ouch drey seyle die twer czugehende."

with which a rated element can be understood as a proxy for quantifying the degree to which the regularized survey principles reorganized rural space. Charting these indices over time reveals an upward trend in the total number of elements assigned values, which confirms that new practices had a measurable impact on the Sambian landscape (see **Figure 9**). On the whole, this pattern confirms the impact of the survey in reconfiguring Sambia's physical and cultural landscape. It is particularly notable that there is a marked increase in total values between 1380-1400, correlating with Conrad von Jungingen's tenure as Grandmaster. The dataset is not without inconsistencies: most noticeably, the considerable drop in values between 1350–1370 (probably reflecting the impact of the Black Death) and 1400–1410 (probably reflecting the intensification of conflict with Poland-Lithuania), as well as the total absence of descriptions from the 1370s. These divergences are not easy to explain, but seems to relate to the issue outlined above: namely, the difficulty of tracking some qualitative details as quantifiable entities. Reading through the set of descriptions dated to this decade actually leaves a fairly robust impression of a regularized boundary system laid out in defined geometric patterns; there are simply not many concrete elements to which index values can be affixed. The increase in linear factors over time can in part be attributed to the lengthening of the descriptions themselves, which grew from an average of four steps in the 1270s to an average of ten in the 1450s, followed by a drop-off in the 1460s (see **Figure 10**). The link is not surprising, but there are two important qualifications. First, the average length of the steps themselves changes remarkably little between 1270 and 1470, remaining close to an average of between eighteen and nineteen words after 1300.[98] This consistent economy of words suggests a more fundamental change in vocabulary. Second, the steady increase in steps is itself an outcome

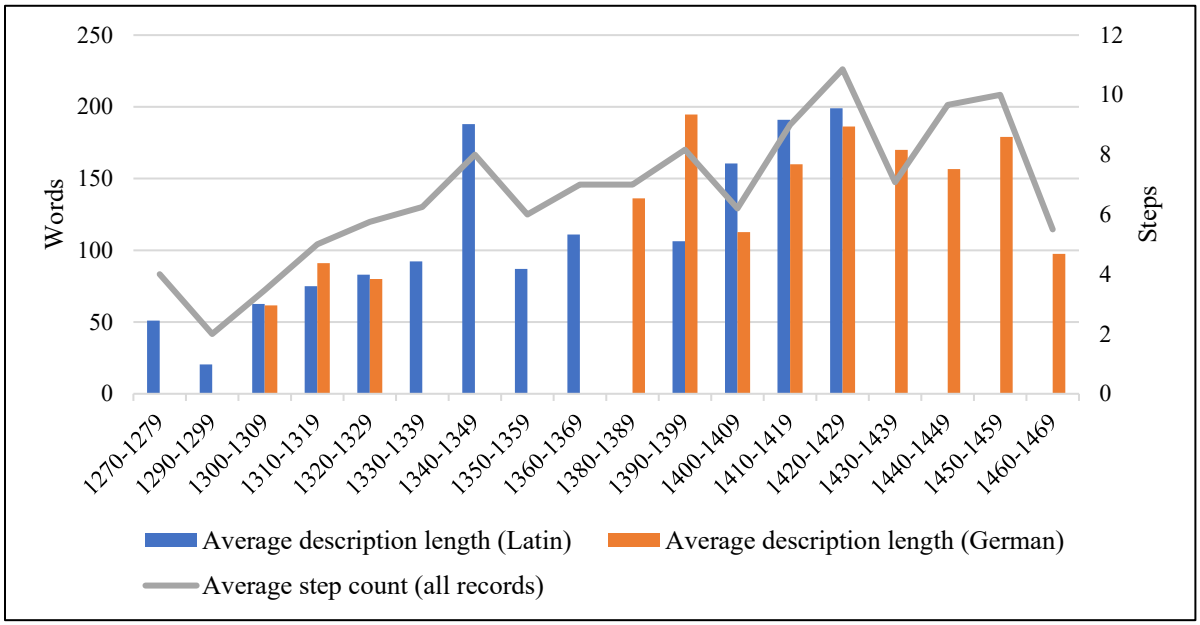
[98] Surprisingly, there is only a small difference between the average word count per step in Latin and German records: 19.1 and 18.1 words, respectively.

FIGURE 9. "LINEARITY" OF SAMBIAN PROPERTY BOUNDARIES BY DECADE



This chart depicts an overall rise in the "linear" nature of property boundary descriptions in Sambia between 1290 and 1470. To approximate this measure, index values have been assigned to select elements within each boundary description, on a scale of 1-4. In my analysis of 88 distinct boundary descriptions, I assigned 450 total index values. For every decade in which I have found Handfesten containing descriptive clauses, I plotted the average number of times that an index value occurs per description. Since the volume of Handfesten varies over time, I have normalized this per-description average by the number of Handfesten processed for that decade.

FIGURE 10. LENGTH OF BOUNDARY DESCRIPTIONS IN WORDS AND STEPS



This chart represents the average boundary description length, both by words (represented by bars) and by number of steps (grey line). To account for differences in syntax, word counts for German and Latin records have been charted separately. The number of steps, on the other hand, reflects averages from both German and Latin records.

of more elaborate survey practices. The boundaries themselves have not gotten longer, but their description—both into the ground and on the page—has become more precise.

Building on these observations of description and step length, a third dataset reinforces the correlation between the rising total of index values and the survey practices they represent. When reading through the descriptions as a whole, certain elements come to seem so commonplace or repetitive as to be simply formulaic. Few elements seem so trivial as the instruction to proceed "directly ahead" or "in a straight line," which occur with seemingly arbitrary regularity. Take, for example, the following steps excerpted from two Handfesten issued in 1304 and 1420, respectively:

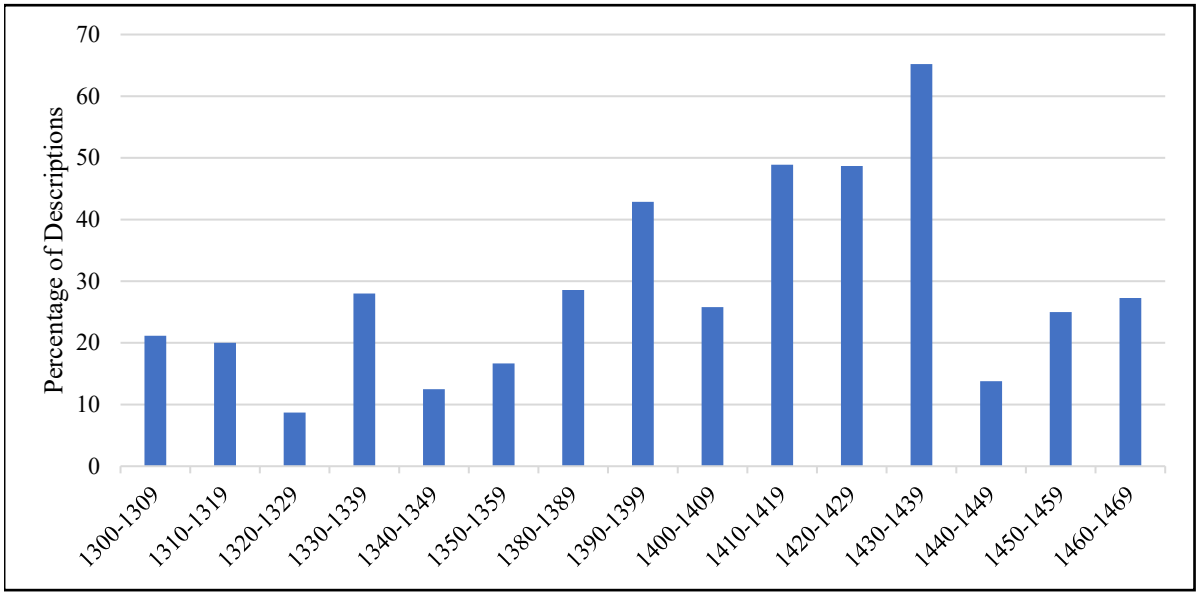
> From the property of the Hospital of the Holy Spirit in Königsberg, straight along the road towards Arnow, alongside a marsh and up to a large stone.
>
> From that [stone], straight ahead up to a linden tree, next to a pear tree.
>
> From that [tree] straight ahead up to a sacred wood.
>
> and from that [sacred wood], return through the aforementioned valley up to the *granicia* of the Schulze.[99]

> Proceed straight ahead to a large stone.
>
> Then further ahead to a stone that is encircled with soil, laying by the Kranische road.
>
> Then straight to a post encircled with soil.
>
> [then] straight ahead to an encircled post close to a mill stream; this [post] is also an *ortgrenicze*, and divides the land of the bishop from the land of the canons.[100]

[99] GStA PK, XX. HA OF 107, fol. 89r-v (1304): "de bonis hospitalis sancti spiritus in Konigsberg viam directe versus Arnow iuxta paludem usque ad magnum lapidem, et ab illo directe usque ad tiliam iuxta pirum, Et ab illa directe usque ad sanctam silvam, Et ab illa superius vallem redeundo usque ad graniciam sculteti, et de hinc antiquam graniciem usque ad paludem que tangit bona hospitalis antedicti."

[100] GStA PK, XX. HA OF 103, fols. 78v-79v (1420): "vordan gerichte czu geen czu eyme grossen steyne, vordan abir czu eynem steyne der do mit erde umbvorffen ist bey dem Kranischen wege gelegen, denne gerichte czu eyme pfole mit erde umbvorffen, vordan czu geen gerichte czu eyme beschotten pfole das do ouch ist eyn ortgrenitcze unde scheidet des bisschoffs und der thumherren land herte bey eyme moel flisse."

FIGURE 11. PREVALENCE OF "DIRECT" TRAJECTORIES BY DECADE



This chart tracks the percentage of boundary descriptions in which at least one of the following terms occurs: *directe*, *linealiter*, *recte*, *in transverso*, *gerichte*, *gerade*, and (*in*) *die twer*.

In each description, the directive to move "straight ahead" (*directe*, *gerichte*) appears built into the formulaic transition from one step to the next, more mechanically syntactic than deliberately substantive. The frequency of their occurrence over time, however, reveals a pattern similar to the overall rise in total index values (see **Figure 11**).

Excepting a dip between 1400-1409 and a sharp drop after 1439 (for reasons that are admittedly unclear), there is a dramatic rise in the fifty years after 1390, right around the time when copies of the *Geometria* were beginning to circulate. That there is a distinct pattern in the inclusion of these words and phrases does not necessarily prove that they should always be taken as literal directions. But the change in language reflects a broader cognitive shift as the description of rural space, infused with the vocabulary of straight lines and right angles, grew increasingly abstracted from topographical contours and landmarks. In sum, excerpting boundary description clauses from the Handfesten and breaking them down into component parts yields a rich dataset amenable to both qualitative and quantitative approaches. On the whole, this evidence indicates a

rise in the primacy of straight lines in the recording of property boundaries between 1270 and 1470, intensifying around 1390 and dropping off after 1440.

VI. Defining Boundaries

We can reach a finer understanding of this trend towards more precise and geometricized clauses by more closely examining their components, especially the boundaries themselves—the various physical forms they took, as well as the official vocabulary employed to represent them in the written record. To start, it is useful to revisit Luprecht's Handfeste, which, as we have seen, the Teutonic Order reissued after carrying out a new survey. The variety of terminuses and waypoints that the record's description links together are not in themselves particularly remarkable—a few roads, an oaken post, a millpond, flowing into and out of one another. This fluid movement defining the property's edges is, however, worth some further consideration. The description begins with a formula: "the first boundary" (*prima vero granicies*), which happens to proceed "from the public road, crossing through the village of Medeniken" and up to "a certain post…in a certain meadow." Subsequent steps follow variations on the same pattern, from a start point to an endpoint, which in turn becomes the start of the next step. The description as a whole is composed, it would seem, of a discrete series of lines whose terminal points are marked as such.

But this neat division into lines and points begins to dissolve on closer examination—are a wooden post, a road, and a body of water really to be considered physically or conceptually equivalent terminuses? Can they even be termed "points" in a consistent way? Leaving aside the question of "straight" lines (except for one reference to a "side" (*latus*) that is to be followed, there is no clear articulation here of polygonal geometry), the question that we must first address is whether there were any lines at all. What, for that matter, is a *granicia*, which here seems to mean a line, elsewhere a point, and in yet other places something in between? Lines and points merge

together so seamlessly as to resist Cartesian categories—more salient are the specific landmarks, landforms, settlements, and infrastructure whose spatial relationship the record succinctly summarizes.

Luprecht's Handfeste uses only the term *granicia*, but across the body of Sambian Handfesten there is a more extensive vocabulary that encompasses a spectrum of distinctive boundaries. A brief technical overview of this terminology and the various types of boundaries I have identified within it will lay the groundwork for further exploration of these boundaries as evidence for studying administrative practices and their impact on rural landscapes. The best place to start, in any case, is with Luprecht's *granicia*, which readers familiar with German or with Slavic languages will have no doubt already recognized.[101] The Slavic origins of NHG *Grenze* (dividing line, boundary) are well documented. Derived from the Old Polish term for a boundary mark or line (*granica*, *grańca*), it entered German vernacular (*grenicze*) and Latin documentary language (*granicia*) by the twelfth century in German-Polish borderlands.[102] The Slavic term itself stems from an Indo-European word meaning the "sharp corner or edge [of a branch or other plant growth]."[103] Medieval iterations echoed the ambiguous nature of these much earlier meanings, existing somewhere between the material world (a visible, material mark, or the marked object itself) and the abstract (an unseen division represented by that mark). In the context of the

[101] The term appears in the plural as *granicies* in Luprecht's Handfeste, although it is meant in the singular and is modified by the singular adjective *prima*. It is hard to say whether this was a mistake (uncertainty of a loan word's declination, for example), or follows the common Latin practice of rendering an abstract singular subject in the plural, or simply indicates the term's morphological fluidity, but I suspect the latter is most likely.

[102] Wolfgang Pfeifer and Wilhelm Braun, eds., *Etymologisches Wörterbuch des Deutschen*, 2nd ed. (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1993), s.v. Grenze, https://www.dwds.de/wb/etymwb/Grenze. On the changing nature of linear boundaries in Poland in light of increasingly contested claims of territoriality, see Grzegorz Myśliwski, "Boundaries and Men in Poland from the Twelfth to the Sixteenth Century: The Case of Masovia," in *Medieval Frontiers: Concepts and Practices*, ed. David Abulafia and Nora Berend (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2002), 217–37.

[103] Julius Pokorny, ed., *Indogermanisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, vol. 2 (Munich: Francke, 1959), s.v. gher-.

Handfesten, *grenicze*/*granicia* can refer to a line (as in Luprecht's case), although it most often refers to points like these:

> (1) The fifth *grenicze* is a large *hawffen*-stone by the aforesaid Rodenicken stream; it borders with our property and with that of the aforementioned Marshal.[104]
>
> (2) Proceed straight from there to the next *grenicze*, a marked and encircled post in the middle of the meadow.[105]

Other times, its form is mixed or unclear, as in the following excerpts:

> (1) Proceed alongside the *granicia* of the inhabitants of Geydau up to the *granicia* of Hermann von Bludau.[106]
>
> (2) Proceed straight ahead from there to the *grenicze* of the Suntlauken estate.[107]
>
> (3) Then move straight to a rather tall oaken post erected in the woods, to which a stone of medium size is likewise adjoined. This *granicia*, which touches the *granicia* of the village of Drebenau is called Pirghen in Prussian. That same *granicia*, in fact, has a *granicia* placed in its middle, which is a small birch tree with soil heavily piled up around it and marked with the symbol of a cross, touching the *granicia* of the village of Taplawken.[108]

The *granicia* and *grenicze* of the first two examples could be a point or a line, or neither; the context of each respective description is not enough to guess either way. Which form it most resembled was probably clear enough to those party to the document, if it mattered at all. The most striking, in any case, is the *granicia* of the third example, which not only comprises multiple parts

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[104] GStA PK, XX. HA OF 104, fol. 1r-v (1407): "die funffte grenicze ist eyn gros hawffen steyn bey dem vorgesprochen fliesse Rodenicken und grenczt mit unsern guttern und mit dem egenanten erbaren herrn dem Marschalke." I am unsure what is meant by "hawffen steyn."

[105] GStA PK, XX. HA OF 104, fols. 101v-102r (1422): "von danne gerichte zcugehende uff die ander grenicze ist eyn pfol geczeichent und umbeschuttet yn dem myttel der wesen."

[106] GStA PK, XX. HA OF 104, fols. 90r-91r (1300): "et iuxta graniciam illorum de Geydaw procedendo usque ad graniciam Hermani de Bludaw."

[107] GStA PK, XX. HA OF 103, fols. 11r-12r (1418): "do von gerichte czu geen off dy grenitcze des hoffes Suntlauken."

[108] GStA PK, XX. HA OF 103, fols. 178v-179v (1407): "deinde directe meando ad palum alterum quercium in silva erectum cui similiter mediocris lapis coniacet ac pruthenice hec granicia Pirghen appellatur tangens etiam graniciem parve villae Drebenaw. Eadem quippe granicia quedam habet graniciam in medio positam que est una vibex parva cum terra conquassata ac signo crucis signata tangens graniciem ville Taplawken."

and names, but also both point and line elements. Here the record describes a *granicia* with the Prussian name "Pirghen" as an oaken post with an adjoining stone—typical landmarks on their own, although such combinations are uncommon. More surprising is that this compound *granicia* is said to have another *granicia* (a small birch tree) "in the middle," and that each of these—the post-stone combination and the tree—touch the respective *granicie* of two different villages. The only conclusion we can draw is that each of these elements served more or less the same function as property dividers, and did so in tandem; beyond this, it is something of a maze, with no discernably consistent (let alone geometric) spatial arrangement. Nevertheless, the relation of *granicie* to one another must have been self-evident, and, given that one was associated with a Prussian name, probably well-known and long in place.

With such flexibility of form and meaning, *grenicze*/*granicia* corresponds closely in the Handfesten with the Latin term *limes*, with which it was to some degree interchangeable: four Latin descriptions open with "the first *limes*, also known as a *granicia.*"[109] Unlike *limes*, however, it was recycled in an array of more specific terms for boundary points in particular spatial configurations.[110] I have divided these into two basic categories: "medial" (*mittelgrenicze*, *granicia medialis*, *granicia in medio*, *granicia intermedialis*) and "terminal" (*ortgrenicze*, *hauptgrenicze*). Both types are defined by their relationship to a line, along which they are implicitly located, which distinguishes them from their more flexible parent term. These linear relationships are simple enough. Medial points, on the one hand, exist anywhere along a line except the beginning or end, where the terminal points exist. By extension, it follows that a terminal point

[109] GStA PK, XX. HA OF 103, fols. 77r-v (n.d.), 172v-173r (1344), 181r-v (1419), 189r-v (1333). All four are episcopal grants.

[110] The vocabulary for boundary lines, in contrast, is relatively restricted, the most common words being *wandt* in German and *latus* or *paries* in Latin.

at the end of one line also exists at the beginning of the next, and special terms (*winkelgrenicze*, *granicia acialis*) were evidently coined to capture this more particular sense of nodality at the juncture of two or more lines.[111] The distinction is subtle, but implies a more complex spatial geometry than lines or points alone.

One Handfeste illustrates with particular clarity how fluid these categories could be.[112] In 1421, a certain Hans Manyoth had purchased property from Bishop Johannes II of Sambia to possess under Prussian law. Following Hans's death forty-four years later, Bishop Nicolas I granted two thirds of the property to a certain Gregory (possibly a relative), while the remainder escheated to episcopal control, per the conditions of Hans's purchase. This redivision subsequently became the basis for the issue of a new Handfeste in 1465, which cited the contents of the original. The original boundary clause is notable for the unusual care with which it specifies how certain points divide Manyoth property from its three neighbors—Carnenutten, Norieyn, and Trintutten—as in the following four steps:

> Cross straight from there to a certain oaken post that stands near the Nadrawen road and divides the property of Carnenutten and Manyoth.
>
> From there cross in a straight line to a little hill, to a certain post that is a *granicia acialis* for Carnenutten and a *granicia medialis* for Manyoth.
>
> Proceed straight from there across the river and further along to a certain willow tree and the oaken post situated near it, which is a *granicia acialis* for Manyoth.

[111] Hans-Jürgen Karp has in fact identified a link between the terms *granicia acialis* and *ortgrenicze* in *Grenzen in Ostmitteleuropa während des Mittelalters; ein Beitrag zur Entstehungsgeschichte der Grenzlinie aus dem Grenzsaum*, 12n34. In my own analysis, I have similarly identified all "angular boundaries" as subsets of the *ortgrenicze*, although I have found no such direct equation of the two in the Sambian Handfesten.

[112] GStA PK, XX. HA OF 104, fol. 61r-v (1421): "Inde directe transseundo ad quendam palum quercineum qui stat circa viam Nadrawen et dividit bona Carnenutten et Manyoth, Deinde linealiter transseundo ad colliculum ad quendam palum qui est granicia acialis Carnenutten et granicia medialis Manyoth, Deinde directe procedendo trans fluvium et ult[erius] ad quendam salicem et palum quercineum prope situm et est granicia acialis Manyoth, Inde directe transseundo ad quendam salicem in prato situatam terra circumfossam et est granicia acialis dividens bona Norieyn et Manyoth."

> Cross straight from there to a certain willow tree encircled with soil located in a meadow and that is a *granicia acialis* dividing the properties of Norieyn and Manyoth.[113]

In the second step cited, the description makes the distinction that a certain hilltop post is a *granicia acialis* for Carnenutten, but a *granicia medialis* for Manyoth. Although it offers little insight into what exactly this difference was, it is clear that it was meaningful enough to specify. It must also have been spatial in nature, since the same wooden post set up in the same place lent itself to two distinct geometric configurations, which a specialized vocabulary was developed to express.

The taxonomy outlined so far proceeds principally from observations of what spatial forms boundaries take in the Handfesten, and what terms the records use to describe them. But beyond these analytic categories, the descriptions furnish evidence for visualizing what property boundaries actually looked like. In one of the most common step structures, a target landmark is identified with a particular boundary type:

> Go from there towards the north, following "straight along the plumbline" [*noch dem drebom*] to a marked linden tree on the hill that is a *mittel grenicze*.[114]

This basic structure can also be inverted, such that the boundary type precedes the marker with which it is being associated:

> The first *limes seu granicia* is a large post on the other side of the bridge across the Bludau waterway, placed on a hill and marked.[115]

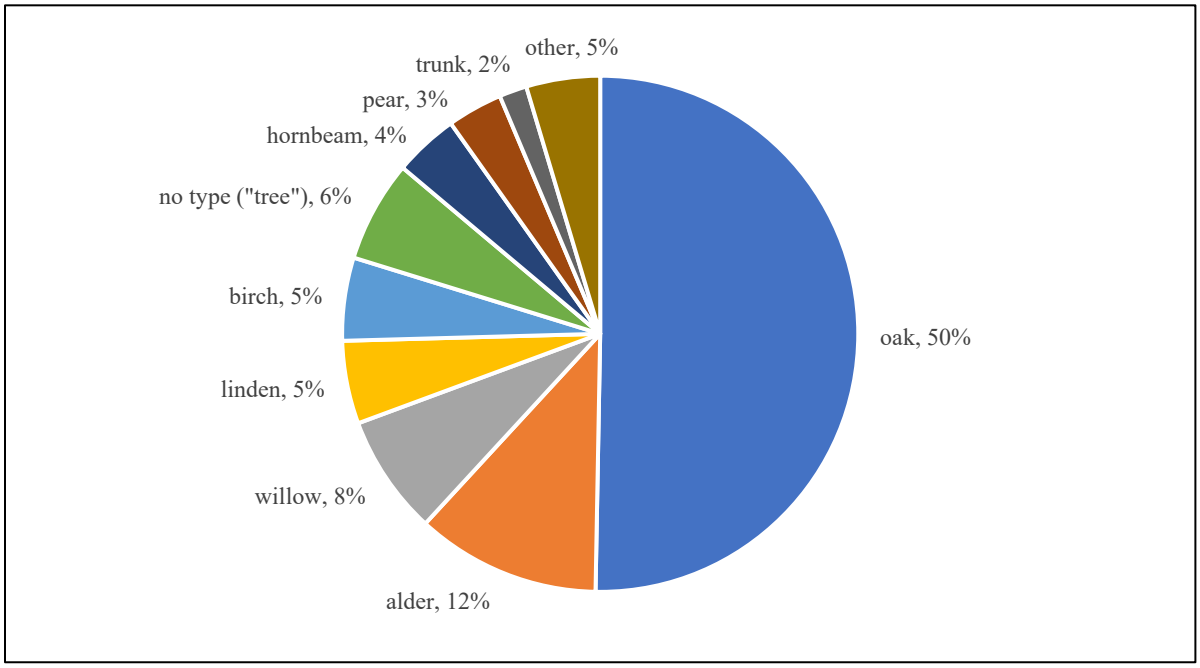
A panorama of rural geography emerges from the body of descriptions, from built structures to natural landmarks and features of topography, even if each of these single features is very rarely

[113] GStA PK, XX. HA OF 104, fol. 61r (1421).

[114] GStA PK, XX. HA OF 103, fols. 10r-11r (1396): "von dannen czu geen kegen dem norden gerichte noch dem drebom czu eyner geczeichente linden off dem berge dy eyne mittel grenitcz ist."

[115] GStA PK, XX. HA OF 103, fols. 147r-148r (1352): "primus limes seu granicia est palus magnus ex alia parte pontis trans aquam Bludau in monte positus et signatus."

FIGURE 12. TYPES OF TREES SERVING AS BOUNDARY POINTS



described in any detail. Boundary markers perch atop hills, stand within "sacred woods" and alongside burial mounds, span waterways as bridges and brace against their current as stones, or demand the attention of passersby at crossroads, taverns, and churches. But over ninety percent of the features labeled as a boundary of some kind take one of three forms: posts, stones, or trees. Aside from variations in material (a description might specify that a post is made of oak or, less frequently, alder) and size, posts and stones are relatively nondescript in comparison to trees, of which there is a colorful array: with oaks, alders, willows, lindens, and birches being the most common types, and hornbeams, pear trees, apple trees, and aspens among the rarer varieties (see **Figure 12**). The ubiquity of oaks, which make up half of the total, is not surprising, given the ecology of oak-heavy Baltic woodlands and the wider European tradition of choosing the distinctively mighty and long-living oak to serve as landmarks and boundary points.[116] The

[116] Pluskowski, *The Archaeology of the Prussian Crusade*, 305–7.

Handfesten describe small trees, large trees, and trees growing in clusters or unusual shapes (like one oak said to have two trunks).[117] Two are specified as "living," suggesting that this might not have always been expected.[118] Dead boundary-marking trees, however common they were, may have differed relatively little from the hewn wooden posts and stakes so commonly recorded as markers. This possible resemblance might be one way to explain moments of confusion between the two; but these moments are rare enough, in any case, that we can confidently treat "posts" and "trees" as distinct entities.[119]

Posts, stones, and trees thus differed in appearance, but they shared a set of attributes that distinguished them as boundary markers in the landscape and in the written record. These features can also be divided into three categories. One of these, true to the Slavic root of *grenicze*, constitutes a marking of some kind. The marking itself is usually unspecified, but sometimes it is said to be one or two crosses, and other times the enigmatic "symbol of a *granicia*" appears, such as the one etched into an oak tree in one of the oldest recorded Handfesten, from 1278.[120] Like markings, the second (and most common) distinguishing characteristic likewise served as a distinctive visual cue, but encompassed a broader array of variations, which generally involved the removal or addition of organic material to or from the site of the marker. In some cases, a ditch was "dug out" around the marker; in other cases, conversely, soil or stones were "piled up" around it, lending both a distinctive appearance and a source of support—a useful strategy for maintaining

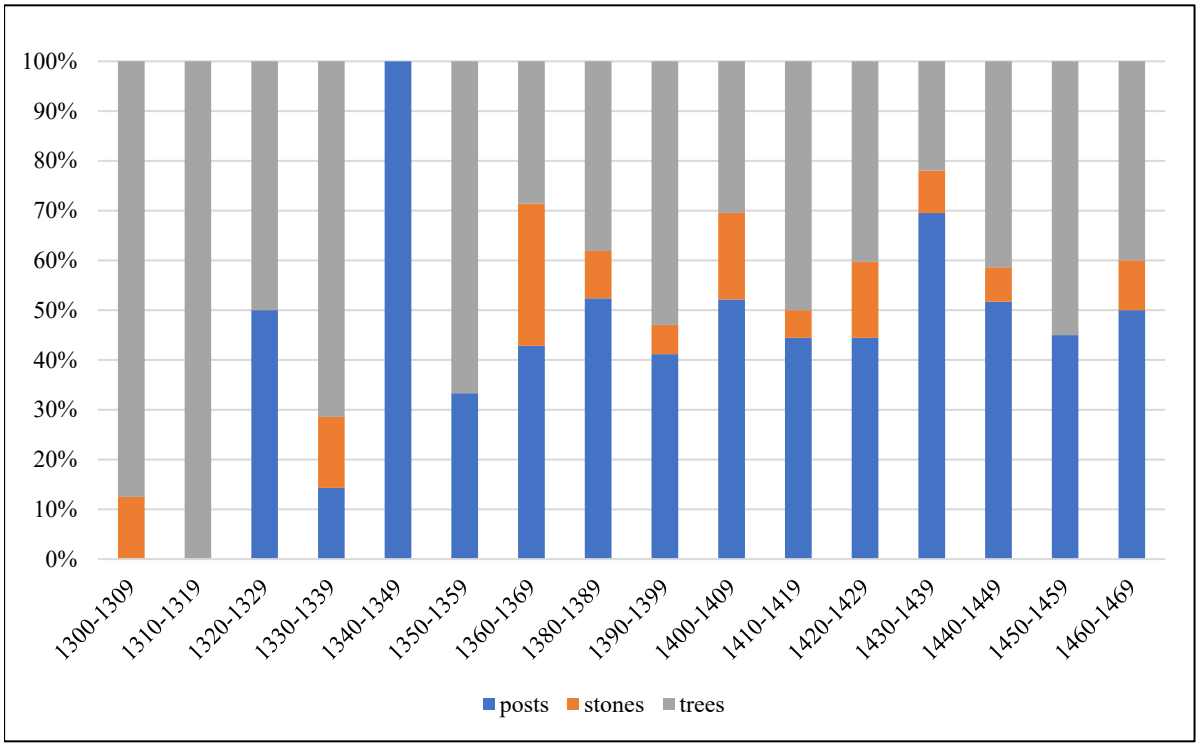
[117] GStA PK, XX. HA OF 107, fols. 129r-130r (1333): "ad unam quercum que stat in binio."

[118] GStA PK, XX. HA OF 103, fols. 105v-106v (1412). Both "living" oaks are described in the same clause as "eyne lebende eiche wolbeschot," and one is marked with two crosses.

[119] One description records a post (*palum*) dividing episcopal and Teutonic territory in one step, but begins the next step "from this oak tree" (*ab hac quercu*). The inconsistency is probably a scribal error. GStA PK, XX. HA OF 103, fol. 77r-v (u.d.).

[120] GStA PK, XX. HA OF 107, fol. 115r-v (1278): "ad quercum cui signum granicie est insectum."

FIGURE 13. RELATIVE FREQUENCY OF POSTS, STONES, AND TREES AS BOUNDARY POINTS



Posts, stones, and trees constitute about 80% of the Sambian boundary point markers identifiable as a particular physical object. The above graph represents the relative frequency of these three most common types.

posts and weakly rooted trees, it seems.[121] The third distinguisher, although more of a verbal cue than a concrete or visual characteristic per se, was the attribution of a "dividing" function—a specification that helps differentiate boundary markers in the written record from other similar features, but which is not always stated.

Altogether, the majority of landscape features directly associated with a boundary were posts, stones, and trees distinguished in one or more of these ways. That these markers seem to

[121] Frustratingly, these seemingly opposite processes were captured with the Latin terms *circumfodere* (to dig around) and *circumfundere* (to envelop or pour around), the past participles of which (*circumfossus*, *circumfussus*) frequently elided in contemporary orthography. *Circumfussus* is often, but not always, paired with a descriptive word or phrase (e.g., *lapidibus* or *cum terra*). Fortunately, the processes' semiotic overlap makes this morphological ambiguity less problematic.

There is no such confusion among the various analogous German terms used (usually *umbegraben*, *umbeworfen*, and [*um*]*beschuttet*), but the latter term poses its own problem. In most cases, it probably means the equivalent of *circumfussus*/*umbeworfen*, but with a more emphatic sense of reinforcement or support. I have translated the term as "reinforced," but it should be understood to overlap closely (if not completely) with its Latin and German synonyms.

have adhered to a certain visual vocabulary is noteworthy as a hint to the systematic nature with which boundaries were set and recognized. On a more technical level, it is helpful for identifying landscape features of all kinds as boundaries of some kind, even if they are not explicitly labeled as such in the record.[122] We can also deduce from this evidence two fundamental functions performed by property boundaries: one legal in effect and abstract by nature, one semiotic in effect and material in form. On the one hand, they represent the legal divisions devised through property surveys and contracted through Handfesten; and on the other, they serve as a visual marker—clearly legible to both administrative officials and local inhabitants—signaling where this division takes place.

This picture gets even more complicated, however, when legal and semiotic functions are split. Take, for example, a Handfeste issued in 1369 to a certain Steynegaude, a vassal (*feodalis*) of the bishop of Sambia who requested a deed for his property after having possessed it for years without one. Its boundary clause reads as follows:

> The first [*granicia*] is called Bakelitten, where [*ubi*] a post has been placed and marked.
>
> Proceed from there around the corner [*secundum angulos*] to the second *granicia*, which is called Pillitten and is likewise marked by a post.
>
> Go from there to the valley called Peyrowayden where a post has also been placed and marked.
>
> Proceed from these three previous *granicie* to another valley called Draymaycken, where, like before, a post has been placed and marked.

[122] It is safe to assume, in other words, that a tree "marked and encircled by a ditch" was most likely a boundary point because it was ascribed these characteristics, even though it was not specifically called a *grenicze*. I have been conservative in identifying such points, and have used a separate vocabulary for features that cannot be identified with certainty.

> And thus proceed in a rectangle [*secundum quadrangulum*] back to the first *granicia* mentioned.[123]

Steynegaude's property boundaries are striking for a number of reasons. Not least, the repeated use of phrases like *secundum angulos* and *secundum quadrangulum* recall the sort of geometric patterning discussed earlier in the chapter as a hallmark of line-oriented land reform. Most relevant here, however, is the ambiguity in the first three steps about what the actual *granicia* is. Both steps feature a named place (Bakelitten, Pillitten, and the valley of Peyrowayden—each, it should be noted, a Baltic toponym) and a post, and it is not clear whether it is the places themselves or the posts marking them (or both in combination) that constitute the "three *granicie*" referenced at the beginning of the fourth step. The distinction may at first glance seem trivial or overly contrived, but it raises an important question: was it the place itself, or the physical landmark chosen to indicate that place, that was ascribed legal authority?

We have by now ventured deep into a semantic realm that may be as puzzling to us as modern readers as it was second-nature to medieval people (although, as we will see in the next chapter, boundary points certainly caused confusion). My goal here has been to gain a foothold in the mental landscapes that these property boundaries encoded, which I take to be especially important in understanding the local experience of colonization. The problem, as we have seen, is that this is hideously complicated. The sources themselves are not only rather reluctant to speak; their language also represents some creole of official terminology and local vocabulary. This is, in fact, rather the point. But the difficulty of accessing local language independent of official syntax limits the granularity of our comprehension. Furthermore, even if we spoke this language (or at

[123] GStA PK, XX. HA OF 104, fol. 3v (1360): "prima [granicia] dictur Bakelitten ubi palus est positus et signatus, deinde procedendum est secundum angulos ad secundam graniciem que vocatur Pillitten per palum similiter signatam, ab inde eundem est ad vallem Peyrowayden dictam ubi etiam palus est positus et signatus, ab hyys tribus graniciis prehabitis procedendum est ad aliam vallem Draymaycken nominatam ubi ut prius palus est positus et signatus, et sic procedendum secundum quadrangulum ad primam…graniciem prenotatam."

least had an interpreter), our own concepts of space are difficult to overcome, which can lead us to trip over the interpretive categories we devise. "On their own terms," in other words, is always in some sense "on *our* own terms," which might prompt us to reflect on our sometime role as colonial officials ourselves in the study of our medieval subjects.

So let us return, at least briefly, to the surface. On the whole, boundaries and boundary markers appear to be one and the same in the Handfesten; but exceptions such as these suggest that the dual natures of these boundaries—abstract and legal on the one hand, material and semiotic on the other—were not always necessarily thought to be so integrated. This ambiguity in what exactly the term *granicze*/*granicia* denoted is, in itself, fundamental to understanding the nature of boundary-making in Teutonic and episcopal Prussia. It offers a glimpse into the improvisational, even experimental nature of the system that both institutions gradually put into place for dividing, managing, and conceptualizing property and space—a process that intensified in the last two decades of the fourteenth century and continued well into the fifteenth.

VII. The *ortgrenicze*

Among the various subtypes of *greniczen* appearing in the Handfesten, there is none more exemplary of this emerging conceptual paradigm and its impact on the division of land in Prussia than the *ortgrenicze*. In comparison to the other, simpler root words fused with *grenicze—mittel* (middle) and *winkel* (corner, angle)—*ort* is distinctively cloudier, with definitions ranging from the point of a weapon, to a neighborhood or district of a town, to the corner of a quadrilateral.[124]

[124] Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften, ed., *Deutsches Rechtswörterbuch* (Weimar: Hermann Böhlaus Nachfolger, 1914), s.v. Ort, https://drw-www.adw.uni-heidelberg.de/drw-cgi/zeige. The latter two meanings are related by the Latin phrase "between four corners" (*intra quatuor angulos/acies*), a periphrastic formulation mainly used to designate a marketplace. German translations of Latin charters used the word *ort* for corner, which lent it a sense comparable to English "quarter." Cf. *Deutsches Wörterbuch von Jacob und Wilhelm Grimm*, digitized version (Trier Center for Digital Humanities), s.v. Ort, accessed March 25, 2021, https://www.woerterbuchnetz.de/DWB.

Where these wide-ranging definitions converge is in the term's most fundamental meaning: an end, apex, or outer limit. Temporal in its earliest OHG attestations (eighth century), it acquired a more spatial and material sense in its MHG use—"an outer limit in space and time, beginning, end," but also a "tip (especially of a weapon or tool), corner, edge…[or] location."[125] To do something *unz an ein ort* meant to do it completely, or "all the way to the end."[126]

But what particular meaning was attributed to an *ortgrenicze* as a type of boundary has attracted decidedly less attention from linguists and lexicographers than its component parts. One source defines it simply as a "boundary marker" (*Grenzmerkmal*); others do not include it as a lemma at all.[127] Max Töppen, the editor of Peter of Dusburg's chronicle in the SSRP, referenced the term in his work on the history of the town of Marienwerder. To describe how the town's boundaries changed over time, he referred to a confirmation made in 1558 by the Protestant Duke Albert after he had personally reviewed the town's limits. Töppen paraphrased Albert's stipulation that a stone or oaken post be placed at a certain point because this was an "*Ortgrenze*, or *Ende*," of the first "side" (*Wandt*) of the property area.[128] Evidently a more in-depth discussion of the term lay outside Töppen's more descriptive task here, but even this brief editorial aside confirms several observations of the Handfesten: (1) that the term was neither commonplace nor entirely self-explanatory; (2) that the point's primary function was to mark the end or terminus of a linear

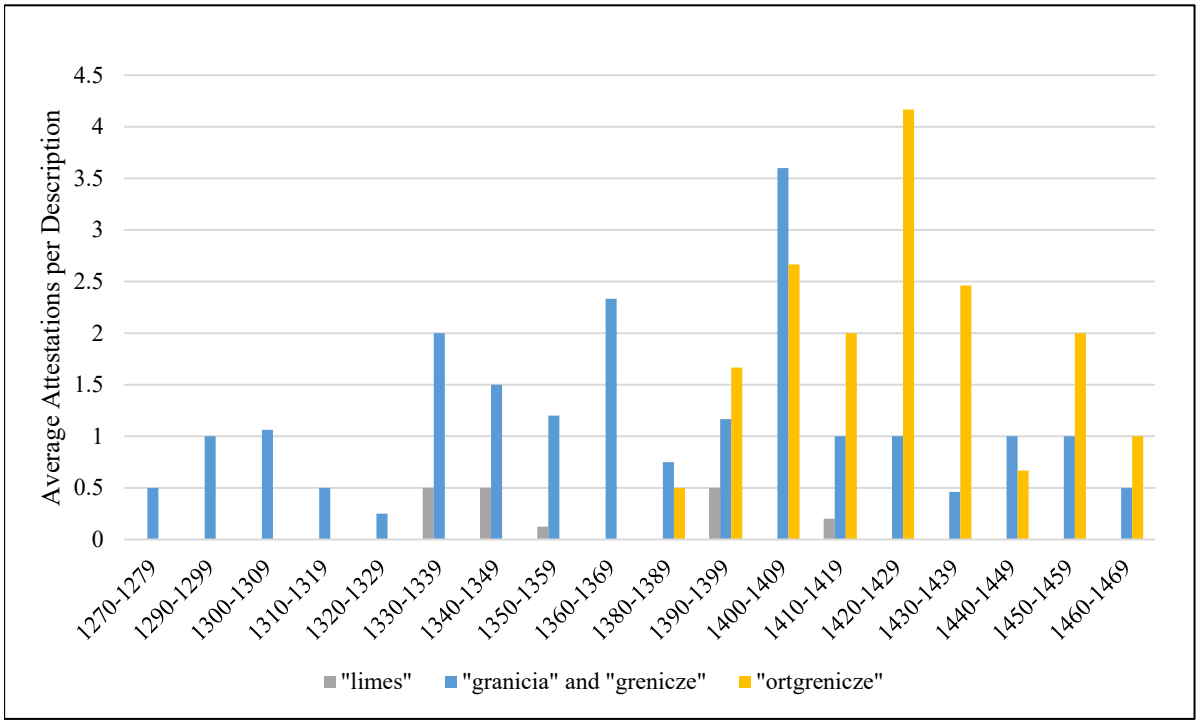
[125] "Äußerster Punkt nach Raum und Zeit, Anfang, Ende, Spitze (besonders einer Waffe, eines Werkzeugs), Ecke, Rand, Himmelsgegend, Platz, Stelle." Pfeifer and Braun, *Etymologisches Wörterbuch des Deutschen*, s.v. Ort. In the sort of etymological twist cherished by linguists, the NHG terms *Ende* (end, limit) and *Ort* (place) have essentially swapped meanings since the Middle Ages. See Pfeifer and Braun, s.v. Ende.

[126] *Mittelhochdeutsches Handwörterbuch von Matthias Lexer*, digital ed., s.v. ort, http://woerterbuchnetz.de/cgi-bin/WBNetz/wbgui_py?sigle=Lexer.

[127] *Deutsches Rechtswörterbuch*, s.v. Ortgrenze.

[128] "Denn es ist eine Ortgrenze oder Ende der ersten Wandt." Max Töppen, *Geschichte der Stadt Marienwerder und ihrer Kunstbauten* (Marienwerder: Kanter, 1875), 45.

FIGURE 14. OCCURRENCE OF *LIMES*, *GRANICIA/GRENICZE*, AND *ORTGRENICZE*



This chart represents the frequency with which the terms limes, granicia (Latin)/grenicze (German), and ortgrenicze appear in property boundary descriptions between 1270 and 1470. The term ortgrenicze appears suddenly in the 1380s, when the "great survey" of the late fourteenth century began to be carried out.

boundary; and (3) that this spatial sense existed independently of the material marker itself, which was meant to be a stone or post more or less like any other.

Etymologically, therefore, an *ortgrenicze* is defined explicitly by its relationship to a boundary line such that, unlike its parent *grenicze*, it cannot exist independently of the sorts of spatial paradigms exhibited in the *Geometria Culmensis*. Of course, it is an open question whether *ortgreniczen* can stand as proxy evidence for determining the influence of the *Geometria* on contemporary survey practices and rural property management. There are a number of patterns in the evidence from Sambia, however, that indicate a strong relationship between the appearance of *ortgreniczen* in boundary descriptions and the administrative reforms of the late fourteenth century. It is especially striking that no *ortgreniczen* appear among the boundary descriptions

under study until 1383, and only become more common in the late 1390s (see **Figure 14**).[129] The sudden appearance of the *ortgrenicze* as a type of property boundary (or, at least, as a more specific term for referencing existing boundaries) therefore coincides closely with the composition of the *Geometria* and the mass undertaking of new surveys, which most likely occurred in Sambia between 1393 and 1396.[130] Given the evidence for its use before the 1390s, the term clearly predated both the *Geometria* and administrative reform, and further study of property records in- and outside of Sambia would doubtless turn up other early examples. Still, it is the only boundary type to show such a sudden change.[131]

Beyond this association with new survey practices, two other patterns are helpful in determining what contemporary records actually meant by the term. Above all, an *ortgrenicze* is nearly always a distinct point. In all but one of the eighty-one cases in which a physical marker is noted as an *ortgrenicze*, more than half are posts, about one in four are trees, and the rest are stones.[132] That one description refers simply to an "oaken *ortgrenicze*" and to another "*grenicze* of elm that is an *ortgrenicze*" suggests the regularity of their association with wooden posts.[133] Moreover, *ortgreniczen* generally seem to have been prominent landmarks. But they were not just

[129] GStA PK, XX. HA OF 103, fols. 85v-86v (1383).

[130] Vercamer, *Komturei Königsberg*, 188.

[131] Medial boundary points, in comparison, appear around four times as frequently in the fifteenth century than in the fourteenth, suggesting a similar correlation between more precise terminology and the new survey; but unlike *ortgreniczen*, they do appear with some regularity well before the 1380s. On the opposite end of the spectrum, the term *limes* all but disappears around the same time that the *ortgrenicze* enters the records. The fourteenth-century attestations of *limites* are so few and scattered, however, that there is less of a robust pattern to identify.

[132] The exception is a ditch—a classic case of point-line ambiguity in the Handfesten. GStA PK, XX. HA OF 104, fols. 15r-17r [1436].

[133] GStA PK, XX. HA OF 111, fols. 126v-127r (1405): "denne czugeenn uff ein ort eichene grenitcz uff das bruch Bawsiszke" and "gerade vonn Rawschenick uff eine Russter grenicze die ein ortgrenitcz ist." It is possible that "Russter" refers here to an elm tree rather than a post made from elm.

visually striking; they also appear to have been situated in highly visible places. At least half the time, they are said to divide the property of two or more neighbors, like a certain oaken post dividing the newly established village of Warmfeld from its two neighboring villages, Trebenau and Taplauken, and from the fields of a Teutonic freeman named Wygal.[134]

Ortgreniczen therefore surface from these descriptions as points of convergence, where the boundary lines of multiple neighbors intersect, and overwhelmingly took the form of a tree, a stone, or, most common of all, a wooden post. This image closely matches the expectation suggested by the combination of its two root words: a concrete object that signals a particular spatial situation (*grenicze*), in this case an "outer limit" or "terminal point." What is especially important in the context of this chapter is that both senses of *ort* as a terminus—namely, as (1) the start or endpoint of a single property line (as in Töppen's example for Marienwerder) and (2) a point of convergence for multiple property boundaries—entail the grid-like configuration idealized by the *Geometria* as an imitation of divine order. The growing prevalence of the term in the vocabulary of the German Handfesten thus serves as an especially relevant index for the impact of institutional paradigms on the colonized Baltic landscape. No wonder, then, that it came into common use more than a century after the colonization of Prussia began, as the land reform movement of the late fourteenth century more insistently materialized in the countryside and in the written records of its division.

[134] GStA PK, XX. HA OF 103, fols. 177v-178v (1434): "Go straight from there to an oaken post that is encircled with soil there; it is an *ortgrenicze*; and it divides Drebenau and Wygal the Marshal's freeman and the village of Taplauken" (*vordan gerichte zcugeende zcu einem eichen pfole der do ist umbworffen mit erde der do ist eine ortgrenitcz und scheidet Drebenaw und [W]ygal des marschalks freyen und Taplawken das dorff*).

VIII. Indigenous Landscapes and the Geographical Archive

The boundary clause evidence considered in this chapter largely reinforces the narrative of historians like Thielen that the increasingly systematized land survey—for which the *Geometria* is supposed to have served as a technical and ideological blueprint—was among the most effective instruments of consolidation and centralization available to Christian colonizers. There is, however, another story within this same body of evidence that informs and enriches the first, even if it reveals itself less readily, and from an even more fragmented set of clues. It tells how the pre-conquest landscape of sacred woods and named stones subtly shaped the geography of its colonizers, eventually becoming embedded in the archival record. It offers a crucial counterpoint to the identification of land reform with centralization, suggesting that the new administrative geography was not a simple matter of imposed authority, but the result of a more dynamic exchange between institutional officials and local, and especially Indigenous, subjects.

Place names in German Prussia have long held recognition as records of the region's distinctive cultural heritage, and the Handfesten are a principal source for their study.[135] Besides town and village names (a conflicted source of evidence for settlement patterns), the Handfesten name hundreds of landscape features, from the generically practical Mollwasser ("Millpond") to the evocatively descriptive Esperberg ("Aspen Hill") and Hummelberg ("Honeybee Hill"). Whether these German toponyms were original or the products of translation is unclear from the evidence at hand, but what is striking in Sambia is that most toponyms recorded in the boundary descriptions were given not in German, but in their original language—mostly, if not exclusively,

[135] On Prussian place names in particular, see Georg Gerullis, *Die altpreußischen Ortsnamen gesammelt und sprachlich behandelt* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co., 1922).

in Prussian. Some records explicitly identify place names as Prussian, like one episcopal Handfeste from 1398 that was especially insistent on making the specification:

> And so the first *limes* of the said property begins from an entrenched elm tree standing in a certain valley, near the river flowing into a canal in the meadow called Satho in Prussian.
>
> From this post, go straight to an entrenched post standing near the field of the villagers of Blumenau in the field called Grosdau in Prussian.
>
> From there, straight to another post standing…near the field of the villagers of Blumenau, in front of the wood called Scalune in Prussian.
>
> From this post, go straight ahead by that same wood to an entrenched post standing on the hill called Prawest in Prussian, which divides the field of Blumenau from Kragen.
>
> From there straight to another entrenched post in the field called Laukinthe in Prussian, next to the road that goes from Kragen towards Powayn.[136]

Like many other Handfesten from the time, this one was born from the directive to survey a property that a certain vassal of the bishop, Paul, and his predecessors had long possessed "without fixed boundaries" (*non limitata et absque graniciis*) near the village of Powayn. The bishop's order was fulfilled. Seven Hufen (*mansi*) were found and regranted under terms typical for Prussian freemen, (even if Paul, with a quite sizeable estate and a son, Henry, currently serving as episcopal *Kämmerer* in Medenau, was quite well-off). But just as the military service and nominal dues (an annual *Rekognitionszins* of one pound of wax and five *denarii*) owed by his family to their lord were fixed firmly into official record, so too were the fields, hills, woods, and meadows of the

[136] GStA PK, XX. HA OF 103, fols. 154r-155r (1398): "primus igitur limes dictorum bonorum est incipiendo ab alimu circumfossa stante in valle quadam prope rivulum influentem foss[um] stantem in prato Satho pruthenice dicto, ab hoc palo directe eundem ad palum circumfossam stantem prope campum villanorum de Blumenaw in campo Grosdow prutenice dicto, deinde directe ad palum alium stantem prope campum villanorum de Blumenaw ante silvam Scalune prutenice dictam, ab hoc palo directe eundem prope eandem silvam ad palum circumfossem stantem in monte Prawest pruthenice dicto qui dividit campum Blumenaw et Kragen, deinde directe ad alium palum circumfossem in campo Laukinthe pruthenice dicto iuxta viam qua itur de Kragen versus Powayn."

local landscape, retaining their native names—Satho, Grosdau, Scalune, Prawest, Laukinthe—well after Paul's family members had, at least publicly, shed their own.

Nearly half of the non-German toponyms I have counted come from Handfesten issued between 1390 and 1419. They enter the record at a fairly steady rate of about one in every two descriptions until 1390, then all but disappear after 1420. Most of these were, like those in Paul's Handfeste, attached to features of the landscape named as points of reference for the boundaries themselves—either locations or nearby sites. Their integration into the record is usually more fluid, without obvious editorializing. A typical German example describes a post "that stands behind Wiskint wood" and, later, "Nirtegarbe hill, which forms a boundary (*grenitczt*) between the bishopric and the [Order]," recounting each name without drawing special attention to it.[137] Elsewhere, scribes made a conscious effort to normalize Indigenous names to German syntax. One description from 1407 offers an unusual trilingual example, describing, in Latin, "the wood that is called *Die Broide* in Prussian" (*silva que pruthenice Die Broide nuncupatur*).[138] Other attestations take onomastic hybridity even further, like the name "Medienwald," which merges both the Old Prussian and German terms for "woodland" (*median* + *wald*).[139]

As emphatically as Medienwald announces its woodedness, other toponyms are more enigmatic. A Teutonic charter from 1333, for example, states simply that a certain oak tree "stands in a place that is called Ywegarge."[140] In this case, however, the meaning behind the place's name,

[137] GStA PK, XX. HA OF 103, fols. 11r-12r (1418): "von der eichen gerichte off eynen umbeschotten pfol der do steet hinder deme walde Wiskint…do von gerichte off den berg Nirtegarbe der do grenitczt czwischen dem bischtum unde dem camerampt zcu Girmaw."

[138] GStA PK, XX. HA OF 103, fols. 178v-179v (1407).

[139] GStA PK, XX. HA OF 104, fols. 62v-63r (1448). Cf. G.H.F. Nesselmann, *Thesaurus linguae prussicae* (Berlin: Harrwitz & Gossmann, 1873), s.v. median.

[140] GStA PK, XX. HA OF 107, fols. 129r-130r (1333).

Ywegarge, can actually be explained from two versions of an earlier, more detailed description of the boundaries between the Order and the Sambian church, in which the same place similarly appears as the location of a boundary post.[141] One version claims that the place got its name from a tree that used to stand there, which "was called Ywegarge in Prussian."[142] The other does not report this detail, but it does gloss the name in German, calling it *huwinboum*, "Owl Tree."[143] The story that emerges from this coincidence of onomastic details illustrates how Christian officials could capitalize on the significance of places like Ywegarge in the local landscape, repurposing it within a new administrative geography. What continues to evade explanation is why Christian officials, who elsewhere justified their presence in the Baltic by their intent to root out pagan customs, chose to go a step further, inscribing a fragment of Indigenous memory into written record. Whatever their reasons, and whether or not owls continued to roost there, the pre-conquest association with Ywegarge was preserved. As the story behind Ywegarge shows, names were recorded not just for places, but for things as well. Stones are called "Pokrawt" and "Absdausil," and posts and otherwise nondescript *greniczen* are given names like "Pillithen" and "Pirghen."[144] Even a "bend" (*curvitas*) along one boundary line bears the aptly tongue-twisting name "Grusmpy Garwe."[145] Although relatively rare, these traces of pre-conquest geography recall the customs that

[141] G. H. F. Nesselmann, "Forschungen auf dem Gebiete der preußischen Sprache," *Altpreußische Monatsschrift*, no. 7 (1870): 295, 310.

[142] "Deinde directe ad palum circumfossum stantem in loco ubi olim fuit arbor pruthenice Ywegarge dicta." Nesselmann, 295.

[143] Nesselmann, 295. "And so we have in Ywogarge an Owl Tree before us, not in the sense of a taxonomic classification, but as the local name (*volksthümliche Bezeichnung*) for a tree in which owls nest." *Ibid.*, 310.

[144] GStA PK, XX. HA OF 112, fols. 1v-2r (1382); OF 103, fols. 187v-188r (1369); OF 103, fols. 5v-6r (1360); OF 103, fols. 178v-179v (1407).

[145] GStA PK, XX. HA OF 103, fols. 178v-179v (1407).

Peter of Dusburg ridiculed as idolatrous products of the irrational pagan relationship with the primordial landscape.

Sacred woods also dot the record, sometimes definitively labeled *silva sacra* or *heiliger wald*, other times identifiable by their toponym, like the "Algasis" we visited earlier along the peripheries of Luprecht's Wargen estate. Another description from 1309 mentioned a sacred wood close to an "ancient burial mound" (*tumulum veterem*) in a description from 1309 and another located, conversely, in the vicinity of two churches, one Prussian and the other presumably German:

> Go from the post to another post that stands near the Prussian churchyard.
>
> From that same post, go straight to a post that stands in the sacred wood.
>
> From there, go all the way to a *grenicze* that stands between Wissebar and Stenegaude.
>
> Further along from the sacred wood, go straight to a post that stands in the *damerau* behind Legithen, near the church.[146]

Given the irony of this juxtaposition (let alone the existence of such woods at all), the Teutonic officials involved in confirming these boundaries and committing them to record must have had reason for doing so. Perhaps these woods' taboo associations peculiarly suited their designation as peripheral spaces in the Christian landscape. Or maybe their names had outlived their function as active cult sites, at least as far as the local clergy cared to know. That one such *heiligewalt* named in a 1357 grant as "Wyssekint wood" lost its attribution as sacred when it reappeared in another Handfeste sixty-one years later, for example, suggests that its pagan aura had faded over time,

[146] GStA PK, XX. HA OF 103, fols. 153r-154r (1309): the burial mound; OF 112, fols. 1v-2r (1382): "von dem pfale zcu gehend uff einen anderen pfal der do sted ken dem pruschen kirchhoff, von dem selbin pfal gericht zcu gende uff einen pfal der do sted in dem heylgen walde, von dannen zcu ghende bis uff eine grenitzce di sted zcwischen Wissebarn und Stenegauden, abir von dem heilgen walde gericht zcu ghende bis uff einen pfal der sted in der damrow hinder Legithen ken der kirchen."

although concerted episcopal endeavors to crack down on pre-Christian rites continued well into the fifteenth century in Sambia, where pagan practices seem to have endured longer than elsewhere in Prussia.[147] The survival of these sacred (or once-sacred sites) both in the landscape and in the archive stands, in any case, as an especially telling testament to the endurance of Indigenous geographies, even in the face of coordinated land distribution that was predicated, theoretically at least, on their elimination.

IX. Conclusion: Entangled Lines

A common metaphor for the cultural landscape is the palimpsest: "a porous surface," as Alexandra Walsham has put it, "upon which each generation inscribes its own values and preoccupations without ever being able to erase entirely those of the preceding one…a surface onto which cultures project their deepest concerns and recurring obsessions."[148] The palimpsest is a particularly apt metaphor for summarizing this chapter's argument that Prussia's Christian colonizers sought to inscribe a cadastral geography onto its landscape in letters and lines that evoked the same triumphalist narrative proclaimed in the chronicle histories: the settlement of a new Promised Land in the Baltic. The Teutonic Order's manual for surveyors, the *Geometria Culmensis*, envisioned the cadastral landscape it promoted as the foundation for an idealized Christian social order. And the Handfesten, as the archived records of the processes involved in the production of this landscape, suggest that the regular survey practices outlined in the *Geometria* were widely

[147] GStA PK, XX. HA OF 103, fols. 6v-7r (1357), 11r-12r (1418). Episcopal mandates forbid congregation in forests and groves as well as burial in unconsecrated ground. Pre-Christian cemeteries were important cult spaces beyond their role as burial sites. Grave goods at post-conquest Christian burial sites show evidence of continued funerary practices that incorporated new forms of material culture, such as silver bracteates minted by the Order. Pluskowski, *The Archaeology of the Prussian Crusade*, 287–89.

[148] Walsham, *The Reformation of the Landscape*, 6. On the layered cultural associations that suffuse physical landscapes with meaning, see Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory* (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1995), 16–19.

implemented in both episcopal and Teutonic territory by around 1400. In sum, Prussia's colonizers did more than institute a particular arrangement of relationships between themselves and the subjects settling their land: they shaped the spaces in which rural people dwelt, labored, and thought in ways that reified their core progress narrative.

Tim Ingold has argued that the planners of modern societies seek to delimit the spaces of everyday life along networks of contrived lines and nodes that restrict movement—and the processes of perception and knowledge-creation it entails.[149] "The traveler whose business of life is conducted at successive stopping-off points wants to spend his time *in* places, not *between* them."[150] The cadastral landscape as it appears in later Handfesten resembles the kind of spatial arrangement that Ingold describes, with property boundaries comprising sequences of points connected by lines of an increasingly abstract nature. Through the perambulation and maintenance of these boundaries, inhabitants conformed to and also reinforced these prescribed patterns. At the same time, however, the small movements of everyday life carry erosive force. The environment itself "does not consist of the surroundings of a bounded place but of a zone in which their several pathways are thoroughly entangled…[a] meshwork of interwoven lines" in which places "do not just have locations but histories."[151] Other anthropologists like Keith Basso have made similar observations of movement among Indigenous peoples like the Apache.[152] To travel from point to point through a landscape, even to name certain landmarks in the course of conversation, is to

[149] Tim Ingold, *Lines: A Brief History* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 74–106.

[150] Ingold, 105.

[151] Ingold, 105, 106.

[152] Keith H. Basso, *Wisdom Sits in Places: Landscape and Language among the Western Apache* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996). For examples from the perspective of a Pueblo writer, see Leslie Marmon Silko, ed., "Landscape, History, and the Pueblo Imagination," in *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996), 264–75.

relive the stories these names evoke again and again, each time suffusing the places themselves with new significance. Common among Aboriginal Australians is the idea of merging with one's ancestors through the continuous process of shaping the landscape—a process that by nature defies linear temporality. "Such features are more than mere marks," Ingold has written of the Pintupi people of the Gibson Desert,

> for in their activities the ancestors did not leave a trail of impressions behind them, like footprints in the sand, while they themselves moved on. They rather metamorphosed *into* the forms of the landscape as they went along. Ever present in these forms, their movements are congealed in perpetuity.[153]

This is why it is so important to see the traces (faint as they may be) of Indigenous landscapes underlying the new arrangement of boundary posts and taxable plots. In the records of its reorganization, we see the pre-conquest landscape entangled with the designs of its colonizers. If Christian narratives of celestial order and eschatological time constituted a subtext for the creation of the cadastral landscape, what stories did Prussian-speaking groves, trees, and stones still tell?

[153] Tim Ingold, "Hunting and Gathering as Ways of Perceiving the Environment," in *The Perception of the Environment: Essays in Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 52–53.

CHAPTER FOUR: WHEN THE TILTING TREE FELL

I. Gathering Kindling

Some time in the late 1380s, a boundary dispute arose between two settlements along the border between the bishopric of Warmia and the Teutonic Order. The dispute concerned a certain tract of woodland that had long been in the possession of the town of Mehlsack, on the bishop's side of the border. Inhabitants of the village of Schönborn, on the Teutonic side, had allegedly been using a clearing in the wood, where it ran into the heath and ploughland belonging to the village. A delegation of officials arrived in the area in January of 1390 in order to settle the issue, having just adjudicated a similar dispute between two border settlements about forty miles to the southeast. The paper trail that these two inquests left in the archive serves as the main source base for this chapter, which argues that Prussia's local landscapes took shape over the course of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries as the product of distinctively Baltic colonial encounters.[1]

[1] GStA PK, XX. HA OBA 482 holds all surviving records produced over the course of these inquests. These include: an episcopal mandate (pp. 1-2); witness testimony for representatives of Plausen and Königsdorf (pp. 3-6); a list of oaths sworn in each case (pp. 7-8); a copy of the adjudicators' judgment on the Plausen-Königsdorf dispute (pp. 9-10); an interrogatory for the witnesses representing Mehlsack and Schönborn (pp. 11-12); and witness testimony for representatives of Mehlsack and Schönborn (pp. 13-20).

Supplementing the contents of OBA 482 are the records of the settlement agreements in each case, which have been edited as documents 239 (Plausen-Königsdorf) and 240 (Mehlsack-Schönborn) in *Codex diplomaticus Warmiensis* 3, ed. Carl Peter Wölky, *Monumenta historiae Warmiensis* 5 (Braunsberg: Edouard Peter, 1874), 202-205, 205-207. These editions were prepared from manuscripts held in the historic Königsberg archive as Schiebl. XXV nos. 4 and 5, respectively.

As was customary, the officials ordered each community to select a representative body of witnesses from the surrounding area, who would give testimony, under oath, about their knowledge of local property boundaries and the nature of the dispute. Among those representing Mehlsack was a man named Wissetünge von Prewilten, whose forename spoke to his Prussian background, and whose toponymic linked him to the nearby village of Prewilten.[2] More so than most of the other locals, Wissetünge had ample ground to convince his questioners that he knew the boundaries of the property in question. He claimed that he was over sixty years old (and thus carried enough gravitas to warrant belief) and that he had lived in the area his entire life. He also affirmed that the townspeople had possessed the wood for a long time, although not (as far as he knew) from the moment of the town's foundation.[3] The boundaries of the wood had existed for some time, and he did know these well. He explained that he had been a boy when the village of Schönborn was established on the other side of the wood. His father had received special permission from the new German settlers to collect kindling along the woodland fringes now in dispute—an area where the denser growth of the forest gave way to the more open heath on the other side.[4] Wissetünge would regularly walk through this brushland in the company of his father,

[2] Both *Wysse* and *Tunge* are common Prussian name elements. Prussian onomastic morphology was flexible, such that any stem name could stand alone, as a prefix, or as a suffix. See Reinhold Trautmann, *Die altpreußischen Personennamen*, 2nd ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1974), 110, 119–20, 158. Intriguingly, the village name recalls the name of one of the particularly prominent Prussian allies discussed in chapter two, who is said to come from Warmia.

[3] More precisely, the town of Mehlsack and its satellite villages (including Prewilten) belonged to the bishop's canons, in accordance with the papal mandate that, just as the Teutonic Order should distribute a third of its territory to the church, each bishopric should likewise grant a third of its territory to its respective cathedral chapter. Wissetünge claimed that the wood had come into the town's possession "during Johannes's tenure as provost."

[4] On the importance of woodlands in local peasant economies and the Order's liberal tendency to granting woodland usage rights, see Friedrich Mager, *Der Wald in Altpreußen als Wirtschaftsraum*, vol. 1 (Cologne: Böhlau, 1960), 153–54, 160–64, 249–51.

who taught him that this was where the boundaries lay between the lords of the Order and the church. Apart from those that his father had shown him, he knew no other boundaries.

Wissetünge's testimony is compelling for several reasons. It is, first and foremost, an extremely rare medieval record left by a non-elite Prussian. Wissetünge himself was at least two or three generations removed from Christian arrival in the area, but he was old enough to recall when Schönborn was a new settlement earlier in the century. Prewilten itself was some decades older. A charter for the village issued in 1282 to two Prussian brothers speaks to the area's longer colonial history.[5] The brothers, Wargin and Napergan, received their plots not according to Prussian law, but Kulm law.[6] The land itself, moreover, had once been cultivated. Its *locatio* was not a matter of intensive clearance, but the resettlement of land that had been vacated at some point during the region's conquest.

In the absence of further detail, the question of past possession hangs heavily above the flourish of episcopal munificence. It is almost certainly no coincidence that the brothers were granted land in the final throes of the Prussian rebellions. Whatever the circumstances of the brothers' own gift, the village retained an ambiguous ethnic association over the following decades, as new German communities formed around it. One later privilege refers to the "Prussian village of Prewilten" as an orientation point to describe the boundaries of property the chapter had carved out for its Advocate.[7] Forty-four years after the bishop had granted Wargin and Napergan their ploughland with German-law privileges, then, the canons' chancery in Frauenburg still

[5] CDW 1.59, pp. 105-6.

[6] The document names a certain Johannes as Schulze (*scultetus*), indicating that the Prussian brothers' property fell within the bounds of a planned or recently settled German village.

[7] CDW 1.235, p. 393: "abinde ad agros seu campum ville Petirswald ad silvam nostram damerowe versus villam pruthenicalem Prewylten."

labeled the village "Prussian." Also still signaling Prewilten's position at the intersection of legal and cultural spheres in 1389 were the names of its villagers questioned as witnesses: alongside Hildebrandt, Brun, and Claus, only Wissetünge clearly signaled his descent with his Prussian name.[8] We do not know whether the older generations of Wissetünge's family had continued living in the area during its resettlement or were new arrivals themselves. But his father may at least have carried trace memories of the region as it was when the village was newly established.

The town of Mehlsack also bears witness to the area's colonial history, even through its name alone. One modern local legend boasts that the town's coat of arms—a papal key crossed with a sword, surrounded by three sacks of flour—recalls the moment when its resourceful residents spilled their last sack of flour in order to dupe their seventeenth-century Swedish besiegers into believing they remained well-provisioned.[9] In fact, the sacks (*Sack*) of flour (*Mehl*) represent the German name that the town bore at least from 1312, when it received an episcopal charter, up until its transfer to Poland after the Second World War. But although "Mehlsack" seems fitting for a town serving as the administrative center of the Warmian canons, the name derived not from a thriving grain economy but from an earlier history of violent transfer. Before the arrival of German crusaders in the mid-thirteenth century, the Indigenous inhabitants of the forested river valley called their stronghold at its center *Malcekuke*, or "grove of the subterraneous ones."[10] The stronghold's Prussian name may have referenced the deities venerated in one of the nearby forests,

[8] We are left to wonder how the witnesses' clothing, appearance, and speech may have marked them in ways that are lost from the written record.

[9] "Nazwa i Herb," Miasto i Gmina Pieniężno, accessed April 1, 2021, http://pieniezno.pl/pl/contents/content/56/42.

[10] CDW 1.163, pp. 282-84. See Erich Weise, *Handbuch der historischen Stätten: Ost- und Westpreußen* (Stuttgart: Kröner, 1966), 139–40.

whose sacred past is evoked in a charter granted to the satellite village of Seefeld in 1325.[11] The canons may have remained ignorant of the name's potentially pagan connotations, or else simply ignored them. In any case, they took the territory with its native name, which unaccustomed German tongues gradually ground into a more palatable sack of flour.

But let us return to Wissetünge, whose testimony we can take as the product of multiple different encounters: between elites and non-elites, Indigenous and settler populations, local inhabitants and non-local officials, and, not least, between humans and the environment. Wissetünge's deposition—and the body of testimony as a whole—thus offers not only a striking medieval record of subaltern speech, but also a glimpse into how local people perceived the environment through the prism of daily experience, generational knowledge and memory, and official cadastral paradigms.[12] Drawing on the legal records of the Mehlsack-Schönborn dispute in particular, this chapter builds on the idea that Prussia's landscape emerged as the co-production of multiple groups—or, as Tom Johnson has recently formulated, as "a form of hybrid knowledge…produced in the interaction between official inquiries and vernacular responses."[13] Where the last chapter looked at Prussia's landscape primarily through the eyes of colonizing

[11] The charter granting permission for Seefeld's settlement (*locatio*) outlines a series of boundaries within a forested area between the castled *allodium* of "Pluth" (Plauten) and the field (*campum*) of "Wuppe." One of these is reached by "descending from the oak tree next to the lake down to the next marked boundary point set in the wood that the Prussians call 'the Sacred Wood'" (*de illa quercu iuxta lacum descendendo ad aliam graniciam in nemore quod a pruthenis Sanctum nemus dicitur positam et signatam*). CDW 1.221, pp. 375-76.

[12] The identification of legal records as a principal, if mediated, site for subaltern expression has a long history in both premodern and postcolonial studies. See especially Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *Montaillou: The Promised Land of Error*, trans. Barbara Bray (New York: George Braziller, 2008); Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller*, trans. John Tedeschi and Anne C. Tedeschi (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980); Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?," in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 271–313. For examples of witness testimony given in the adjudication of rural property-boundary disputes in high medieval Catalonia, see Jeffrey A. Bowman, *Shifting Landmarks: Property, Proof, and Dispute in Catalonia around the Year 1000* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004), esp. 169-73.

[13] Johnson, *Law in Common*, 155.

institutions, this chapter shifts the perspective to the people who dwelt in it, labored in it, and sometimes had disagreements about it. This was a living landscape in the constant process of being made and remade—a process that the fine-grain detail of these records offers more readily than the Handfesten alone.[14] Moreover, the body of evidence that the two inquests precipitated illustrates not only the administrative tools with which Prussia's colonizers sought to inscribe the legitimate contours of possession and use—surveys, perambulation, adjudication, and record-keeping—but also the role of local communities in maintaining these boundaries.[15] Wissetünge's testimony—especially the recollection of his boundary-conscious father—offers a telling example of how people living along the fault lines of possession acted in this capacity, while also illustrating how volatile these lines were.[16]

We will begin the investigation of this evidence by reconstructing, as clearly as possible, the circumstances that prompted the inquests, before focusing in on the details of the dispute as they surface from the body of testimony.

[14] I draw here on Tim Ingold especially. See, for example, *The Perception of the Environment: Essays in Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill*, 1–7; "Building, Dwelling, Living: How Animals and People Make Themselves at Home in the World," in *The Perception of the Environment: Essays in Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 172–88; "Materials against Materiality," *Archaeological Dialogues* 14 (2007): esp. 11-14.

[15] Johnson has also made this point about the late medieval English "legal landscape," which he calls "an exemplary instance of the way in which non-elites systematically sustained the operation of law. The landscape required constant labor to give it the appearance of stability." Johnson, *Law in Common*, 154.

[16] This was especially critical at the eastern border of the Warmia, which lacked the concretion and continuity of the Passarge river, which divided the chapter's territory from the Commandery of Elbing on the western side. For a recent appraisal of "narrativization" in the witness testimony of high-profile trials undertaken in the matter of the Order's forceful seizure of Pomerania, which the Polish crown also claimed, see Milliman, *The Slippery Memory of Men*, esp. 151-79.

II. *In loco granicarum*

The adjudication of the dispute between Mehlsack and Schönborn took place ten days after a similar inquest, also between a Teutonic village (Königsdorf) and a neighboring village belonging to the Warmian episcopate (Plausen), had been undertaken by the same four adjudicators. Put simply, both disputes concerned the use and possession of particular areas where long-recognized boundaries had frayed. We have already seen that this was, for Mehlsack and Schönborn, a certain woodland clearing. For Plausen and Königsdorf, it was a plot of ploughland adjacent to a certain stretch of woodland. The appointment of middle-to-high-ranking officials as the delegation carrying out these inquests suggests that the resolution of these disputes was a matter of some importance to both the Order and the Warmian bishop. A Teutonic priest from Marienburg numbered among them, as did the Archdeacon of Breslau (Wrocław), from even further afield. High-ranking canons from foreign archdioceses cannot have been expected to intervene in tiffs over every misaligned forest clearing or contested patch of beets; nor did local boundary disputes normally (if ever) leave behind such a voluminous paper trail in Prussia. Mehlsack, as the seat of the Warmian chapter, was a town of some importance; but this alone does not explain the energy invested in the adjudication. These particular disputes might have stood out as a referendum on the decades-long process that had fixed the political boundary between the Teutonic Order and Warmia, the most independent of the four Prussian dioceses.[17] It is perhaps no small matter that each resolution favored the bishop at a time when the Order—notorious for its aggressive territorial expansionism—was at the height of its power.

[17] Karp, *Grenzen in Ostmitteleuropa während des Mittelalters; ein Beitrag zur Entstehungsgeschichte der Grenzlinie aus dem Grenzsaum*, 8–13.

Both inquests nevertheless proceeded along entirely ordinary lines. The process as a whole began on November 26, 1389, when Bishop Henry Sorbom (r. 1373-1401) ordered that a conflict (*schelunge*) along his border with the Commandery of Balga required resolution.[18] The Commanders of Elbing and Balga met with the bishop to discuss the matter, and each side delegated authority to a chosen pair of officials.[19] In the mandate he issued afterwards, Henry outlined the course of action that the designated personnel would take, and the ensuing paper trail indicates that the inquest unfolded accordingly.[20] The four appointed arbitrators and their retinue proceeded first to a certain point along the boundaries between Plausen and Königsdorf on December 29, a Friday.[21] Here, they assembled the eldest members of the local communities "at the site of the boundary markers" (*in loco granicarum*)—in this case, a certain stone in the vicinity of Königsdorf, where a cross was set up as a designated place for the swearing of oaths—and sixteen witnesses testified as to "who has ever been and still remains in possession of the ploughland over which conflict had arisen" (see **Table 1**).[22] Attendant scribes recorded their

[18] GStA PK, XX. HA OBA 482, p. 1. The given date in the bishop's mandate is the "Friday after Saint Catherine's day [November 25]," which fell on a Thursday in 1389. The surviving record of Henry's proclamation is a creased, but otherwise unmarked paper copy. It lacks distinguishing authentication features like seals, signatures, or script hierarchy, but its top edge is cut in a sawtooth pattern suggesting it was produced as a chirograph—an attribution made by OBA 482's file notes. The document recording the terms of the Mehlsack-Schönborn settlement hints at the physical display of the bishop's proclamation in the twinned form of a chirograph to the crowds present in the course of the proceedings (see n29 below).

[19] The bishop appointed Nicolaus (Archdeacon of Breslau [Wrocław]) and Otto von Ragetteln (whose office goes unnamed); and the Commanders appointed Johannes Schulmeister (a priest-brother at Marienburg) and Claukon von dem Geylinfelde (like Otto, named without title). The arrangement left room for flexibility. An alternative member was allowed to stand in should one of the four appointees be unable to attend; and in fact, records from later in the process name a certain Grust von Wopyn as a replacement for Otto von Ragetteln. Furthermore, a fifth member could be added in case the four were unable to reach an agreement themselves; no such impasse seems to have arisen.

[20] Especially instructive in this regard are the summaries of the proceedings as recounted in each respective settlement agreement, the contents of which were read out in German to the crowd assembled at the close of each inquest.

[21] The feast day of Saint Thomas of Canterbury.

[22] CDW, vol. 3, no. 239, pp. 202-3: "tercia die mensis Januarii, hora terciarum vel quasi, in loco granicarum prope villam Künigsdorff penes quendam lapidem, in quo iacuit quedam Crux, super qua illi de Palusen cum suis testibus, tacta sancta Cruce eorum manibus, qui tangere poterant, realiter iuraverunt." GStA PK, XX. HA OBA 482, p. 1: "Wer

TABLE 1. WITNESSES DEPOSED IN THE PLAUSEN-KÖNIGSDORF INQUEST	
Tilo the Surveyor (*primus*)	Plausen
secundus	Königsdorf
tertius	Plausen
quartus	Königsdorf
quintus	Plausen
sextus (testimony ends abruptly)	Königsdorf
septimus	Plausen
octavus (no testimony recorded)	Königsdorf
nonus	Plausen
decimus (no testimony recorded)	Königsdorf
undecimus	Plausen
duodecimus	Königsdorf
tredecimus	Plausen
quattuordecimus	Königsdorf
quindecimus	*pro arbitris utriusque partis*
sedecimus	*pro arbitris utriusque partis*
Summary	
16 *total witnesses* **7** *representing Plausen* **7** *representing Königsdorf* **2** *unaligned*	
SIGNATORIES OF THE SETTLEMENT	
Wilhelm, *Waldmeister of Lünenburg*	Dytrich von Welkaym
Heinrich, *Schulze of Camyn*	Sander von Grunau
Claus Frieberg, *Schulze of Wuslauke*	Arneke Schafstete von Baydoyten
Hineze Smyt, *Schulze of Schelden*	Hannos Wulff von Bischofsteyn

The depositions of sixteen witnesses appear in the records of the inquest conducted to resolve the boundary dispute between Plausen and Königsdorf in January 1390. Only one, Tile "the Surveyor" (messer) is named; the rest are referred to only by the order in which they appear. Each witness's testimony is preceded by a heading that specifies whether the witness speaks pro Plausen or pro Königsdorf, with two witnesses said to speak "on behalf of each party" (pro arbitris utriusque partis). Seven witnesses testify for each party, but only four depositions appear for Königsdorf: sextus's deposition breaks off abruptly after he states his age, while octavus and decimus claim they "know nothing" about the dispute. The eight signatories of the adjudicators' final judgment five days later were named. These eight were mostly carriers of various local offices, varying from the Waldmeister of Lünenberg (the titular official in the neighboring Waldamt) to the Schulzen of three local villages (Camyn, Wuslauke, and Schelden). **Source:** GStA PK XX. HA, OBA 482 pp. 3-6.

in der besitzunge sy gewest und ist von aldirs des ackirs do dy schelunge umbe ist." This question's wording echoes throughout the depositions.

depositions, probably on wax tablets and apparently with minimal editorializing, duplicating the loose syntax and colloquial cadences of witnesses whose accounts were often rambling, vague, or inconsistent.[23] Strikeouts are abundant, and missing words or phrases are inserted as interlineal and marginal notations. A few days later, on January 3, the crowd gathered again to listen to the adjudicators read out, per Henry's instruction, "the documents of the agreements made between the Order and the church."[24] Based on the content of these said documents, the testimony of the gathered witnesses, and their own judgment, the arbitrators then announced their verdict that Plausen was in rightful possession of the disputed property. To render the decision legally binding, they instructed Plausen's village council to designate a certain number of inhabitants to serve as signatories to the act.[25] The entire process, from the day of their arrival until the final formalization of the settlement, had taken four days.[26]

[23] On the use of wax tablets in Prussia, see Thielen, *Verwaltung*, 19; Erich Keyser, "Ein Danziger Wachstafelzinsbuch in Kopenhagen," *Mitteilungen Des Westpreußischen Geschichtsvereins* 22 (1923): 1–5; Anton Bertling, "Die Wachstafeln der Danziger Stadtbibliothek," *Zeitschrift des Westpreußischen Geschichtsvereins* 11 (1884): 1–62.

[24] GStA PK, XX. HA OBA 482, p. 1: "Ouch sullen sy lesin dy brive dy uff dy berichtunngen sin gemachet und bestetiget czwischin der kirchen egenannt und deme orden." Henry presumably meant the dossier of records generated in the course of the inquest, including his initial mandate. It is conceivable, however, that he could have been referring to the border agreement reached between the Order and his predecessor, Johannes Stryprock (r. 1355-1373). Stryprock had notably countered the Order's opportunistic expansionism with a lawsuit that reached Avignon in 1371 for papal arbitration. Jan Kopiec and Mario Glauert, "Johannes Stryprock (Streifrock)," in *Die Bischöfe des Heiligen Römischen Reiches, 1198 bis 1448: ein biographisches Lexikon*, ed. Erwin Gatz and Clemens Brodkorb (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2001), 184; Jan Kopiec and Mario Glauert, "Heinrich Sorbom (Sauerbaum)," in *Die Bischöfe des Heiligen Römischen Reiches, 1198 bis 1448: ein biographisches Lexikon*, ed. Erwin Gatz and Clemens Brodkorb (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2001), 184–85.

[25] GStA PK, XX. HA OBA 482, p. 1: "Weme sy denne noch der selbin brive lute und geczugnis daz sy gehort habin czue teilen dy besitzunnge is sy Palusen von eyme teile ader Konige[sdorf]…von deme anderen teile, der sal von syme teile syne grenicze doselbist salb vii^{de} beczeugen uff den heiligin alz eyn recht czue spricht daz selbige mit allen artikeln vorgenannt."

[26] A four-day interim came between the arrival at the boundaries (December 29/January 8) and the enacting of a settlement agreement (January 3/January 13) in both cases. The period between the final Plausen-Schönborn settlement and the initial assembly of witnesses from Mehlsack and Schönborn was also four days.

After settling the matter between Plausen and Königsdorf, the delegation continued along the Warmian-Teutonic border in order to negotiate any other similar conflicts, as the bishop had ordered. It appears that this is how they learned of the dispute between Mehlsack and Schönborn, about forty miles to the northwest of where they had begun.[27] This next inquest proceeded like the first. The arbitrators summoned witnesses to gather on January 13 at a designated site between the village of Schönborn and a tract of woodland belonging to Mehlsack (see **Table 2**). As with Plausen and Königsdorf, a cross was set up at a certain boundary marker, except this time the chosen marker was not a stone, but the "stump or trunk" of a tree once known as the "Tilting Tree" or "Tilting Oak" (*Buckende Baum* or *Eiche*).[28] It is significant that the delegation chose the Tilting Tree's trunk as the assembly point. Not only had the oak evidently fallen down, but some witnesses may not have even recognized it as a boundary marker anymore—a point we will return to later. In any case, the locals who gathered at the site of the stump-mounted cross listened to Archdeacon Nicolaus as he read out, in German, the text of the bishop's orders, an identical copy of which, he assured them, was in the possession of each pair of adjudicators.[29] Eighteen witness depositions were taken, the boundaries were examined, and by January 15, the delegation had again reached a

[27] GStA PK, XX. HA OBA 482, p. 1: "dy selbin iiii ouch entrichten sullen andere schelunge uff greniczen dy do sin czwischin der kirchen und deme orden gebite czur Balge."

[28] The Latin text of the settlement surprisingly leaves out the tree's distinctive vernacular name, but does identify it as a boundary marker associated with Mehlsack's woodland: "In loco granicarum silve civium et civitatis Melzag et prope villam Schoneborn penes quendam stipitem sive truncum veterem…in quo iacuit quedam Crux, super qua ille de Melzag cum suis testibus, tacta sancta Cruce eorum manibus, qui tangere poterant, realiter iuraverunt." CDW 3.240, pp. 205-6.

[29] The recounting of the bishop's orders and the authorization of the four adjudicators follows the document as it appears on OBA 482, p. 1, with minor syntactic and orthographic differences. The reference to each side's retention of an identical copy of this document suggests that it was, in fact, a chirograph.

TABLE 2. WITNESSES DEPOSED IN THE MEHLSACK-SCHÖNBORN INQUEST		
Claus von Steynbotten	*about* 60 *years old*	Mehlsack
Ludeke Nagel vom Eichholz	*about* 80 *years old*	Schönborn
Dietrich von Steynbotten	*over* 50 *years old*	Mehlsack
Girdunne von Steynen	50 *years old*	Schönborn
Wissetünge von Perwilten	*over* 60 *years old*	Mehlsack
Claus Wilhin vom Lichtenfeld	50 *years old*	Schönborn
Hanneke Sprynteyn	40 *years old*	Schönborn
Siegfried von Steynbotten	50 *years old*	Mehlsack
Claus von Wilknitt	40 *years old*	Schönborn
Nicolaus von Wilknitt	60 *years old*	Schönborn
Bernd von Plauten	50 *years old*	Mehlsack
Fritze von Wilknitt	*over* 60 *years old*	Schönborn
Joneke von Wilknitt	38 *years old*	Schönborn
Glandyn von Pentun	50 *years old*	Mehlsack
Hildebrant von Perwilten	50 *years old*	Mehlsack
Cünczil von Schönborn		Mehlsack
Brun von Perwilten	*under* 50 *years old*	Mehlsack
Claus von Perwilten	50 *years old*	Mehlsack
Summary		
18 *total witnesses*		
10 *representing Mehlsack*		
8 *representing Schönborn*		
SIGNATORIES OF THE SETTLEMENT		
Herr Bernhard von der Vesten	Herr Kirstan, *"der Wytwen prister"*	
Claus von Steynbotten	Dietrich von Steynbotten	
Siegfried von Steynbotten	Tile von Steynbotten, *son of Siegfried*	
Nicolaus von Dirsau	Michel von der Schosnicz	
Hannus von Babeczin	Fritze von Wilknitt	
Claus von Wilknitt	Joneke von Wilknitt	
Nicolaus von Wilknitt		

The depositions of eighteen witnesses appear in the records of the inquest conducted to resolve the boundary dispute between Mehlsack and Schönborn in January 1390. Each deposition is preceded by a heading that specifies whether the witness speaks pro Mehlsack or pro Schönborn, then begins with the name and approximate age of the witness. Six witnesses have distinctively Prussian names: Ludeke Nagel, Girdunne, Wissetünge, Hanneke, Joneke, and Glandyn. The dispute's settlement agreement also lists thirteen signatories, five of whom also gave depositions. All the signatories appear to be inhabitants of local villages, except for Herr Bernhard von der Vesten (said to be a "lord of the Order") and Herr Kirstan, a priest. **Source:** GStA PK XX. HA, OBA 482 pp. 13-20.

decision. The arbitrators read out to the reassembled crowd the text of the settlement, to which a new group of witnesses appended their names.[30]

We do not know where the delegation went next. If they carried out further inquests along the contested border between the Order and its Warmian neighbors, the records do not seem to have survived. What documentation does survive, however, sheds light on the contours and textures of the boundary-making rituals that underlay the production of the Handfesten. Granted, such descriptive clauses probably only appeared in the record by way of legal instruments employed to smooth out unusually contentious disputes, as Hanna Vollrath has argued.[31] But even if the inquests that Henry Sorbom initiated in 1389 set off a more procedurally elaborate chain of events than was typical, they nonetheless illustrate the nature of the interactions between officials and locals as they came together in the co-production of the geography we explored in the last chapter. This process comprised a series of intensely oral and aural rituals, from individual depositions to public recitations of official records. And local inhabitants—repositories of memory and custodians of the bounded landscape—emerge from the extent documentation of the proceedings as critical agents in its performance in three main ways: (1) their testimony served as a principal source of context and evidence for the adjudicators' decision-making; (2) their formal recognition of the final decision constituted the apex of its legal ratification; and (3) their regular attendance to maintaining and recognizing the boundaries as described in the settlement made the legal fiction a day-to-day reality.

[30] Two notaries signed each settlement agreement. For the Plausen-Königsdorf case, these were Conrad Steynbuth (a Warmian cleric) and Hermann Hermanni Tarnow de Sterneberg (a cleric far afield from Schwerin, by Magdeburg in Germany). For the Mehlsack-Schönborn inquest, Conrad Steynbuth was there again, this time with another Warmian cleric, Nicolaus Sonnefeld de Melzag, whose name indicates some association with the chapter's town. Eight witnesses are named in the first, eleven in the second.

[31] Hanna Vollrath, "Rechtstexte in der oralen Rechtskultur des früheren Mittelalters," 329–30. Cf. above, p. 220n79.

It is not surprising, then, that the legal proceedings took place *in loco granicarum*. Whether by the stone near Königsdorf, at the fallen oak tree on the edge of the Mehlsack burghers' woodlands, or at any of the other *granicie* traversed in the course of the officials' perambulations, the gathering of local inhabitants in the presence of their boundary markers attests not only to their totemic materiality, but also to the practical importance of their recognition as legally significant objects. We can imagine the witnesses pointing to, gesturing at, and moving among the landmarks, images of which the depositions conjure in varying degrees of focus, from peripheral awareness to intimate familiarity. These records of testimony therefore offer a rare window into how local people in Prussia perceived and interacted with the boundaries that divided their world.

III. The Roots of the Matter

The dispute between Plausen and Königsdorf concerned, ostensibly, the possession of a certain plot of ploughland and the stretch of woodland adjoining it. General consensus among the eleven witnesses with anything to say on the matter (even among those testifying on behalf of Plausen) held that the villagers of Königsdorf had first cleared a space in the woods some years ago, which they had then sown with beet seeds. Things changed about twenty years earlier, however, when surveyors operating at the behest of Ulrich Fricke, the Commander of Balga (1361-1371), drew a boundary across the cleared land such that Königsdorf's ploughland now fell within the territory of the bishop.[32] Now that they officially had the right, the villagers of Plausen took to clearing and sowing the arable themselves. If there had been contention beforehand that prompted Ulrich

[32] This would have been right around 1371, when Bishop Johannes Stryprock forced the Order to a new agreement on their shared borders, which must have sent smaller tremors (the Commander's actions among them, perhaps) along the fault line between their territories.

Fricke's intervention (as some witnesses claimed), it seems to have subsided for a time.[33] "The people of Königsdorf sowed the land under dispute" about twenty-five or twenty-six years ago, recalled witness *secundus* in a summary of the events that followed the survey, "and the people of Plausen cleared, sowed, and made use of the same land peacefully, up until a year or two ago, when a misunderstanding arose between the bishop's underlings [*diener*] and Königsdorf, which often laid claim to the ploughland."[34] His account generally matches what the other witnesses had to say on the matter.[35]

In the second case, eighteen witnesses gathered to testify on behalf of Mehlsack and Königsdorf. Some of them appear to have been related, even though no one makes direct mention of any family ties. A document issued three years later, for example, records the chapter's acquiescence to the bishop's request that three brothers named Nicolaus, Siegfried, and Theoderich von Steynbotten be released from manual labor dues, and instead pay a yearly tax—a telling detail about the middling status of the witnesses chosen: smallholders recently freed from Scharwerk dues.[36] We can assume that these were the same Claus, Siegfried, and Dietrich von Steynbotten

[33] *Septimus* attested, for example, that "there was contention between Plausen and Königsdorf until the Commander Lord Fricke of Balga and Lord Hannos von der Leysse and Lord Balburn had the boundaries laid out." GStA PK, XX. HA OBA 482, p. 4.

[34] GStA PK, XX. HA OBA 482, p. 3: "Item her spricht dy von Konigesdorf haben daz gesellet dorumme dy schelunge ist. Und dy von Palusen han daz selbege gerümet beseet unde genossen fredelich bis an di czyt also no vur eyne iare adir vur czwen. Do was wol eyne irunge czwichen des bischofs diner unde Konige uf der schelunge unde Konig hat is uft an gesprochen den acker."

[35] *Septimus* claimed that "he had not heard that there was any strife since the time the lords set the boundaries, except what [recently] arose two years ago" (*unde von der czeit als dy hern dy greniczen saczen habe her nicht gehort daz do czweitracht sy gewest sundir was* [*nu*] *geschen ist bei czwen iaren*); and *tredecimus* that "the people of Plausen sowed half [the land] and peacefully held it since then until two years ago" (*ouch spricht her her weis…daz sy en* [*halb*] *geseyt haben dy von Palusen und fredelich gehabt han bis her uf czwey iar*). GStA PK, XX. HA OBA 482, pp. 4, 5.

[36] CDW 3.278, p. 250. The pound of wax was a ubiquitous (and largely symbolic) form of taxation called the *Marcpfund*, collected annually on Saint Martin's day. Legal boilerplate associated with the tax stated that it was levied "in recognition" of seigneurial authority, lending it a second name, the *Rekognitionszins*.

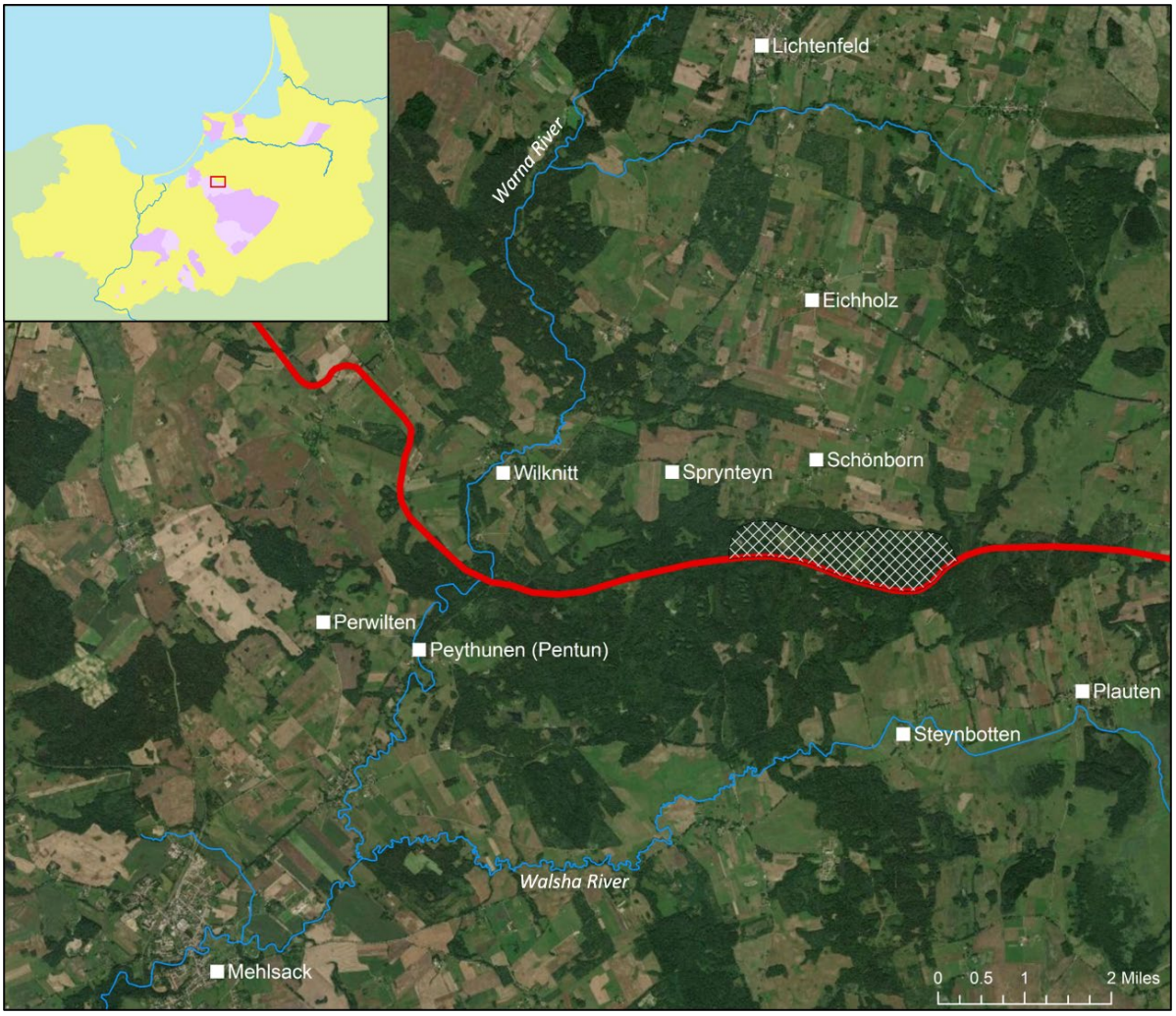


Figure 15. Map of the area around Mehlsack and Schönborn, marking towns and villages involved in the inquest of January 1390. The red line marks the division between the territory of the Teutonic Order (to the north) and that of the Warmian cathedral chapter (to the south). The white crosshatched segment approximates the area of the hegewald under dispute.

who provided depositions and also appeared as signatories of the final settlement.[37] Compared to the Plausen-Königsdorf case, there was considerably less consensus among the witnesses as to how the conflict had arisen. They did, however, generally share the opinion that the conflict centered on a certain stretch of brambly woodland (*hegewald*) that lay close to Schönborn, but belonged to Mehlsack (see **Figure 15**). The circumstances under which the *hegewald* came into dispute illustrate in finer detail how local memory could come to diverge from official record. To

[37] Claus and Dietrich are diminutives for Nicolaus and Theoderich.

investigate this process, then, we need to see the disputed landscape, as best as we can, through the eyes of its inhabitants, whose descriptions not only deviated in telling ways from the formulations in the adjudicators' questions, but also from one another.[38]

Let us start with what we know about the property under dispute. The *hegewald* appears neither in Mehlsack's original 1312 charter, nor in the recapitulation of the town lands' boundaries in 1326.[39] The surrounding woodlands may have always tacitly belonged to the town, but it was not until well after Mehlsack's founding that they had begun to be apportioned into more precise property units. The witnesses referred frequently to two of these plots, which they called the "Twelve Hufen" (most closely associated with the *hegewald* itself) and the "Six Hufen" (associated with the adjacent moor, or *heide*).[40] Ludeke Nagel, who claimed to be around eighty years old, declared that the Twelve Hufen did not belong to the town at its foundation, but only about forty years later on. This would have meant that the *hegewald* came into the town's possession some time in the 1330s or 1340s. Cünczil von Schönborn (in fact a resident of Mehlsack)simply recalled that it was a long time before the plot was purchased, while Wissetünge (the Prussian from Prewilten) believed it was "when Johannes was provost," although he was not sure when this was. The purchase of the Six Hufen, on the other hand, stuck out much more clearly in the witnesses' minds, and not only because it had occurred more recently. They remembered it in connection to a survey of the moor (*heide*) that the chapter had conducted about thirty years ago

[38] An interrogatory exists only for the Mehlsack-Schönborn dispute: GStA PK, XX. HA OBA 482, p. 11.

[39] CDW 1.163, pp. 282-84; 1.229, pp. 384-86.

[40] Taken together, the total eighteen Hufen still would have covered only slightly more than one square mile of woodland (about 300 hectares or 750 acres). More of it may have been left un-surveyed or else lay outside of the specific area under discussion. Alternatively, it is possible that even as the plots themselves shrank or expanded, the old names stuck.

on the town's behalf.[41] So we see over a period of fifty to sixty years how a certain tract of woodland—largely hidden, it seems, from official view—was gradually partitioned. This slow process unfolded beyond the purview of officials on either side of the border, and the witnesses themselves remembered it rather hazily, if at all. It is striking, then, how the major survey surfaces from the mist, indicating how the interpolation of officialdom could leave an imprint on local memory, yet only limitedly upon the landscape itself.

From here, the testimony only becomes more fractured. There was little agreement over when or how ambiguity had arisen regarding the boundaries of either the *hegewald* (the Twelve Hufen) or the *heide* (the Six Hufen). For one thing, it was only Mehlsack's witnesses who asserted that there was any conflict at all. Cünczil argued that the boundary mix-up began around twenty years ago, following a Teutonic survey of contested legality (we will return to this later), and Claus claimed that Schönborn's villagers had actually begun moving into the *hegewald* less than ten years ago. A man named Glandyn, from the village of Peythunen, relayed the most detailed story of the dispute's evolution. He claimed it began when certain inhabitants of Schönborn entered the *hegewald* and began to clear it, even though the land had lain within Mehlsack's *de facto* possession for some time. Glandyn's testimony suggests that this may have been more accidental than purposeful—not a willful act of trespassing, but a matter of over-clearance across an unclear boundary line. Glandyn intimated, in any case, that it had only really become a point of contention within the last year or so.

[41] Both Siegfried von Steynbotten and Cünczil placed the event twenty-eight years ago exactly (Siegfried calls it a survey, and Cünczil calls it a purchase). Claus and Dietrich von Steynbotten both said it was over thirty years ago. Claus's recollection of the survey fixates particularly on the swearing of oaths, while Dietrich associated it with the first exploitation of the contested plot of land.

What emerges from the body of testimony as a whole is the ambiguity of possession in the colonized landscape. As Mehlsack gradually acquired (or at least formalized) legal proprietorship of the woodlands, neighboring villages did not always congruently adjust their own patterns of clearance and use. Such continuity need not have constituted either outright defiance or ignorance of these changes in ownership, but amounted to something more of a middle ground. Informal arrangements normalized the permeability of legal boundaries, as when Wissetünge's father had negotiated with the newly settled villagers of Schönborn an allowance to collect timber in their part of the woods. So here we have both villagers and officials grappling with the same underlying problem of how to inhabit, utilize, and measure with any fixity a countryside in constant motion. The loud silence of Schönborn's witnesses on the matter not only suggests an unwillingness to acknowledge any transgression, but seems also to reflect this ambiguity.

The sharing of land through informal agreements, moreover, resisted the neat cadastral lines along which the formal acts of administrative officials were inscribed. The adjudicators, for their part, did not name either the Six or Twelve Hufen in their questions, even though these two plots surface from the testimony as the witnesses' focal points in the disputed landscape. They focused instead on the rightful possession and use of a certain "clearing" or "recess" (*wynkel*) in the *hegewald*, asking whether there were any recognized boundaries that divided these otherwise permeable spaces. There was no doubt, in other words, that the *hegewald* itself belonged to Mehlsack. In fact, the adjudicators at least understood the wood to be a boundary in itself, on one side of which lay Mehlsack and on the other, Schönborn. But what complicated this division—from the perspective of *both* locals and intervening officials—was the recess in the wood on its Schönborn-facing side, which had evidently formed over years of gradual clearance. Herein lay the importance of clarifying the ambiguous evidence of the recess's use, a long enough legacy of

which could have constituted a solid legal foundation to claim possession, even in contradiction to written record. Recourse to this Roman-law concept of prescription was a common form of legal legerdemain in medieval property litigation, especially among lay claimants.[42] Beyond the practical issue of ownership, however, the particular nature of the ambiguities at the root of the matter prompted an even thornier question: was the recess still part of the wood, or had it been assimilated into the open field through clearance and use?

Such an abstraction may seem, at a glance, too hypothetical to have been of much concern to the adjudicators as they attended a rather marginal dispute. But this very routineness indicates the extensive cracks running through the foundation of the legal paradigm they sought to enforce. If the features they designated to mark the contours of the partitioned landscape were thesmelves so changeable, how permanent could the order be that they were supposed to reify?

IV. The Trunk That Was the Tilting Tree

When the adjudicators enacted their judgment on the property division between Mehlsack and Schönborn, they read out a description of the new boundaries to the crowd assembled at the trunk of the Tilting Tree.[43] The description comprised four distinct landmarks, which the delegation recited in succession from west to east (**Table 3**). If relatively brief, the description follows the regular format we saw earlier in the Handfesten, conveying a sense of guided movement from one

[42] On the theory of prescription, see Barry Nicholas, *An Introduction to Roman Law* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), 120–29. For illustrative examples of the law in practice, see Daniel Lord Smail, *The Consumption of Justice: Emotions, Publicity, and Legal Culture in Marseille, 1264–1423* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003), 219–21; Bowman, *Shifting Landmarks*, 47–50, 169–70.

[43] The German text of the boundary clause stands out in the Latin record of the settlement, illustrating the argument of Patrick Geary and others that such descriptions represent an imprint of vernacular orality on the written record.

Table 3. The Boundaries and Landmarks between Mehlsack and Schönborn		
von der eychen, die eyne ortgrenicze ist czwischen Wilkenite und Schonenborn und steet bey dem hegewalde der Stat czu Melzag	From the oak tree that is an *ortgrenicze* between Wilknitt and Schönborn, and stands by Mehlsack's *hegewald*.	**"The Wilknitt Oak"**
gerichte zu geende uf den Stok, dor uf eyne czweselechte buckende geczeichente Eyche gestanden hat, und von alders eyne grenicze gewest ist und noch ist	Straight on to the stump, atop which a forked, bent-over, and marked oak tree used to stand, and which has always been and still remains a boundary point [*grenicze*].	**"The Tilting Tree"**
und von demselben Stöcke zu geende gerichte uf eyne kleine umbgeschatte geczeichente Eyche bey dem lantwege, in dem heydechen und von alders eyne grenicze gewest ist und noch ist	To a small, reinforced, and marked oak tree by the main road, in the little moor, which has also always been and still remains a boundary point.	**"The Little Oak"**
und von der selben kleinen Eychen gerichte czu geende uf die Erle, die do steet bey dem flysse Grabelle	To the alder tree that stands by the Grabelle stream.	**"The Alder"**

The settlement agreement enacted by the adjudicators of the Mehlsack-Schönborn dispute described the boundaries between Mehlsack's hegewald and the village of Schönborn as they appear above. The segments of the description join at four distinctive landmarks, which I will henceforth refer to by the names designated here in the righthand column. Besides minor orthographic and syntactic differences, the formula as it appears in the settlement document matches the oath preserved in the records of the inquest. **Sources:** CDW 3.240, p. 204 (agreement); GStA PK, XX. HA OBA 482, p. 7 (oath).

landmark to the next, which it evokes using the same vocabulary and syntax.[44] Unlike the descriptions in the Handfesten, however, this one offers a view into the process of its creation, where the divergent accounts of witnesses informed a visiting delegation tasked with their concordance. The agreement presumably held for years to come, altering local topography and

[44] I have not found a Handfeste for Mehlsack or Schönborn from after 1390, but it is safe to assume that the description as it was recorded in the settlement document would have been copied into it (pending further alteration).

memory, at least for a time. The younger villagers and townspeople would no doubt remember, thirty years later, when Nicolaus the Archdeacon from Breslau had headed a delegation of Teutonic and episcopal officials to conduct an inquest and survey of the *hegewald*, just as they (if rather dimly by now) recalled such interventions in decades past. But rather than taking the boundary description as an imprint of the landscape it made, here it serves as a starting point for moving backwards in time, in order to see the landscape in its unmaking.[45] Piecing together the fragments of this process captures a slow-shutter image of local boundaries not as the permanent fixtures of the landscape that the Handfesten sought to project, but as constantly mutating products of negotiation, maintenance, and ecological cycles.

The witnesses who assembled to share their knowledge of the existing boundaries agreed on relatively little. But they did, almost to a head, name a certain alder tree as a terminus.[46] The Alder itself must have been easy to identify, given such universal recognition in an otherwise thorny body of testimony. And since most of the witnesses had little to say about it, its distinguishing features must have been self-evident. One mentioned that in addition to being marked with some symbol, it was encircled with a reinforcing bank of soil or stones—a common feature ascribed to a variety of boundary markers in the Handfesten. It was also removed from the woodlands to its west, standing instead in the open fields belonging to the neighboring village of Plauten, and close to a stream called the Grabelle. The tree had existed as a boundary for a long time—twenty years according to one, and thirty according to two others. It had not prompted any disagreement at the time of the survey that the Order conducted about twenty-two years earlier in

[45] On "dematerialization" as a process of making, see Ingold, "Materials against Materiality," 10–11.

[46] Of the sixteen with anything to say on the matter, all but one identified the Alder as the final point in a series of two or more; the sixteenth identified it as the first.

the late 1360s, and had probably already been widely recognized ten years before that, when the chapter carried out its own survey of the Six-Hufen plot associated with the *heide*. At the opposite end of the boundary line from the Alder stood a certain oak tree dividing the settlements of Wilknitt, Schönborn, and Mehlsack, according to almost every account. There was some variety in its description, however. To most witnesses it was a single tree, alternatively called the "Wilknitt oak" or the "Wilknitt *grenicze.*" But some named it instead as a group of three oak trees, the middle of which was the one that mattered.[47] That the three-oak location and the more commonly attested single oak were two ways of referring to the same boundary point is clear from context, and three accounts naming the Wilknitt Oak and the Tilting Tree (also an oak) as independent landmarks rule out the possibility that these were different names for the same tree. On the contrary, no account named both the single oak and the three oaks—further evidence that these were, in fact, different ways of describing the same landmark, or at least the same location.

In sum, where the boundary stopped or started was evidently not in dispute. The Alder and the Wilknitt Oak (or three-oak cluster) held enough recognition as terminuses of the boundary between Mehlsack's *hegewald* and Schönborn's fields that the adjudicators conveyed it in their final judgment. With just one exception (we will return shortly to Girdunne von Steynen's reference to the Little Oak as an intermediate point), Schönborn's witnesses referenced *only* the Alder and the Wilknitt Oak in their depositions. The issue, in other words, was what divided the intervening miles of woodland—the *hegewald*, a supposed boundary in itself, whose frayed edges emerge hazily from the jumbled accounts of Mehlsack's witnesses.

[47] Eight of sixteen witnesses refer to an "oak tree" (once, the "middle oak tree"). They were split almost evenly between representatives of Mehlsack (three) and of Schönborn (five). Five said the tree divided Wilknitt and Schönborn; two that it divided Wilknitt, Schönborn, and Mehlsack; and one simply that it was the "Wilkniter grenicze." Four further witnesses (two from each Mehlsack and Schönborn) referred instead to "a *grenicze* where the three oaks stand."

The two intermediate boundary markers that the adjudicators recorded in the final agreement, the Little Oak and the Tilting Tree, bore certain similarities to the Alder and the Wilknitt Oak. As with the Alder, a stone or soil embankment encircled the Little Oak, which also bore a distinguishing mark. Claus von Steynbutte reckoned that it had stood next to a country road (*lantweg*) for around fifty years (most of his own sixty-five), and Cünczil (who, as we saw earlier, had for some time resided in Schönborn before relocating to Mehlsack) associated it with a shady copse of beech trees.[48] Cünczil also clearly ascribed its designation as a boundary marker to the people of Mehlsack, recalling that "during Lord Fricke's time as the Commander of Balga, the Little Oak was marked as a boundary point; and it was the townspeople of Mehlsack who did this."[49]

The active role that the townspeople evidently took in designating the Little Oak as a *grenicze* contrasts starkly with its virtual absence from the accounts of Schönborn's witnesses. Of the ten locals attesting to the boundary's existence, only one, Girdunne von Steinen, represented Schönborn. Girdunne's recollection of his participation in a Teutonic survey conducted twenty-three years ago hints at the diplomatic sensitivity of surveys along this fault line of possession in the years leading up to Bishop Johannes Stryprock's papal suit against the Order in 1371. At the behest of Ulrich Fricke, the surveyor Claus Wichmann and his men arrived one December day at the Wilknitt Oak, where a group of local villagers joined them.[50] The group included Girdunne,

[48] GStA PK, XX. HA OBA 482, p. 13. Dietrich von Steynbutte similarly claimed the Little Oak had existed as a boundary point for over forty years. On the family relationship between Dietrich and Claus, see p. 276 above.

[49] GStA PK, XX. HA OBA 482, p. 18: "bey herrn Vricken geczyten do der kumpter czur Balge was do czeychente man ~~her~~ die cleyne Eyche czu eynir greniczen und das taten die Burger von Melsag." Cünczil curiously proceeded to claim to know nothing "about the [Little] oak tree and beech thicket that the Schulze recognized [following a past survey]" (*von der eychen und von der haynbuchen die der Schulcze wyste do weys her nicht von*).

[50] Among those in attendance was Hanecke, *Kämmerer* of Bornayn. The office of *Kämmerer* was held by men of Prussian descent, and oversaw the local administration of Prussian villages.

who remembered advising the surveyors against straying onto foreign property (*fremder leute gut*) as they carried out their measurements. The party accordingly stopped first in Mehlsack, where two men obliged their request that representatives of the town accompany them on their circuit of the boundaries.[51] Beginning again from the Three Oaks, the newly expanded group headed first to the Little Oak then to the Alder, taking measurements by "dragging a chain across the open field," as another witness reported, and swearing an oath at each point to affirm that there was no known dispute along the way. Girdunne's story offers a telling glimpse of the survey in practice, where a mixed company of local people and designated officials recorded mathematically precise measurements in the course of their conventional perambulation.[52] It illustrates the growing influence of regular surveying practices discussed in the last chapter, but also the continued reliance of officials on the knowledge and standing of their local companions.

If surveyors failed to acquire the consent of local people, their official interpolation into the rural landscape could sow the seeds for future conflict, years or even decades later. Cünczil von Schönborn's conflicting account of the same survey serves as an example. In contrast to Girdunne, who attributed the survey to the initiative of Commander Fricke, Cünczil claimed that it had taken place at Mehlsack's request. Moreover, the townspeople had pressured Schönborn's Schulze to participate in the event "without the permission of the [Teutonic] lords and against the

[51] GStA PK, XX. HA OBA 482, p. 15: "do sprach Girdunn, wir wellen fremder leute gut nicht messen, sie syn den kegenwortig und struten in die…Stat czu Melsag zu den Burgern, und empoten das sie czur irn greniczen qwemen, und qwomen zu yn czwene Bladye und Sonnenfelt und woren do bey das sie an huben an selbigen dryn Eychen."

[52] Like the 1390 inquest, the survey twenty years prior resembles common medieval practice. It is worth noting that the scribe copying the testimony was evidently so accustomed to writing "richte want"—one of the most common linear boundaries structures discussed in the last chapter—that he slipped up when recording the detail about the oath-swearing, emending "eyn richte want" to "eyn richt sagen."

will of the peasants."[53] The survey began with the Little Oak, which Cünczil claimed was only marked as a boundary at this time although it had been there since the region's first major outbreak of bubonic plague ("the first great death") between 1348 and 1350.[54] From here, Cünczil's account grows stranger still. He claimed to "know nothing of the oak" (which oak he meant is unclear), nor of a certain "beech thicket" (*haynbuche*) unique to his account. Instead, he insisted on the significance of a different tree, also peculiar to his deposition: a bent-over fir tree bearing a distinctive burn mark "older than any others by which Schönborn's villagers have abided."[55] By failing to recognize the fir tree in particular as a legitimate boundary point, Cünczil asserted that the survey had become the source of current contention. "Before this time," Cünczil concluded, "they never had any confusion."[56]

These ripples of alleged irregularity suggest deeper fissures, both in the reliability of the testimony and in the legitimacy of the procedures meant to formalize the disputed boundaries. If Cünczil was telling the truth, the controversy he revealed makes it all the more doubtful that only one of Schönborn's eight attendant witnesses would have known about the Little Oak. Perhaps Schönborn's witnesses, believing the recess in the woodland to be the rightful possession of those who had worked it for so many years, denied their knowledge of certain boundaries in the face of the area's unjust retraction. Alternatively, they may have wanted to avoid speaking out against the

[53] GStA PK, XX. HA OBA 482, p. 18: "und dorczu wart bebotet der Schulcze vom Schonenborn und der quam darczu ane der herren Orlowb und wider der gebawr willen."

[54] GStA PK, XX. HA OBA 482, p. 18: "und die Eyche die do lygt hat gelegen sieder der irsten Sterbe."

[55] GStA PK, XX. HA OBA 482, p. 18. Cünczil's description of the fir tree reads as follows: "von der eychen und von der haynbuchen die der Schulcze wyste do weys her nicht von, sunder von der Tannen die neder gebrochen ist…der schalm der in der tannen ist ~~dohaben sie sich angehalden~~ der ist elder denne die andern do haben ~~halden~~ sie sich an gehalden die vom Schonenborn." The strikethroughs here suggest a disruption in the rhythm of Cünczil's testimony.

[56] GStA PK, XX. HA OBA 482, p. 18: "und der messer der hat sie vorwirren mit guten lewten der sie gewyset hat von der Erlen uff die Eyche [the Tilting Tree], und das mag syn bey xx iaren, und vor der czyt hatten sie keyne verwerrunge."

village Schulze or his successor. But what did Cünczil have to gain, now that he lived under the jurisdiction of the chapter? Had he been one of the peasants against whose better judgment the Schulze had acted, and sought some measure of vengeance by slandering him as a rule-breaker and blaming him, implicitly, for the strife between the two communities?[57] It is by no means certain, in any case, that his account—full of detail, but riddled with inconsistencies—was more reliable than any other, nor does the evidence at hand offer enough information to speculate much on the motives that shaped each witness's testimony. But there is enough peeking above the surface of the legal apparatus that we can glimpse the tensions beneath it.

As curious as the Schönborn witnesses' reticence regarding the Little Oak may be, their complete silence about the Tilting Tree is even more suspicious. The Tilting Tree stands in the testimony as the most distinctive landmark by far, not only for its distinctive shape or its selection as the site of assembly throughout the inquest, but also because its collapse seems to have catalyzed the whole dispute. Each witness representing Mehlsack described the tree in some detail, especially its characteristic curvature and the splitting of its trunk into two upper branches.[58] They primarily associated it with the Twelve-Hufen plot, where it stood by a mill powered by one of the brooks flowing through the wood. Dietrich von Steynbuthe, for example, remarked that he knew "that the *ortgrenicze* of the Twelve Hufen was an oak tree that stood bowed by the mill, marked with a cross that had been chiseled into it."[59] Claus von Steynbuthe also described an *ortgrenicze* of the Twelve

[57] On the function of late medieval courts as public venues for pursuing private vendettas, see especially Smail, *The Consumption of Justice*, 29–88. Bowman makes a similar observation of rural property disputes, albeit in an earlier context, in *Shifting Landmarks*, 169–73.

[58] Only one witness, Claus von Prewilten, described the tree's branches this way (*oben czweselechtig*). GStA PK, XX. HA OBA 482, p. 19. Nevertheless, this detail was repeated in the Mehlsack witnesses' final confirmation oath. OBA 482, p. 7; CDW 3.240, p. 205.

[59] GStA PK, XX. HA OBA 482, p. 14: "ym ist wissentlich das von der ortgrenczen der xii huben die eyne Eyche was…und czu dem mole stunt und buckende was und geczeynchent [*sic*] mit eyme Creucze an gehauen wart."

Hufen as an oak tree by the mill. In contrast to Dietrich, however, the tree Claus described was not bending over, but lying on the ground.[60] Siegfried, the third witness from Steynbuthe, used the same phrase as Claus, but helpfully added that "it used to be called the Tilting Tree."[61] As other witnesses related rather less periphrastically, the Tilting Tree had finally fallen over. What "used to be a bowed and marked oak tree, and also a *grenicze*," was now a "rotted trunk."[62]

Glandyn and Wissetünge proved the most informative about this recent event. Although admittedly unsure as to whether the disputed clearing belonged to the town or to the villagers (he guessed it was rightfully Mehlsack's), Glandyn asserted that he knew the *hegewald* well, having hunted there since his youth. He had recognized the boundaries between Mehlsack and the lords of the Order for twenty or thirty years.[63] Two of these boundaries had undergone recent changes: (1) a certain post between the Wilknitt Oak and the Tilting Tree had been uprooted; and (2) a rotted trunk now lay in the place where the Tilting Tree used to stand.[64] Wissetünge appears to have been less confident in his account, even though he asserted, like Glandyn, that he had known the woods

[60] GStA PK, XX. HA OBA 482, p. 13. Claus calls the tree the "legende ortgrenicze."

[61] GStA PK, XX. HA OBA 482, p. 16: "und den legenden bowm, der do hys der buckende bowm." If Dietrich, Claus, and Siegfried were all related, the differences among their accounts here are all the more striking.

[62] GStA PK, XX. HA OBA 482, p. 18. These were the words of Hildebrandt von Prewilten: "eynen fulen ronen der eyne buckende geczeichende eyche was und eyne grenicze was." Cünczil von Schönborn (p. 18) related "that the rotted trunk was a marked boundary point while the oak tree stood" (*das der fule rone sye eyne geczeichende grenicze gewest die wyle die Eyche stunt*). Brun von Prewilten (p. 19) also made a similar observation.

[63] GStA PK, XX. HA OBA 482, p. 17.

[64] GStA PK, XX. HA OBA 482, p. 17: "von der greniczen die do scheydet Wilkeniten und Schonenborn do die drey Eychen steen, gyng die grenicze uff eynen pfol, der ist nu usgeczogen, und von dem pfol uff eyne Buckende Eyche, do nu eyn ful rone lygt, und von dannen uf eyn cleyn Eychlyn bey dem wege."

Only two other witnesses referred in passing to the post in Glandyn's description: Hildebrandt and Claus von Prewilten (pp. 18, 19), both representing Mehlsack. According to Claus, it "used to stand" (*stunt*) between the Wilknitt boundary and the recently fallen Tilting Tree.

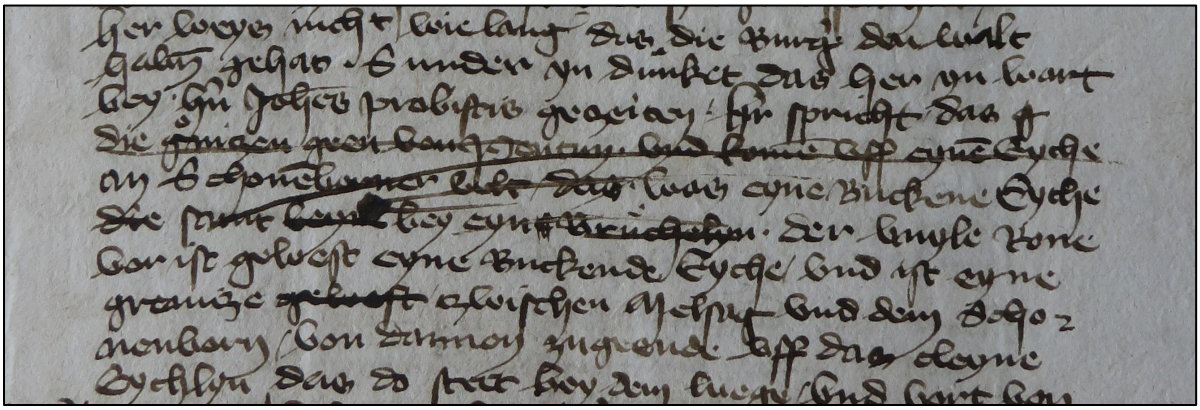


Figure 16. Wissetünge describes the Tilting Tree. **Source:** GStA PK, XX. HA OBA 482, p. 15. Author photo, by permission of the Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin.

since childhood. A tangle of strikethroughs clutters his description of the Tilting Tree's remains, which constituted the first of the three points he named (**Figure 16**).[65] In the portion that the scribe (mostly) struck from the record, Wissetünge described the tree itself as "an oak tree in Schönborn's fields, which was a Tilting Oak that stooped over a little brook." This description, if rather choppy in its written form, did not diverge in any marked way from other witnesses' accounts. Why, then, did the scribe strike so much of it from the record? A certain quirk in the syntax of the deposition's written form hints at an explanation. The particular patterning of strikethroughs echoes a halting uncertainty in Wissetünge's speech, suggesting some degree of confusion about whether the fallen tree remained a valid boundary marker. After he described the tree, Wissetünge seems to have doubled back to correct himself. And no doubt gesturing to the *granicia* around which the inquest's participants had gathered, he abruptly shifted his attention to "the rotted trunk." At first, the scribe had written that "the rotted trunk *was* once a Tilting Oak, and *used to be* a boundary point between Mehlsack and Schönborn." But he subsequently crossed out the second past participle, *gewest*,

[65] GStA PK, XX. HA OBA 482, p. 15: "die greniczen geen von Pentun und komen uff eynen [*sic*] Eyche an Schonenborner velt, das was eyne Buckene [*sic*] Eyche die stunt beyn bey eyn brüchelyn der vuyle rone vor ist gewest eyne Buckende Eyche, und ist eyne grenicze gewest czwischen Melsag und dem Schonenborn."

rewriting this key line of testimony to say, instead, that the rotted trunk "*is* a boundary point," still.[66]

V. Conclusion: After the Fall

It is, of course, impossible to reconstruct this encounter between the elderly Prussian smallholder and his questioners in full detail. Nevertheless, this meandering between past and present—whether the exact words of the witness or the self-correction of a scribe endeavoring to follow them—conveys the ambiguity in the tree's identification as a boundary. When the Tilting Tree fell, its legal function likewise fell into doubt. Perhaps Schönborn's villagers welcomed this change as an opportunity to assert possession of the clearing, or maybe it just exacerbated preexisting uncertainties. Either way, as Wissetünge's testimony illustrates, the boundary existed somewhere between past and present time, a phantom of the Tilted Tree that lay moldering on the ground. The dispute that its fall had prompted was deeply rooted in a number of interlocking factors: the over-clearance of woodlands in the course of settlement; conflicting ideas of ownership; the fallibility of official surveys; and, not least, the variability of memory and experience. Most importantly, however, the felicitous paper trail that the Mehlsack-Schönborn inquest left behind allows us to see that this was no simple matter of official intervention in a local squabble gone awry. The straightforward clarity of the new boundary description as it was recorded in the settlement agreement (and as it would have proceeded into future Handfesten) belied something much more complicated. A product of translation and negotiation between multiple circles of local people and officials, the resolution again illustrates the hybridity of the cadastral landscape that Prussia's colonizers sought to materialize.

[66] All emphases added.

CHAPTER FIVE: PATHS THROUGH PATHLESS PLACES

I. The Promised Land and the Pagan Empire

Chapters three and four focused on the interior landscapes of Prussia under the rule of its Christian colonizers—what the Teutonic Order's chronicles imagined as a northern Promised Land. I have argued that Prussia's cadastral landscapes reflected the complexity of the distinctive settler-colonial society that took shape over the course of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. The Teutonic Order and its neighboring bishoprics sought to realize a vision of orderly society in the landscape itself, deploying a cadre of officials as surveyors and arbiters of property lines in constant flux. The archive that materialized from these processes preserves the contours of a distinctive cadastral geography that blended Western settlers' and Baltic natives' patterns of naming, knowing, and managing rural spaces. Changes in the land likewise catalyzed encounters between institutional officials and local people that precipitated new, ad-hoc arrangements for partitioning and sharing the colonized countryside. By 1400, Prussia's colonizers had transformed it into a highly productive and increasingly populated region. Its layout and its cultivators, however, reveal a far greater degree of complexity than narratives of its "blossoming" had imagined. The final two chapters move from Prussia's interior to its peripheries—a region that, as

we have seen, German contemporaries called "the Wilderness" (*wildnis*) or "the Great Wilderness" (*große wildnis*).[1]

"In the year of our Lord 1283, when fifty-three years had already passed since the beginning of the war against the Prussian people," wrote Peter of Dusburg,

> all the nations in that land were now pushed out and driven beyond its borders, such that not one remained who did not humbly bow his head to the most holy Roman church. At this time, the brothers of the Teutonic Order undertook a war against the Prussians' neighbors—the strong and proudly battle-hardened people living across the river Nemunas, in the land of Lithuania.[2]

By the time Peter was writing, this "new" conflict had already been dragging on for fifty years. If he suspected it would not end for at least another fifty, he did not openly say so. Nevertheless, the *wildnis* of the Prussian-Lithuanian frontier became the staging ground for a century of violence. Nearly every year (and often multiple times per year), armies from each side carried out raiding expeditions through the deep forests and morasses that drew geographer Hans Mortensen's comparison to the impassable pioneer terrains of the North American West.[3] It was, after all, this notoriously devilish landscape that the Austrian herald Peter Suchenwirt was describing in the poem that Mortensen paired with the woodcut image (see introduction, **Figure 4**) of a nineteenth-century "prospecting party" mired in the brambles of the American *Urwald*:

> We balked at ditches, then at clearings,
> now at deep water, swamp, and rotting tree limbs,
> (even in Hungary one does not find
> such malignant paths through such terrible moors!)
> and at quagmires that brought us great distress.
> The army passed straight through the wilderness
> up, down, here, and there,
> jumping high, bending low;

[1] See p. 35 above.

[2] Peter of Dusburg, *Chronicon terrae Prussie* 3.221, ed. Max Töppen, SSRP 1 (Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1861), p. 146.

[3] Mortensen, "Landschaftsbild." See pp. 34-37.

the branches began to lash fiercely
at the neck of many a man;
the wind had pummeled down
many a mighty tree;
and over all of it we had to force our way,
no matter the toll it took
…
Then a stallion sank down to its saddle
deep in a sludgey morass,
with a great fallen tree trunk lying rotten in its way;
we spurred it on to give its all.[4]

Few biographical details are known about Peter Suchenwirt, whose heraldic poetry can be considered definitive of the genre, but he did accompany Duke Albert III of Austria on a crusade to Lithuania in 1377, which the duke undertook in honor of the Virgin Mary. The verses above, although embellished to suit their chivalric posture, thus drew on Peter's first-hand experience.[5] Much of the poem juxtaposes the grandeur of the knightly retinue with the banal violence of the expedition and the near-impenetrability of the *wildnis*. In between episodes where men are taken captives "like hunting dogs," the crusaders fly their blazoned banners in the sunset. If Mortensen saw the pioneer spirit of the West in the travails of the knights as they negotiated the landscape, he demurred from acknowledging the legacy of frontier brutality evident in their indiscriminate slaughter.[6]

[4] Peter Suchenwirt, "Von herzog Albrechts ritterschaft," ed. Ernst Strehlke, SSRP 2 (Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1863), lines 206-19, 477-80. Here I have translated a passage from the original that corresponds, with some slight alterations, to the NHG verse that Mortensen quoted (or translated; he did not clarify). This particular image of the horse occurs in a different context from the rest of the passage, but similar images appear throughout.

[5] Claudia Brinker-von der Heyde, "Peter Suchenwirt," in *Die deutsche Literatur des Mittelalters: Verfasserlexikon*, ed. Burghart Wachinger et al., 2nd ed., vol. 9 (New York: De Gruyter, 2004), 481–88.

[6] Considering the contemporary popularity of Westerns, in which white violence against Native Americans is endemic, Mortensen was of course not alone. On the exploitative legacy of Western films, see Philip J. Deloria, *Indians in Unexpected Places* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004), 52–108.

A different set of first-hand accounts of raiding paths through Lithuania offers another window into the so-called *wildnis* along Prussia's peripheries. In the last quarter of the fourteenth century, a series of texts called *Wegeberichte*—brief navigational reports outlining frontier raiding itineraries—were commissioned and compiled by the Teutonic Order.[7] Each of these reports describes the waypoints and landscapes of a certain route (or routes) that an invading army might take, and typically names one or more reliable guides willing to lead the expedition. But although it is accurate to call the Wegeberichte descriptions, they are not very descriptive. Rarely is any single detail rendered in much more than a few words, and it is only in the tessellation of thousands of details that a picture emerges.

Scholarly analyses of these curious texts tend to fall into two primary types. On the one hand, they have furnished evidence on the planning and execution of the crusading ventures themselves, which contemporaries referred to specifically as *Preußenreisen*, or simply *Reisen*. On the other, they comprise a wealth of onomastic and geographic information for reconstructing historical landscapes and, occasionally, the routes running through them. Both approaches carry the positivist assumption that the Wegeberichte objectively represent real places, landscapes, and routes. This chapter introduces the Wegeberichte as texts, and considers their place in the historiography of this contested region, both as windows onto its landscape and products of the wars that tore it apart. It then summarizes information about medieval Lithuania to contextualize the central argument that the texts served as logistical blueprints for the particular nature of the violent encounters between the Teutonic Order and the pagan empire that outlasted it.

[7] For a detailed overview of the Wegeberichte as texts, see Päsler, *Sachliteratur*, 326–39.

II. The *Wegeberichte*

Theodor Hirsch prepared his 1863 edition of the Wegeberichte as an appendix to Wigand von Marburg's militarily focused chronicle, describing the texts as "reports elaborating, with varying degrees of comprehensiveness, the distances, waypoints, campsites, route characteristics, and notable difficulties, as well as the means to overcome them."[8] Scholars since then have generally agreed with this catchall definition. Bernhart Jähnig, for one, has referred to them as "descriptions of the routes along which military expeditions through the *wildnis* to Lithuania were to be undertaken"; and Zenonas Ivinskis likewise defined them as "report[s] on Lithuanian routes prepared by the Teutonic Order…[showing] the main obstacles and favorable locations: pathless forests, thickets, swamps, unbridged rivers, sand bars, cultivated fields, hamlets, manors, and safe places for a marching army to camp and find provisions."[9] Despite their regular structure, vocabulary, and texture of detail, however, precisely defining and schematizing the Wegeberichte as a genre is more vexing than Hirsch initially conveyed.

Hirsch worked from MS A186 in the historic Königsberger geheimes Archiv.[10] MS A186 exists now as two companion manuscripts, GStA PK, XX. HA OF 1 and OF 1a.[11] The original

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[8] Hirsch, "Die littauischen Wegeberichte," 663. Theodor Hirsch's edition of the reports as the "Littauischen Wegeberichte" fixed the term in scholarly vocabulary. I have generally cited Hirsch's edition except where it diverges significantly from the original and when specific codicological or paleographic features are relevant.

[9] Bernhart Jähnig, "Die Quellen des historischen Staatsarchivs Königsberg zur Geschichte der deutsch-litauischen Beziehungen in der Zeit der Ordensherrschaft und des Herzogtums Preußen," in *Deutschland und Litauen. Bestandsaufnahmen und Aufgaben der historischen Forschung*, ed. Norbert Angermann and Joachim Tauber (Lüneburg: Institut Nordostdeutsches Kulturwerk, 1995), 14; Zenonas Ivinskis, "Litauische Wegeberichte," in *Encylopedia Lituanica* (Boston: Juozas Kapočius, 1973), 352.

[10] For more on the archive's history, see Kurt Forstreuter, *Das preußische Staatsarchiv in Königsberg: ein geschichtlicher Rückblick mit einer Übersicht über seine Bestände* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1955).

[11] The GStA PK's finding aids refer to OF 1 and 1a as "A186" and "Rest des Folianten A186." Since Hirsch mentions only one manuscript, however, this split evidently occurred after the publication of his edition. It also appears to have been arbitrary, occurring less than a quarter of the way into the Wegeberichte portion of the manuscript. Cf. Päsler, *Sachliteratur*, 329. I will occasionally refer to OF 1 and OF 1a as OF 1-1a to reflect this former unity, but will refer to them individually in the case of folio citations.

register was produced in the early sixteenth century as a compilation of sundry medieval administrative texts—a "Register of Various Miscellany and Other Things from the Time of the Order," according to its early modern frontispiece.[12] It was the work of many different late fourteenth- and early fifteenth-century hands (eight are detectable in the first twenty-seven folios alone), and at least eleven different watermarks appear across its eighty-one total folios. Hirsch divided the contents into three categories: regionally organized dispatches; miscellaneous fourteenth-century inventories, letters, and treaties; and the Wegeberichte themselves.

With some few exceptions, the Wegebericht genre is unique to this compilation.[13] Most of the text entries, however, are not themselves unique, appearing in multiple versions across sixty-three folios.[14] Hirsch resolved minor discrepancies among duplicate or triplicate texts by collating corresponding copies into composite entries, which he labeled *Wege* and numbered 1-100.[15] Insofar as the individual reports formed a compilation, each discrete Wegebericht constitutes a single "entry" essentially corresponding to one of Hirsch's hundred composite *Wege*.[16] Entries

[12] GStA PK, XX. HA OF 1a, fol. 1r.

[13] Single Wegeberichte (which appear in epistolary form) and various documents relaying information about the Lithuanian frontier are scattered throughout the GStA PK's *Ordensbriefarchiv* (OBA) collection (e.g., GStA PK, XX. HA OBA 438, 649, 1306, 2973).

[14] Not including blank folios. All but twenty-two of Hirsch's one hundred composite "Wege" exist as two or more copies. Entries also appear in at least six formatting schemes, from paragraphs to columns to lists, employing a variety of symbol and punctuation systems to visually distinguish constitutive segments.

[15] Hirsch evidently missed an entry on OF 1a, fol. 295v (the folio was presumably interpolated into MS A186 after he had completed his edition). I have appended it to his organizational scheme as W. 101. His numbering scheme was geographically oriented, beginning in the northwestern region of Samogitia, then moving southeast towards modern-day Belarus. It is not my prerogative here to critique Hirsch's editorial praxis, which reflects the geographic interests of early scholars; but his organization of the Wegeberichte has invited some reproach, and his footnotes have occasionally been revised or refuted.

[16] The ontological alignment between entries as the appear in the manuscript and Hirsch's *Wege* (composites of matching entries) is not precise, but variations in the texts' actual content is negligible.

A note on terminology: NHG *Bericht* corresponds most closely to English "report," and its ENHG counterpart *bericht* is likewise best construed as "report" or, especially in its administrative usage as a communicative parcel of information, "dispatch." Although *Bericht* thus conveys the nature of the original Wegebericht as an epistolary report,

outline one or more "routes," the multi-day itineraries outlined between two terminuses.[17] "Routes" in turn comprise a sequence of "segments" between waypoints, each generally corresponding to one day's journey.[18] While variations in orthography, script, and form offer insights into the technical process of textual transmission, this simplified vocabulary captures the basic structure of the texts, and eases most discussion.

Like boundary descriptions in the Handfesten, the Wegeberichte generally adhere to a standard structure, syntax, and vocabulary.[19] Take the following example (**Figure 17**):

FIGURE 17. A TYPICAL WEGEBERICHT

***Leitsleute* introduced**	*Dese wege wellin furen Rabutte, Naybutte und sin bruder Waygail von Waldow, Sade von Lawkiskin, geczeichent am sontag vor nativitatis Christi lxxxv anno*	Rabutte, Naybutte and his brother Waygail von Waldow, and Zada von Lawkiskin offer to lead these routes, which were marked down on the Sunday before Christmas Day, 1385
Route 1 begins	*czum erstin anczuhebin an der Tilsot*	First, set out from Tilsit
	von Tilsot an eyn vlys, das heist die Lumpe, ij mile, do let man die erste cost	2 [Prussian*] miles from Tilsit to a river called the Lumpe, where the first camp can be lain
	von der lumpe czu Wilkeniskin ouch ein flys iij mile, do mus man in etlichen enden rümen	3 miles from the Lumpe to Wilkeniskin, another river; the way must be cleared in several places
	von Wilkeniskin bis czu Arisken uf das velt iij mile und mus doczwisschin in etlichen enden rümen, do let man die andir cost	3 miles from Wilkeniskin to the field of Arisken, where the next camp can be lain; the way must be cleared in several places

it misrepresents the new form given to the content of the original letters through the processes of copying and compilation (for further discussion of this process, see chapter six, p. 357). The neutral term "entry" more suitably denotes each discrete unit of content in the manuscript, corresponding to a copy of an original report. Werner Scholze-Stubenrecht et al., eds., *Oxford German dictionary: German-English, English-German*, 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), s.v. Bericht; *Frühneuhochdeutsches Wörterbuch*, online version, s.v. bericht, accessed March 25, 2021, http://fwb-online.de/go/bericht.s.0m_1604990502.

[17] Routes are rarely so straightforward. They may also indicate alternative routes, add a return route along a different path, or split off towards two or more destinations.

[18] Each segment names or describes its waypoints, the distance between them, and features or dangers of note, such as waterways to cross, places to gather (or seize) supplies, potential sites of ambush, and so on.

[19] Ralph Päsler has categorized the Wegeberichte according to four "forms." These are (1) epistolary, which only W. 39 and 57 fit; (2) complete, containing all four major elements: a heading, the names of primary leitsleute, the report itself, and the names of additional leitsleute; (3) standard, resembling the complete form but lacking additional leitsleute; and (4) abbreviated, comprising only the geographic contents. Päsler's breakdown is heuristically useful, although it may inventory the reports' contents a bit *too* schematically. Päsler, *Sachliteratur*, 329–30.

Figure 17 (continued)

	von Ariskin bis uf die Jure ij mile, doczwisschin ist ouch czu rümen, und do kerin die sletin wedir[20]	2 miles from Arisken to the Jure [river]; the way must be cleared in several places
	von der Jure uf das velt czu Cutibe ij mile, doczwisschin must man rumen und wopint sich doselbist	2 miles from the Jure to the field of Cutibe; the way must be cleared in between, and you must be on your guard
	von Cutibe sint ij mile ins land Medenikin, gerum weg	2 miles from Cutibe into the region of Medeniken; the way is clear
Route 1 ends	*an allin nachtlegern ist wassers und holczes genug ane uf dem letzstin legir czu Cutibe*	at every campsite there is plenty of water and timber, except at the last site at Cutibe
Route 2 begins	*und wenne man ins lant Medenikin sprenget*	and if the plan is to go forth into the region of Medeniken…
	so hat man ij mile bis czu Parzepil, do ist das erste nachtleger im lande, und mag do czwu nacht legin, ab man wil, do ist futers und czu heerin gnug	…it is 2 miles to Parsepil, which is the first campsite in the region; you can stay two nights there if you wish, since there is plenty of fodder [for the horses] and plenty to plunder
	von Parzepil bis czu Twertekaymen ij mile, czu herin gnug	2 miles from Parsepil to Twertekaym; plenty to plunder
	von Twertekaymen czu Warnestilte ij mile	2 miles from Twertekaym to Warnestilte
	von dannen czum flise, das heist Asswee ij mile, alles czu herin gnug	2 miles from there to the river Asswee; plenty of everything to plunder
	von Aswee czu Esenen dem vlize ufs velt Questin ij mile	1.5 miles from Aswee to the river Esenen and on to the field of Questin
	von Questin bis czu Labelawkin j mile	1 mile from Questin to Labelawkin
Route 2 ends	*do kumpt man uf den alden weg wedir us, und man mus czu Qestin futer nemen czu eyner nacht, das man habe uf der Jure, das ist vort iij mile*	here you return to the previous route, and must take a night to resupply at Questin, since it is three miles from there to the Jure
Route 3	*wil man abir durch Medenikin ken Knetow wert so wellin sie von Parsepil bis czu Skrunden, das ist ij mile; vorder bekennen si sich nicht.*	alternatively, if the plan is to go through Medenikin towards Knetow, then the *leitsleute* will take you from Parsepil to Skrunden; but they are unfamiliar with what lies beyond there
Route 4 begins	*wil man aber von Asswee czu Crasyen, do Girstawt wonet, do wil Maze von Rangnit furen*	alternatively, if the plan is to go from Asswee to Crasyen, where Girstawt dwells, then Maze von Ragnit can lead…

[20] The meaning of the phrase "do kerin die sletin wedir" is not clear to me.

Figure 17 (continued)

	und ist von Asswee czu Crasyen iij mile vulle lant czu heerin gnuk	…from Asswee to Crasyen, which is three miles of rich land with plenty to plunder
	von Crasyen czu Passeel ins lant ij~~j~~ mile wedir czurucke, czu heerin gnuk	2.5 miles from Crasyen to Passeel, back into the region [of Medenikin?]; plenty to plunder
	von Passeel czu Questin ij~~j~~ mile,	1.5 miles from Passeel
Route 4 ends	*von Questin wedir in die aldin wege uf die Jure*	from Questin, back to the first route at the Jure
Route 5 begins	*Hannus Wissen, so czur Memel, bekennet sich im lande czu Medenikin und wil anhebin, do die Carsschowin wonen und wil furen*	Hannus Wissen…is familiar with the region of Medenikin, and can set out from where the "Carshauen" dwell, leading…
	czu Lakawse dem flise, das ist ij~~j~~ mile, czu herin gnuk	…1.5 miles to the river Lakawse; plenty to plunder there
Route 5 ends	*von Lakowse czu Parsepil ij mile, doczwischin wonet Gnete und ist czu herin gnuk, vorder bekennet her sich nicht*	2 miles from Lakawse to Parsepil; Gnete dwells in between, and there is plenty to plunder; [Hannus] is unfamiliar with what lies beyond here

This Wegebericht demonstrates most of the features distinctive of the genre. It is more complicated than average because of the number of routes it comprises and the number of leitsleute it names, but each route is itself quite typical. *Note that a Prussian mile is equivalent to about 5 modern miles. **Source:** Die littauischen Wegeberichte W.9, 671-72.

The entry begins with a reference to a guide (*leitsmann*, *leitsleute*) as the guarantor of the route (or, in this case, routes) who has indicated his willingness to lead an expedition of crusaders along it. The route itself follows, relayed as a sequence of segments that read much like the steps of the boundary clauses, conveying a path from one waypoint to the next through repeated expressions—"from there" (*von dannen*), "further" or "next" (*vort*), and so on. In addition to naming a destined waypoint, each segment includes details about opportunities to plunder supplies, obstacles or dangers (or the lack thereof), as well as estimated distances (especially Prussian miles, roughly equivalent to five modern miles).

We will explore these routes in more detail later in this chapter, but two points will round out this preliminary discussion of the Wegeberichte as texts. First, although many entries in the manuscript visually replicate the segmented structure outlined above, this was not always the case.

The Wegeberichte primarily facilitated the planning of expeditions, including the selection of qualified leitsleute. We should accordingly avoid the temptation to treat the Wegeberichte as itineraries for use in the field, let alone as maps.[21] The second major point is closely related. Regardless of how they appeared in writing, each of the segments constituting the basic building blocks of the Wegeberichte corresponded to a day's march through territory considered hostile or, at least, ripe for plundering. Exploitative violence, in other words, was the lens through which the texts projected the landscapes and settlements of the Lithuanian frontier.

III. The "Wilderness" Frontier

Densely forested, full of marshes and wetlands, and sparsely populated, the terrain of the *wildnis* acted as a natural buffer, with the eastward-creeping settlements and fortifications of the Teutonic Order on one side and the westward-looking villages and farms of Lithuania, loosely confederated under the authority of the Lithuanian grand dukes and their noble vassals, on the other. As reports describing paths through this landscape, the Wegeberichte have often been treated as a kind of map. Most recently, for example, Stefan Striegler has argued that while the texts do not constitute maps in a modern sense, they do encode the "mental maps" of the leitsleute who purveyed their knowledge of the frontier to members of the Order.[22] Earlier historians have taken the cartographic comparison somewhat more literally, seeing in the Wegeberichte a repository of details about the

[21] Päsler has convincingly disputed Hirsch's hypothesis that all entries likely originated in the same epistolary form exemplified by W. 39 (OF 1, fol. 221v; OF 1a fol. 275v) and W. 57 (OF 1a, fols. 250v, 275r; OBA 438). He suggests instead that the so-called abbreviated form was actually the norm, extracted into the lengthier format only on request. Päsler, *Sachliteratur*, 329–30, 335–36. On the Wegeberichte as planning devices, cf. Stefan Striegler, "'Die littauischen Wegeberichte': Rekonstruktion und Konstruktion eines historischen Grenzraumes, 1384-1402" (master's thesis, Universität Greifswald, 2016), 14.

[22] Stefan Striegler, "Die "Littauischen Wegeberichte": Kognitive Karten und die Kommunikation geografischen Wissens im Mittelalter," *Studia Maritima* XXV (2012): 205–17; Striegler, "Die littauischen Wegeberichte," 6. I generally agree with Striegler on the idea that the texts encode certain spatial perceptions, but with the qualification that the process of transfer itself shaped this knowledge in significant ways (see chapter six).

region's medieval geography. Many of these studies, in turn, essentially sought to replicate the texts in modern cartographic mediums, extracting details about places, place names, and topographies to reconstruct otherwise irrecoverable historical landscapes.

Representing this marriage of historical and geographical methods are the historian Gertrud Mortensen (née Heinrich) and her husband, the geographer Hans Mortensen, whom we first met in the fraught context of twentieth-century nationalist historiography. The Mortensens' shared interest in the eastern *wildnis* region fueled years of collaborative research during the 1920s and 1930s, culminating in a sweeping (and controversially unfinished) study of settlement and migration patterns in the Prussian-Lithuanian *wildnis* from the fourteenth to the seventeenth centuries.[23] The Mortensens ultimately understood the *wildnis* as a defined space—a place apart, with concrete political and topographic features distinguishing it as such. Details procured from administrative sources like the Wegeberichte and, above all, the Handfesten served as building blocks in the Mortensens' overarching methodological goal to reconstruct historical landscapes, especially the *wildnis*, from reticent administrative records. A telling example relates to the *hagen*—the natural barriers of fallen trees and other natural debris that we have already seen frustrating the advances of crusaders time and again in the chronicle narratives. The Mortensens interpreted the reports' frequent references of these barriers as evidence for their theory that an immense, virtually seamless natural wall had separated the placid farmlands of German settlement from the rugged *wildnis* to the east.[24] While the so-called *Hagenlinie* demonstrates the Mortensens' ability to detect and assemble evidence from across the historical record, it also exposes fissures

[23] Mortensen and Mortensen, *Besiedlung*, 1937.

[24] Mortensen and Mortensen, *Besiedlung*, 1937, 1:20–21. Contemporary sources' lack of precision in identifying the location and extent of *Hagen* renders the identification of a *Hagenlinie* highly suspect, and suggests that an ideological agenda warped their interpretation of the evidence.

in the foundations of their research. In addition to ideological biases they may have harbored, their methods were grounded in three fundamental, but flawed, certainties: (1) that hard political borders existed in the Middle Ages; (2) that these political borders aligned with topography; and (3) that historical borders and historical landscapes could (in a sense, could *only*) be reconstructed in tandem.

Outside of their crowning work on settlement, the Mortensens' journal publications and cartographic projects focused on the *wildnis* as a historical landscape. A 1934 article by Hans Mortensen is particularly illustrative.[25] Here, Mortensen developed the premise that the *wildnis* as a distinctive landscape comprised a variety of ecologies and topographies. The medieval expression *wildnis*, he argued, encompassed both a "narrow" and a "broad" meaning. (The *große wildnis*—by which the Teutonic Order referred to the forested region of eastern Prussia bordering the territory of the Lithuanians—is not to be confused with the binary taxonomy contrived by Mortensen.) Whereas the term *wildnis* in its "narrow" sense referred more specifically to mobility-restricting old-growth forest, it could, in its "broad" sense, also encompass a more heterogeneous assemblage of woodlands, fields, marshes, rivers, meadows, and hills whose topographic similarities were perhaps less important than their common demographic characteristics. Corresponding to the Latin terms *solitudo*, *desertum*, and *locus desertu*s, the German term *wildnis* served primarily as a shorthand for areas of low settlement density. To support the claim that the region was sparsely populated, but not *un*populated, Mortensen pointed to the scattered hunters, fishers, and beekeepers roving elusively through the foliage of the forests and through the folios of the archival record. These rustic denizens occupied the distinct topographic spaces that

[25] Hans Mortensen, "Die landschaftliche Bedeutung der Ausdrücke Wildnis, Wald, Heide, Feld usw. in den Quellen des deutschen Nordostens," in *Vom deutschen Osten: Max Friederichsen zum 60. Geburtstag*, ed. Herbert Knothe (Breslau: M. & H. Marcus, 1934), 127–42.

Mortensen goes on to discuss in more detail (*heiden*, *dameraus*, *palwen*/*wiesen*, *felder*, *länder*, and *bergen*). His philological survey stands as a comprehensive study of the written representation of landscape in the *wildnis*, but nonetheless reaffirmed a taxonomic tendency to construe medieval conceptualizations of landscape in concrete categories with fixed, definable features, even if his concept of greater and lesser varieties lent some nuance to their identification.

The Mortensens were not alone, of course, in seeking to capitalize on the potential of the Wegeberichte as sources of geographic information. Around the same time, H. Müller touted Hirsch's edition (and, no less crucial, his footnotes) as an essential source for local history.[26] Gesturing approvingly to the work of Gertrud Heinrich (later Mortensen) and others, he insisted that historical records like the Wegeberichte were vital tools in the task of recovering the original character of local landscapes. This task was, moreover, becoming increasingly urgent as the corrosive impact of new settlements and modern agriculture rapidly and radically transformed the countryside. The most fundamental step in this task was understanding the region's overall climatic character—the topography, geology, hydrology, meteorology, and vegetation determining its overall *Wegsamkeit*, or "conduciveness to passage."[27] To this end, he proposed his own analysis of three problematic terms (*damerau*, *grauden*, and *baiten*) particular to the localities and vocabulary of the Wegeberichte, in no small part positioning his intervention as an overdue corrective of Hirsch's notes. In the same year as Müller, Paul Lemke published a shorter study more concerned with the actual mapping of certain routes than with the definition and

[26] H. Müller, "Über die Örtlichkeiten der 'Wegeberichte' innerhalb der heutigen Landesgrenze," *Altpreußische Forschungen* 4, no. 2 (1927): 43.

[27] Müller, 44.

characterization of environmental terminology.[28] Vexed, like Müller, with the inconsistency of Hirsch's notes, Lemke identified Alfred Thomas as the only scholar to have begun the process of amending them. Thomas was the Head Instructor of history, geography, and Lithuanian language at the Königliches Realgymnasium in Tilsit, a German town on the Nemunas River.[29] Thomas was also something of a pioneer himself—the first to critically engage in print with Hirsch's "Littauische Wegeberichte" as a geographic and historical source—and he published his article on the subject as a sort of addendum to Hirsch's edition.[30]

Thomas's work set an enduring precedent for the study of the Wegeberichte in the twentieth century, and he organized it in two parts, the second of which was included only in its 1885 reprinting.[31] In the first part, he sought to characterize summarily the geography (the *wildnis* specifically), warfare, logistics, and personnel as they appeared in the Wegeberichte. Thomas, like the Mortensens fifty years later, assembled a conflicting image of a peopled, yet almost insurmountably impenetrable wilderness.[32] He imagined a vast expanse of woodlands and

[28] Paul Lemke, "Wo die 'Leitsleute' durch die Memelniederung führten," *Prussia* 27 (1927): 58–61. The title of Lemke's article is somewhat misleading: he says very little about the leitsleute themselves, focusing instead on the identification of historical places serving as waypoints.

[29] Tilsit was constructed as a Teutonic border castle, and in fact appears as a frequent launching point for raiding parties undertaking a *Reise*.

[30] Alfred Thomas, "Litauen nach den Wegeberichten," *Zeitschrift für wissenschaftliche Geographie* 4 (1883): 85–90. Thomas's study proved instrumental as a bridge between Hirsch's work and the critical studies of the 1920s and 30s (as opposed to the local histories of which Müller wrote rather dismissively). Over forty years had transpired between the publication Hirsch's edition and Thomas's study. Thomas's article was reprinted in an expanded version as the preface to the Tilsit Gymnasium's 1884-1885 *Jahresprogramm*, an annual pamphlet with semesterly schedules and students' academic accomplishments, which reflects the importance of the subject along a border that had again become highly politicized: *Litauen nach den Wegeberichten im Ausgange des vierzehnten Jahrhunderts*, rev. ed. (1883; Tilsit: J. Reyländer & Sohn, 1885).

[31] This second part of Thomas's study focused on Lithuanian linguistics and onomastics, the identification of historical places, and other such technical details. It is essentially a compilation of additions and amendments to Hirsch's notes.

[32] Also like Mortensen, Thomas focused in particular on hunters, fishermen, and beekeepers, adding to them bands of marauders (it is unclear to me whether he was referring specifically to the Order's armies). Thomas, "Litauen nach den Wegeberichten" (1883), 85.

morasses sparingly punctuated with convent-castles like Tilsit, which he labeled a "cultural oasis" in the midst of the primeval forest. Reflecting on the texts' onomastic richness, he remarked that "we get the impression that we indeed have a 'well-settled land' before us," repurposing a turn of phrase (*gut besatczet lant*) used repeatedly in the Wegeberichte.[33] Seeing the texts as a unique window onto the cultural and physical topography of medieval Lithuania, Thomas developed a methodology for approaching the texts that the Mortensens and their contemporaries would later take.

Thomas's ideological approach to the texts also anticipated that of later German historians. Oscillating between nostalgic patriotism for the heroic, pioneer-like hardships of the German knights and a sense of tragic pathos for their victims, his ambiguous relationship to the Teutonic past identify him as a transitional figure between the measured criticisms of Johannes Voigt and the histrionic nationalism of Heinrich von Treitschke. In a line he added to the otherwise nearly identical second publishing of his essay, Thomas wrote ardently of the "local and patriotic interest" drawing him to the subject of his study.[34] This passion nevertheless cools in his somber contemplation of the "tragic" pillaging undertaken by the erstwhile heroized knights. Thomas' brief study of the Wegeberichte thus encapsulates the complex significance that the study of the "wilderness" landscape and its inhabitants held in the history of medieval Prussian as a formative moment in the history of Germany. He intuited that the *wildnis* was something of a self-fulfilling prophecy—not an unpopulated region but a *de*populated one after a century of warfare bent on leeching the region of its riches and displacing its population. "Year in, year out," he lamented,

[33] Thomas, 89.

[34] "So mag es denn gerechtfertigt erscheinen, wenn wir die W[egeberichte] zum Gegenstand unserer Studie machen, zumal uns noch ein lokales und patriotisches Interesse dem Stoffe zuführt." Thomas, *Litauen nach den Wegeberichten* (1885), 3.

"the depopulating campaigns from Kurland and Prussia fell upon the land. Entire landscapes were laid waste."[35] Although he did not articulate it as such, Thomas already recognized in the obscure and seemingly anodyne texts of the Wegeberichte a story of colonial violence whose ambiguous legacy he was unsure how to navigate.

IV. The *Preußenreisen*

Like the Wegeberichte themselves, relations between Teutonic Prussia and Lithuania were deeply rooted in an ongoing conflict that historians have tended to cast as a dramatic contest between two great powers. In his theatrical history of the Teutonic Order, for example, Marian Tumler asserted that the Lithuanian crusades "did not just occupy the forefront of contemporary chroniclers' minds. They are a common thread running through the Order's history until 1400, and were critical to the development—indeed the very existence—of the Order."[36]

Tumler, like other pre-war German historians, saw in the so-called "Eternal Crusade" the gradual unraveling of the Order's military strength, economic power, and moral authority. After the Second World War, scholars like Erich Weise continued to tout the historiographic gravity of the wars, even as they wagged fingers at earlier historians who had celebrated the use of force against pagan "Slavs" (non-Germans, in other words) as a triumph of Germanness. This was the "Heidenkampf," whose origins in the missions of the twelfth century had given way to a crescendo of violence, first in the thirteenth-century Prussian crusades then the fourteenth-century Lithuanian

[35] "Jahr aus, Jahr ein fielen die entvölkernden Züge von Kurland und Preußen aus über das Land. Schon standen ganze Landschaften verödet." Thomas, "Litauen nach den Wegeberichten" (1883), 89.

[36] Tumler, *Deutsche Orden*, 327. Tumler mostly completed his history by 1938, but it was only released in 1955. It exemplifies the sort of crossover that could occur between pre- and post-war German scholarship in spite of major ideological caesura.

crusades, and eventually culminating in the battle of Tannenberg (Grunwald) in 1410, where the combined forces of the united Polish-Lithuanian crowns crushed the Teutonic army.[37]

Lithuanian scholars too have identified recurring wars with the Order as a crucible of statehood and national self-consciousness.[38] Twentieth-century Lithuanian nationalists, moreover, revitalized and embellished the legacy of the Grand Duchy's emergence into European affairs as historical proof that Lithuania existed as an independent nation before its union with Poland, a bond that had long since soured. This assembly of a medieval nation crystallized in the cult of the grand duke Vytautas, who had commanded the Lithuanian forces at Tannenberg. Patriotic Lithuanians memorialized the 500th anniversary of his death in public celebrations, statues, and the surging popularity to name newborn boys after the legendary ruler. The significance of the medieval past in the formation of a national Lithuanian identity is also evident in the interwar campaign to liberate and reappropriate Vilnius—the so-called "City of Dukes"—as the nation's rightful capital. Particularly iconic was Vilnius' hilltop castle of Gediminas, the relic of medieval statehood attesting most vividly to the *ur*-Lithuanian identity ascribed to the city. Vilnius became the subject of poems, anthems, and children's songs, featured on postal stamps, and popularized "Vilnius passports," faux papers issued by the Vilnius Liberation Union that were coveted madly

[37] On the so-called "Heidenkampf," see Erich Weise, "Der Heidenkampf des Deutschen Ordens," *Zeitschrift für Ostforschung* 13 (1964): 401–20. On the German historiography of medieval Lithuanian-Prussian relations more specifically, see Sven Ekdahl, "Die preußisch-litauischen Beziehungen des Mittelalters: Stand und Aufgaben der Forschung in Deutschland," in *Deutschland und Litauen. Bestandsaufnahmen und Aufgaben der historischen Forschung*, ed. Norbert Angermann and Joachim Tauber (Lüneburg: Institut Nordostdeutsches Kulturwerk, 1995), 31–44.

[38] For an overview of relevant Lithuanian historiography, see Alvydas Nikžentaitis, "Litauisch-preußische Beziehungen im Mittelalter. Der Litauische Forschungsstand," in *Deutschland und Litauen. Bestandsaufnahmen und Aufgaben der historischen Forschung*, ed. Norbert Angermann and Joachim Tauber (Lüneburg: Institut Nordostdeutsches Kulturwerk, 1995), 21–30.

by children.[39] Although keen to distance themselves from their problematic union with Poland, Lithuanian nationalists nonetheless shared the conviction of other contemporary Europeans that the foundations of modern nationhood lay in their medieval past.

In his definitive study of the Teutonic Order's wars with the Lithuanians, Werner Paravicini treats them neither as nation-forging contests nor even primarily as crusades per se, but as the chivalric spectacles that their common medieval name entails.[40] Paravicini thus frames the *Reisen* not only as military ventures, but also as investments of considerable financial and cultural capital by the Christian elite. In the wake of the effective loss of the Holy Land after the fall of Acre in 1291, Teutonic Prussia became the crusading destination par excellence for the European nobility. Anybody who was anybody embarked on a *Reise* at least once, with Chaucer's fictional knight and the blind king John of Bohemia numbering among the high-profile guests to have made the journey to "Prusse." The *Reisen* were accordingly extravagant affairs with costs for preparation, travel, personnel, and so on that stretched the purses of its participants.[41] For knights and nobles, however, the exorbitant price-tag was worth the opportunity to win the coveted honor of fighting the pagans and taking one's place at the sumptuous feast awaiting them in Marienburg's

[39] Violeta Davoliūtė, *The Making and Breaking of Soviet Lithuania: Memory and Modernity in the Wake of War* (New York: Routledge, 2013). Just a glance at Davoliūtė's bibliography verifies the popularity of Vytautas' name throughout the twentieth century.

[40] Werner Paravicini, *Die Preußenreisen des europäischen Adels*, 2 vols. (Sigmaringen: J. Thorbecke, 1989). For an overview of the *Reisen* as a term, as expeditions, and as a cultural phenomenon, see *Ibid.*, vol. 1, 11-44.

[41] On the dimensions of financing the expeditions, see Werner Paravicini, *Die Preußenreisen des europäischen Adels*, vol. 2 (Sigmaringen: J. Thorbecke, 1995), 163–309. Western European nobles traveling far distances to Prussia usually lacked enough cash to make the journey, relying instead on complex systems of credit and loans. For a briefer overview, see Werner Paravicini, "Edelleute, Hansen, Brügger Bürger: Die Finanzierung der Westeuropäischen Preußenreisen im 14. Jahrhundert," *Hansische Geschichtsblätter* 104 (1986): 5–20.

legendary brick halls—the *Ehrentisch*, in comparison to which papal indulgences for participation in the crusade seemed rather secondary.[42]

As for the Order, its reputation and very existence as an institution hinged on its role as a protector of Christendom, a raison d'être that came under siege as the 1386 conversion of the Lithuanian grand duke Jogaila and his subsequent union to the Polish crown dramatically altered the political landscape. To satisfy the expectations of noble participants, and to flaunt the grand importance of their mission, the Order dedicated massive resources to both the practical and the aesthetic logistics of their crusade. The Wegeberichte themselves surface most prominently in Paravicini's discussion of frontier topography as well as the logistics and tactics involved in the preparation for each *Reise*, including reconnaissance (*Kundschaft*).[43] The coordination of these actual military elements of the *Reisen* fell within the purview of the Marshal, who was accordingly the regular recipient of the reports. Beyond the chivalrous feasting and fanfare, the Wegeberichte thus serve as a blunt reminder that the goal of the *Reisen* was to devastate the lands and peoples of the frontier zone. Paravicini's use of these sources illustrates two related approaches: first, to present them as logistical aids; and second, to parse them for geographic and topographic details about the borderland regions targeted by the raids.

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[42] Studying the prevalence and practice of papal crusading indulgences in the Lithuanian wars, Axel Ehlers argues that remissions, while not unimportant, were hardly the primary attraction of the *Reisen*. *Ablasspraxis*; "Indulgences"; "The Crusade of the Teutonic Knights against Lithuania Reconsidered," in *Crusade and Conversion on the Baltic Frontier*, ed. Alan V. Murray (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2001), 21–44. On the *Ehrentisch*, see Paravicini, *Preußenreisen*, 1989, 1:316–33; Wenta, *Studien über die Ordensgeschichtsschreibung am Beispiel Preußens*, 160–61. On Marienburg's decorative iconography, see Lubocka-Hoffmann, *Die Marienburg*.

[43] Paravicini observes that reconnaissance was an essential component in the logistical preparation for a *Reise*, including the evaluation of raiding routes and weather conditions, especially snow levels and the sturdiness of frozen waterways in the winter. If conditions were not right, a *Reise* commonly risked cancelation (to chivalric chagrin). *Preußenreisen*, 1995, 2:85–95. The second volume of Paravicini's study also includes a comprehensive list of 299 campaigns undertaken by both the Order and the Lithuanians between 1305 and 1409 (pp. 20-41, table 49), as well as a compilation of weather data from forty-one of these (pp. 14-18, table 48).

Knights like Chaucer's we know well enough. But the Lithuanians are likely a less familiar subject to both medievalists and non-medievalists alike. The following background information on late medieval Europe's last pagan empire is meant to serve two principal purposes. First, and most obvious, is to provide necessary context for the following discussion of the Wegeberichte. Alliances and enmities along the Prussian-Lithuanian frontier were hardly absolute, but were characterized by a fluidity of people, places, and policies. Second, and perhaps less obvious, is to recognize the Lithuanians as legitimate subjects of medieval history. It is easy to overlook Lithuania—pagan, source-poor, and seemingly too far East to matter much.[44] It is, by extension, too easy to confine the relations between the Teutonic Order and Lithuania (and thus fundamentally misunderstand the context in which the Wegeberichte were produced) to the binarism that has so often constricted the study of colonial subjects. The Eternal Crusade went on for so long precisely because the Lithuanians were organized, armed, and politically savvy enough to outmaneuver them. The Lithuanian dukes of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries undertook processes of state-building that resemble Pekka Hämäläinen's Indigenously oriented paradigm of colonial and imperial sovereignty in his study of the Comanche people of the American southwest. The Lithuanians offer a compelling comparative case to Hämäläinen's subjects: unlike the Comanche, the Lithuanians adapted foreign administrative structures, and ultimately outlasted one Western rival by allying with another.[45] They also, therefore, differ pointedly from their Prussian neighbors, despite certain cultural and linguistic affinities.

[44] It is true that precious few Lithuanian sources have survived from the Middle Ages. This is not from a lack of production or sophisticated record-keeping practices, however; the records were a victim of disastrous fires that devastated the grand-ducal archives in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. For an overview of the sources that do survive, see Stephen C. Rowell, *Lithuania Ascending: A Pagan Empire within East-Central Europe, 1295-1345* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 26–48.

[45] Hämäläinen, *The Comanche Empire*, 1–17.

V. Lithuania and the Lithuanians

Lithuanian Society under the Gediminids

Of Lithuania's many neighbors, the Teutonic Knights were perhaps the most belligerent. Nor was this new. The rise of the Lithuanian grand dukes began around 1240 with the willpower of the duke Mindaugas, whose authority largely stemmed from his ability to organize resistance against early crusading aggressions—the very existence of a Lithuanian polity thus hinged on a coordinated response to the threat of invasion.[46] In 1300 territory answering to the authority of the Lithuanian dukes already covered a considerable area, from the delta of the Nemunas River through the watersheds of the Nevežis and Neris rivers, on eastwards to lands capitulated by the Rus' to Lithuanian princes in latter half of the thirteenth century. The forests and wetlands of the *wildnis* largely barred access to the heartland's fertile interior, while wooden forts erected along the Nemunas monitored river traffic. Gediminas, who took up the mantle in the early fourteenth century, was even more successful than Mindaugas in the extent of his conquests and the consolidation of their administration, incorporating parts of Belarus, Ukraine, and western Russia into the area under his influence. By 1370, Gediminas' sons Algirdas and Kęstutis shared the ducal title with relative amity, splitting their rule between the two distinct cultural regions that constituted their patrimony. The north and west, under Kęstutis' oversight, was ethnically and linguistically Lithuanian, while the south and east comprised Ruthenian acquisitions from the Kievan Rus', which Algirdas guarded jealously from Muscovite hands.[47]

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[46] The most authoritative work on Mindaugas is in Lithuanian, but includes a brief English summary: Edvardas Gudavičius, *Mindaugas* (Vilnius: Žara, 1998). In German, see Zenonas Ivinskis, "Mindaugas und seine Krone," *Zeitschrift für Ostforschung* 3, no. 3 (1954): 360–86.

[47] For an overview of Gediminid administration, see Rowell, *Lithuania Ascending*, 49–81. On the Jagiellonians in the context of their Gediminid predecessors, see Daniel Stone, *The Polish-Lithuanian State, 1386-1795* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1974), 3–20.

Like their father Gediminas, Algirdas and Kęstutis continued to expand their territory while enhancing the power and prestige of the grand ducal office. And like other European rulers, they negotiated diplomatic treaties with foreign powers, offered rights to entice western settlers, possessed strategic estates (such as border-forts and stud-farms for warhorses), and likely served leading functions in religious practices.[48] As they steadily expanded eastward and strengthened ties with the free Rus' cities of Pskov and Novgorod, moreover, both Algirdas and Kęstutis came to see themselves as the heirs of the Rus'. Their multilingual chancery communicated with western church- and statesmen in Latin, with the Teutonic Order in German, and with their Slavic northern and eastern neighbors in Ruthenian; Lithuanian was employed as a language of state relatively rarely, traceable only in scattered fragments of legal proceedings.[49] Kęstutis oversaw the move of the capital from Trakai to the more diverse and economically developed center of Vilnius, and both brothers entertained an ongoing flirtation with Orthodox Christianity, dominant in their eastern holdings. For Algirdas at least, the rumbling along the western borders was of secondary concern to the consolidation of their Rus' inheritance in the east.

Administrative structures in Kęstutis' territory remained largely traditional.[50] Here Lithuanian language and religious customs retained dominance, and with few exceptions, the warrior aristocracy held landed estates bestowed by the grand dukes. Gediminas and his sons cultivated an extensive network of noble kin, and attentively assigned them to high official posts.

[48] Spurred on by wars with the Teutonic Knights, the Lithuanians developed a light but sturdy armored cavalry force whose maneuverability in difficult terrain became renowned throughout Europe, and on whom the grand dukes heavily relied. Darius Baronas argues that even as the Lithuanians adopted western tactics from the crusaders like fort-building, their cavalrymen remained distinctive. Baronas, "Kontext der litauischen Kriegskunst."

[49] See Stephen C. Rowell, "Summary," in *Chartularium Lithuaniae res gestas magni ducis Gedeminne illustrans*, ed. Stephen C. Rowell (Vilnius: Mintis, 2003), 366–402.

[50] Rimvydas Petrauskas, "The Lithuanian Nobility in the Late-Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries: Composition and Structure," *Lithuanian Historical Studies* 7 (2002): 1–23.

Contrary to the traditionally held timeframe a century later, the Lithuanian nobility appears to have been already split between upper and lower strata by the mid-fourteenth century. It also apparently comprised a complex and fluid range of statuses, judging by the diverse vocabulary of nobility employed in foreign chronicles.[51] Most common were *nobiles* and *bayoren*, but terms like *meliores*, *proceres*, *satrapae*, *meliores nobiles*, and *meliores satrapae* were also used. Less clear, however, is how these particular terms mapped onto the division into upper and lower strata.[52] While a simple distribution of upper-*nobiles* and lower-boyars is no longer tenable, it does appear that Gediminid family members tended to constitute a hereditary upper nobility, occupying the highest posts (like membership in the grand duke's council), exercising administrative functions, and possessing large estates.[53] Local posts also appear, as a rule, to have been hereditary. While the grand dukes technically retained the right to fill vacant posts by fiat, they rarely interfered, relying instead on loyal and stable local administrators. Distinct from the relatively cosmopolitan

[51] Rowell points out that the multilingual titulature that the grand dukes fashioned for themselves in the fourteenth century could precipitate confusion. The term *kunigas*, for example, was easily confused with German *könig*. Rowell proposes that *kunigas* initially meant "prince," but later changed to mean something more like "priest." *Lithuania Ascending*, esp. 63. "Royal estates" (e.g., W. 81: *des konigs hofe*) are common waypoints in the Wegeberichte, which Hirsch and others have assumed to be holdings of the grand dukes.

Surveying ranks and statuses among multiple Baltic peoples, Reinhard Wenskus interpreted the pan-Baltic sociopolitical rank (Prussian: *koningas*, Lithuanian: *kunings*) as, essentially, a castellan "lord" (*Herr*)—a primarily martial position that gradually attained a sacerdotal dimension stemming from an association between strongholds and holy places, especially sacred groves. Wenskus, "Nichtdeutsche Bevölkerung des Preußenlandes"; Wenskus, "Sozialordnung," 413–22; Wenskus, "Beobachtungen." Wenskus's philological expertise aside, his extrapolations of pan-Baltic customs from his Prussian-centric perspective are, of course, still open to debate. For a brief recent overview (also from a primarily Prussian perspective), cf. Vercamer, *Komturei Königsberg*, 294–95.

[52] Petrauskas, "The Lithuanian Nobility," 9. In his influential study of landholding records in the 1930s, Henryk Łowmiański posited that the boyars ought to be associated primarily with ownership of the village unit in one-to-one ratios. Rimvydas Petrauskas refutes this model based on the complexity of landholding patterns evident in sixteenth-century records, and points to Łowmiański's heavy reliance on Vytautas' charters. Readers of Polish may consult Łowmiański's original study: *Studia nad początkami społeczeństwa i państwa litewskiego*.

[53] Based on an analysis of witnesses named in ducal diplomas, Petrauskas argues that is it not only likely that a hereditary upper nobility existed a full century before typically assumed, but also that the Gediminids formalized and institutionalized a hereditary network derived from the former tribal aristocracy. "The Lithuanian Nobility," 10–11.

institutional structures in the eastern territories, western Lithuania amounted to more of a patchwork of nobles, estates, and villages. Patrimonial holdings were often widely dispersed, rivalries were common, and although the grand dukes exercised virtually absolute power, the logistical limitations of their itinerant rule kept them at a distance. The highly localized and often contested political landscape at the western edges of the grand dukes' territory is crucial to understanding the frontier encounters between the Teutonic Order and the Lithuanians.

Conflict and Exchange across the Teutonic Frontier

It was common, in fact, for Lithuanian nobles to reach across the border and form diplomatic relationships with Teutonic officials. Correspondence between the Grandmaster and his Teutonic subordinates reveals the considerable effort and resources that went into sustaining friendly relationships with powerful Lithuanian nobles. The *Tresslerbuch* records some of the lavish gifts given to solidify friendships, such as luxurious fabric from Arras purchased in Danzig and sent to the wife of a certain Lithuanian noble in 1404. Lithuanians and members of the Order are known to have served as intermediaries in the fraught diplomacy of the later fourteenth century. The Teutonic official Marquard von Salzbach spent eight years at Vytautas' court until 1392, when the enterprising duke withdrew his support from the Order for a second time. Even after this change of heart, Marquard remained a close ally of Vytautas, eventually serving as an important intermediary between the grand duke and the Order in the 1390s and 1400s.[54] The baptism of Kęstutis' daughter Danutė offers another high-profile example of the diplomatic ties cultivated across the border. In this case, a Teutonic Commander, Günther von Hohenstein, acted as Danutė's

[54] Rimvydas Petrauskas, "Der Frieden im Zeitalter des Krieges: Formen friedlicher Kommunikation zwischen dem deutschen Orden und dem Großfürstentum Litauen zu Beginn des 15. Jahrhunderts," *Annaberger Annalen* 12 (2004): 28–42.

sponsor, formalizing a quasi-familial bond predicated on a ceremony of conversion. Conversion was a significant means of empowerment for lesser nobles as well, with religious affiliation having ostensibly more weight than perceived ethnic or linguistic differences. The brothers Thomas and Hans Surwille, for instance, were two Lithuanian boyars who converted in exchange for land and ranks in Teutonic Prussia. Hans served the Order as a translator and negotiator, while both assisted in a 1385 *Reise* with their knowledge of a certain ford across the Wilia. To avoid romanticizing cross-border collaboration, however, it is crucial to note that people operating on both sides, especially in service of the Order, were subject to anxious suspicion. A letter from Vytautas to the Grandmaster in 1411 seeking to exonerate Hans of the accusation that he had given up the Order's secrets serves as a reminder that even the most trusted and successful Lithuanians were subject to damnatory stereotypes.[55]

Despite this shadow looming across the border, ongoing conflict did not entail the cessation of communication and diplomacy. Treaties—to end or pause conflicts, for instance—were frequently being ratified and renegotiated, and the Lithuanian nobility accommodated their neighbors' customs by adopting foreign practices of oath-taking and peace-making. That is not to say that traditional customs—like the slaughter of an ox and the subsequent smearing of its blood on the faces of the involved parties—were totally renounced or replaced. As contact with Catholic and Orthodox powers intensified, however, traditional practices were gradually adapted to fit alongside their allies' and rivals' cultures of written diplomacy. Even as most Lithuanians

[55] On Hans and Thomas, see Werner Paravicini, "Litauer: vom heidnischen Gegner zum adligen Standesgenossen," in *Tannenberg - Grunwald - Žalgiris 1410: Krieg und Frieden im späten Mittelalter*, ed. Werner Paravicini, Rimvydas Petrauskas, and Grischa Vercamer (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2012), 262–64. Thomas Surwille and his property is attested in the several Teutonic Handfesten. In July of 1397, for example, he was granted a very large estate of 120 Hufen as well as a church in fief; the document calls him a "ritther." GStA PK, XX. HA, OBA 546. He also appears multiple times in Wigand von Marburg's chronicle. For further discussion of the brothers' baptism, see chapter six, p. 341.

remained largely illiterate, written agreements had become quite common by the 1370s and 1380s. They offered one more means of negotiating and managing diplomatic ties across a wide-ranging array of linguistic, cultural, and political axes.[56]

Nor was contact and exchange limited to the elite. Both the Order and the Lithuanians recognized the necessity and value of protecting trade and trade routes between their territories, even during times of conflict. Agreements were formed—sometimes officially, other times clandestinely—granting safe passage to merchants without necessarily stipulating a cessation of violence. Of course, trade with a pagan enemy always carried a certain tinge of illicitness. Honorius III was the first to prohibit trade with northern pagans in 1218, building on precedents in canon law penalizing forms of exchange that could confer unwanted military advantages to pagans. As early as 1253, however, Mindaugas issued the first surviving trade privilege allowing German merchants to pass freely and peacefully through his lands. Four years later, the Order received Alexander IV's permission to sell and buy wares in all lands and places within their reach, a privilege that was reissued by Urban IV in 1263 with the toothless caveat that it should not become a basis for regular trade (the Knights did, in fact, boast of unlimited, papally authorized trade privileges). By 1338, a treaty with Gediminas established the precedent of a mercantile zone of peace (*vredelant*) in all lands under the rule of the Lithuanian *koningh*.[57] The status of trade continued to change throughout the fourteenth century. Escalating tensions between the Polish crown and the Teutonic Order prompted each side to curtail its protection of trade along their borders, compelling merchants traveling to Poland to bypass Teutonic Prussia and seek secure

[56] On the adaptiveness of Lithuanian diplomacy, see Stephen C. Rowell, "A Pagan's Word: Lithuanian Diplomatic Procedure 1200–1385," *Journal of Medieval History* 18, no. 2 (1992): 145–60.

[57] Stephen C. Rowell, ed., *Chartularium Lithuaniae res gestas magni ducis Gedeminne illustrans* (Vilnius: Mintis, 2003), no. 18, pp. 187–195.

passage via Lithuania instead. The following decades proved even more problematic as hostilities intensifying between the Order and Lithuania caused trade to dwindle further, with no definitive evidence of any trade-related treaties between 1356 and 1387. Despite ongoing hostilities, mercantile activity nevertheless eventually returned in the early fifteenth century as borders (and border conflicts) gradually stabilized.[58]

The final treaty promising peaceful trade between Christians and pagans was signed between the Teutonic Knights and the Lithuanian Samogitians in 1390, following the formal conversion of the Lithuanian grand dukes and their official union to the Polish crown. The events of 1385-87 mark a dramatic turning point in Lithuania's relationship to the West. For over a century, both Westerners and the grand dukes themselves had capitalized on Lithuania's pagan identity in shaping diplomatic policies. The legitimacy of the Order's crusade naturally relied upon the identification of the Lithuanians as pagan.[59] While this largely remained the case throughout the fourteenth century, the grand dukes did not hesitate to leverage the political potential of their religious affiliations.

Paganism, Baptism, and Union with Poland

It is nearly impossible to escape the muddling of historical evidence and fanciful imagination in the study of Lithuanian paganism, since much of the evidence for its practices stems from the

[58] A decade of Teutonic lordship in Samaiten (1398-1409) set a precedent for more firmly negotiated borders, prompting the boyars to recognize for the first time a certain *terra* with determinable, defensible boundaries. The borders established between the Order's Prussian territory and Poland-Lithuania by the Treaty of Melnosee (1422) would endure much longer than the peace itself. The border remained largely unchanged not only through the Order's secularization in 1525 and the third partition of Poland in 1795, but all the way through to the victorious Allies' annexation of the Klaipėda district to the nascent Lithuanian Republic between 1919-23. See Stephen C. Rowell, "The Lithuano-Prussian Forest Frontier, c. 1422-1600," in *Frontiers in Question: Eurasian Borderlands, 700-1700*, ed. Daniel Power and Naomi Standen (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 182–208.

[59] On the shifting portrayal of the Lithuanians from "pagans" to "enemies of the faith" in the chronicles of the Teutonic Order, see Kristina Markman, "Between Two Worlds: A Comparative Study of the Representations of Pagan Lithuania in the Chronicles of the Teutonic Order and Rus'" (PhD diss., UCLA, 2015), 78–119.

unreliable accounts of early modern Christian authors.[60] Archeological evidence (especially grave goods) points on the whole to a persistence of pagan funerary customs, even as Baltic peoples increasingly adopted elements of Christian material culture.[61] From the scant information available in textual sources, it is clear that Lithuanian religion featured elements common to other pagan cultures of the southern Baltic. Woods and trees were certainly the primary loci of the sacred, divination based on the behavior of animals (especially green snakes, certain horses, and perhaps pigs) was practiced, and horses, both alive and dead, were particularly prevalent in burials and religious rites. Both men and women appear to have played roles as priests and prophetesses, especially the so-called *blûtekirl*—priests responsible for sacrificial offerings and divination. As we saw in chapter two, Peter of Dusburg even told of a pope-like high priest Criwe, who presided over the cult center at "Romow."[62] According to Peter, the Prussians, Lithuanians, and Livonians all held Criwe with such reverence as their pope that he and his *nuncius* were received with great dignity in their itinerant circuits all throughout the Baltic. With no definitive evidence that Criwe existed as anything more than a figment of Christian imagination, however, the highest religious authorities to emerge from the records are the grand dukes themselves.[63] Rowell asserts that despite continued attempts to desperately prove the historical validity of Dusburg's pagan pope, no attestation exists either of him or of Romow, although some have proposed that the name

[60] Although Rowell recognizes this problem, he does not escape it in his endeavor to reconstruct pagan religion from fragments of evidence scattered across medieval and early modern textual sources. Rowell, *Lithuania Ascending*, 118–49. Cf. Marija Gimbutas, "The Pre-Christian Religion of Lithuania," in *La cristianizzazione della Lituania*, ed. Paulius Rabikauskas (Vatican City: Libreria editrice vaticana, 1989), 13–25.

[61] Pluskowski, *The Archaeology of the Prussian Crusade*, esp. 287-91. There is evidence that customs involving sacred groves continued in Lithuania into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

[62] See p. 125 above.

[63] Peter of Dusburg, *Chronicon terrae Prussie* 3.5, ed. Max Töppen, SSRP 1 (Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1861), pp. 53-54.

"Criwe" could relate to a more generic Prussian term for a priest, derived from the word for the "staff" serving as a distinguishing accessory.[64]

While the Gediminids took their roles as pagan authorities seriously, they also understood the advantages of converting—or at least promising to convert—to either Latin or Orthodox Christianity.[65] Friendship with the pope could be particularly beneficial. Gediminas, for example, wished to broadcast invitations to Western farmers, craftsmen, and soldiers to settle in Lithuania in exchange for papally sanctioned privileges as early as the 1320s. In order to guard against interception by agents of the Teutonic Order, he took advantage of his friendly terms with the papacy by entrusting his messages to papal legates. His letters depicted Lithuania as a safe land with churches waiting to welcome the faithful to a land of plenty, and promised peace and unity between a baptized Lithuania and Christendom.[66] Baptism did not, however, immediately bring peace. After succeeding his father Algirdas as grand duke, Jogaila ruled briefly with his uncle Kęstutis, then with his cousin Vytautas. The rivalry between Jogaila and Vytautas has long been a foundational theme in the historiography of Poland-Lithuania, but in fact the cousins generally acted in tandem.[67] Upon marrying the Polish monarch Jadwiga, Jogaila spearheaded the official conversion of 1386/87, largely in response to his enemies' accusations that the grand dukes and their people had never really converted, but harbored pagans and Orthodox Ruthenians. Both

[64] Murray, "Heathens, Devils and Saracens," 209; Rowell, *Lithuania Ascending*, 125–28. Aleksander Pluskowski likewise confirms that no archaeological evidence exists of such a cult site, although the rise of the Lithuanian dukes can be linked with the centralization of certain cult practices. *The Archaeology of the Prussian Crusade*, 67–68.

[65] On the role of baptism in Mindaugas' power politics, see Rasa Mažeika, "When Crusader and Pagan Agree: Conversion as a Point of Honour in the Baptism of King Mindaugas of Lithuania (c. 1240-63)," in *Crusade and Conversion on the Baltic Frontier, 1150-1500*, ed. Alexander Murray (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2001), 197–214.

[66] Rowell, *Lithuania Ascending*, 189–229.

[67] Stephen C. Rowell, "The Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the Beginning of the Union with Poland: The Background to Grunwald," in *Tannenberg - Grunwald - Žalgiris 1410: Krieg und Frieden im späten Mittelalter*, ed. Werner Paravicini, Grischa Vercamer, and Rimvydas Petrauskas, 26 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2012), 43–51.

leaders, moreover, committed to efforts of converting their pagan people, sponsoring Dominican and Franciscan missions, founding and reviving Catholic dioceses, and even attempting to act as liaisons in the reunion of western and eastern Christianity.

At the same time, tensions between the Teutonic Order and the united polities of Poland and Lithuania escalated, and the labyrinthine series of alliances and betrayals among the Knights, Vytautas, Jogaila, and their subordinates ultimately converged in the early 1400s. In the 1398 Treaty of Salinwerder, Vytautas officially conceded the coveted territory of Samogitia, which linked northern Prussia with the Order's Livonian territory. Three years later, Jogaila granted his cousin the title of Lithuanian ruler for life, an acknowledgement that catalyzed (among other effects) a reconfiguring of loyalties among the Lithuanian nobility, generally to Vytautas' benefit. Vytautas seized the opportunity to secretly support uprisings by Samogitians who came to identify him as their rightful ruler in place of the Order. More secure than ever in his position as sole ruler of Lithuania (and having embittered the Order more than ever), Vytautas set old rivalries aside to strengthen his ties with Jogaila. Their mutual support had its most momentous impact on the Order's history at Tannenberg on July 15, 1410, a massive defeat from which the Order never fully recovered.

Beyond the political implications of the cousins' conversion and union, the last decades of the fourteenth century saw a transformation across Europe in the perception of Lithuania and Lithuanians. While more neutral city chronicles simply knew very little at all about the lands beyond the Nemunas, less friendly chronicles and literary texts continued to portray Lithuanians as beastly and sub-human enemies into the 1370s. The barbaric pagan could be humanized, however. On the one hand, they could appear as a sort of noble savages who rode, fought, and ruled just like Christians (and were thus worthy adversaries); on the other hand, they could always

convert. After the conversion of 1386/87 and the attendance of the Lithuanians at the Council of Constance, European perceptions began to shift, and a great barrier was lifted in the relations between Lithuania and the West.[68] At the same time, ironically, Lithuania may have in some ways become even more distant. The union of Poland and Lithuania made some Westerners more likely to shift the discourse to privilege the more familiar kings and events of Poland, effectively leaving Lithuania to the wayside.[69] Similarly, the Lithuanians' practice of communicating with their neighbors in their neighbors' languages had long promoted relatively stable relations for much of the fourteenth century; they may have been seen as barbaric on the battlefield and in their sacred groves, yet eminently civilized in the chancery. It was in German and Polish propagandistic writings after 1387 that the rhetoric of Lithuania's barbarism reached a fever pitch, before leveling out again after 1410.[70]

The Lithuanians' conflicts and collaborations with their Christian neighbors placed them in an international spotlight during the late Middle Ages, even if their place in worldwide medieval scholarship no longer reflects it. Deliberately hovering on an ambiguous borderline between friends and foes, Christians and pagans, wildness and civility, they actively and successfully engaged in diplomacy and trade, even as conflict with the Teutonic Knights dragged on. It is out of this context of exchange and hostility that the Wegeberichte emerged.

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[68] Paravicini, "Vom heidnischen Gegner," 253.

[69] Militzer, "Was wußte man in den deutschen Städten während des Mittelalters über Litauen und Vilnius?"

[70] Paravicini, "Vom heidnischen Gegner," 261. On this particular point, Paravicini cites Rowell: "Unexpected Contacts. Lithuanians at Western Courts, ca. 1316-1400," *The English Historical Review* 111 (1996): 562–63.

VI. The Logic of Raiding

The martial nature of the Wegeberichte is not only evident in the details they assemble, but is embedded in their structure. Each segment of a route covers a day's journey between two campsites where a passing army could safely refuel and recuperate. Descriptions of the landscapes between these campsites, moreover, referred to logistical concerns about the mobility, provision, and survival of raiding armies. Two main goals shaped the Order's strategies in its raids against the Lithuanians: the element of surprise, and the seizure of plunder and prisoners.

These twin objectives depended, moreover, on crusaders' mobility, to which the vegetation and hydrography of the *wildnis* posed a considerable challenge. No surprise, then, that among the texts' most defining features are their constantly repeated alerts to the necessity of clearing (*rumen*) and bridging (*brucken*) obstacles in order to advance. In its usage here, the verb *rumen* refers especially to the clearing of forest underbrush and debris to clear a path. It is often accompanied by words or phrases quantifying the extent of clearance needed. Only "minor" (*eyn wenyng*) clearance might be needed in one place; elsewhere, "in several places" (*an etzlichen enden*).[71] Detail about what needs to be cleared, or about the time- and energy-intensive labor involved in doing so is virtually absent, however.[72]

More telling are the instances where clearance is *not* necessary. One of the four routes in W. 78, for example, specifies in two of its three segments that "there is…nothing to clear," while the third implies it with the repetition that, as on the previous day, the army will pass through

[71] Cf. Paravicini's brief comment on the terms: *Preußenreisen*, 1995, 2:89–90.

[72] That is, labor carried out not by the knight's themselves, but by the army's less visible auxiliary forces, which included Prussians. See Paravicini, 2:83–85. On the construction of temporary forts and bridges in the course of military campaigns, see Baronas, "Kontext der litauischen Kriegskunst," 169–72.

"clear" or "open" (*gerume*) land. [73] A segment of W. 6 employs similar language in its specification that clearance is unnecessary within a certain "open *damerau*."[74] The *damerau* (borrowed from Polish *dąbrowa*, "oak forest") was a regional hallmark of the Baltic landscape, essentially a type of oak-dominated, deciduous forest with very little underbrush, and thus relatively open compared to other denser woodlands.[75] Open landscapes, however, were exceptions to the rule in an otherwise grueling routine of clearance.

Like "clearing," the necessity of "bridging" is an especially common directive. Determining the precise meaning of *brucken* is more complicated than is the case for its partner *rumen*, but doing so is productive in developing the sense of how the Wegeberichte conveyed the rhythms and logistics of mobility. Bridging is often prescribed, as expected, at the many waterways crisscrossing the fields and woodlands of the Baltic. As we have already seen in chronicles like Wigand's, the problems posed by this watery landscape were, in fact, significant. In recognition of the fundamental correlation between weather and wayfaring, the *Reisen* were strategically planned according to seasonal rhythms when water levels and currents would be easier to manage—ideally, low and sluggish in summer, and frozen over in winter, a condition that was especially conducive to the negotiation of larger bodies of water like lakes. For example, W. 90, a relatively detailed report, notes of one segment:

> From there, there are four miles until Berste. In between there is a good, spacious route, except there is a river in between and it is called the Kathre, and it only freezes with reluctance; but still it is not much wider than thirty feet, and there is

[73] W. 78 is outlined for two armies, which is quite common. In the first and second routes, the two armies travel parallel to one another before converging at a point where they can travel together either to Tracken or back to the beginning.

[74] W. 6: "do czwisschin ist eyne rume damerow, do darff man nicht rumen."

[75] Their openness did not necessarily make them easy to traverse, however. Occasional references to "dry" (*truge*) *damerau* suggest that the ground was usually soggier (e.g., W. 12). As Hans Mortensen remarked with ironic dryness, "I nevertheless know *Dameraus* [*sic*] in East Prussia today that are soggy indeed." "Landschaftliche Bedeutung," 136.

> plenty of wood to be found alongside it, such that one can easily cross it…But should one *not* want to cross over the river, there is likewise a lake out of which the river flows, over which one can easily pass in the winter, because it is frozen.[76]

There are several clues here about the logistics of bridging. Most importantly, the entry points out that although a certain river to be crossed is averse to freezing, two factors allow it to be bridged easily: its narrow width, and the abundance of wood in its vicinity. The availability of wood, in fact, is a common characteristic of places suited to bridging.

Following this evidence, we can identify a preliminary meaning of the term *brucken* as the construction of rudimentary corduroy or pontoon bridges—fast, if not durable, solutions to the issue of maneuverability.[77] Peter Suchenwirt described one such crossing of the river Šešupė:

> In went the army through Sambia,
> and before Insterburg it came upon
> the Suppe, where we saw
> four bridges thrown over it;
> the water is, as we saw,
> one whole lance's length deep.[78]

It is clear in the Wegebericht, however, that the makeshift bridge was only a backup plan because of the particular river's aversion to freezing. The report even offers the alternative suggestion to bypass the river entirely, passing instead over the frozen lake out of which it flowed. The reference to (presumably more sophisticated) bridges already existing at points where highways meet the river is also telling. They indicate that conventional traffic regularly passed along well-established

[76] W. 90: "von dannen hat man iiij myle bis czu Berste, do czwuschen ist rum gut weg, sunder eyn flis ist do czwuschen und heiset Kathre und besteet czumole ungerne, doch ist es nicht wol breyter wen xxx schü, und man holczes gnug do umbelang findet, das man is wol mag brucken….Mochte man denne yo nicht obir das flies, so ist eyn sehe, us deme das flies fluest, ober den czueth man wol wintercziet, went her ist bestanden."

[77] Baronas argues that the Lithuanians picked up a number of engineering techniques from the Teutonic Knights, including the construction of wooden castles and bridges. Baronas, "Kontext der litauischen Kriegskunst."

[78] Peter Suchenwirt, "Von herzog Albrechts ritterschaft," lines 178-83: "Hin zogt daz her durch Samlant; / fur Insterburch der zug geschach, / an di Suppen, dâ man sach / vîr prukken uberslahen; / daz wazzer ist, als wir sâhen, / nâchen ganzer glefen tief."

highways connecting Lithuania and its neighbors, and that the routes of the Wegeberichte intentionally bypassed them.

Defining other attestations of the term *brucken*, however, requires a somewhat broader semantic range. Certain segments, for example, deem it necessary "to bridge *a bit* in some places," suggesting a range of intensity rather than a binary necessity to carry out the action or not.[79] Nor were rivers or streams the only features to be bridged. In some cases, it was necessary to bridge a certain distance on either side of a waterway as well.[80] Across its many manifestations in the texts, then, a more fitting definition of *brucken* is more along these lines: "to cross, often by some artificial means, over a body of water or through waterlogged terrain."[81] *Brucken* thus pairs very closely with *rumen.* Like the dense vegetation of the forests, wet, swampy ground was a constant impediment to crusaders bushwhacking and bivouacking their way through the *wildnis*.[82] To forge paths in pathless places was not just a deliberate strategy; it entailed the remaking of local topography.

Beyond the practical application of facilitating mobility, changes in topography served as physical evidence of a more abstract reconfiguration of geography. Contemporary sources attest to a special affinity between the Baltic environment and its people. As we saw in chapter two,

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[79] W. 51 (emphasis added).

[80] W. 62: "do hat man czu brucken uf beide seiten eyn armbrost schos adir mee." Cf. Peter Suchenwirt's description of the Memel river as "a bow's shot wide" (*pogenschuzzes weit*), which necessitated the arrangement of boats to cross it. "Von herzog Albrechts ritterschaft," lines 186-92. Wigand von Marburg also describes crossing in small boats (e.g., *Cronica nova prutenica* 156, ed. Theodor Hirsch, SSRP 2 [Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1863], 650-51).

[81] It is worth noting that "fording" (*vorten*) does appear to be used distinctly from *brucken* as crossing without means of artificial aid. W. 97, for example, describes two rivers "that one can easily ford with an army riding on horseback, as long as the weather is not too wet [in the summer]" (*die man mit eynem rytenden heere wol vortet, ap is nicht gar nas wetter ist*). This is the only appearance of *vorten*, whereas *brucken* appears at five points, suggesting a semantic difference rather than one scribe's preference for one verb over the other. It is also striking that the meteorological stipulation refers only to fording rather than other means of crossing.

[82] Watery ground was also unsuitable for setting up campsites, as W. 93 states multiple times.

Peter of Dusburg explained Baltic religion as a false equation of the natural with the supernatural, treating the landscape itself as holy.[83] Sacred groves, which we have already seen as references in property boundary descriptions, occasionally also appear as waypoints in the Wegeberichte.[84] Emblematizing the intersection between pagan cult and wild spaces, the groves evoked especially sinister associations in the Western imagination as loci of lingering pagan practices. Thomas of Cantimpré wrote that the Lithuanians dared not besmirch their sacred woods, or even enter them except to make sacrifice; and the anonymous author of the "Messin chronicles" recorded that the groves functioned as refuges of last resort for pagans under duress.[85] Of particularly ghoulish interest to Western observers was the burning of the dead on sylvan funeral pyres. Recounting his patron's deeds on crusade in "Prusse," for example, one French chronicler described "the so-called holy woods of pine, where [the Lithuanians] burn the bodies of their dead, making sacrifice of them."[86] Besides this cult significance, however, sacred groves evidently served as landmarks for the leitsleute, who, by repurposing them as navigational aids for invading armies, aided the Teutonic Order in its self-assertation as the rightful ruler of pagan lands and peoples.

The Order's more immediate goal in reconfiguring local topography, however, was the seizure of spoils. W. 37 describes, for example, the following route:

> First out from Crymol, it is two [Prussian] miles to a knee-deep ford over the Nawesche.

[83] Peter of Dusburg, *Chronicon terrae Prussiae* 3.5, p. 53.

[84] Sacred groves appear in at least three reports: W. 7, 23, 51.

[85] Rasa Mažeika and Loïc Chollet, "Familiar Marvels? French and German Crusaders and Chroniclers Confront Baltic Pagan Religions," special issue, *Francia: Forschungen zur westeuropäischen Geschichte* 43 (2016): 41–62.

[86] Jean Cabaret d'Orville, *La chronique du bon duc Loys de Bourbon*, ed. Alphonse M. Chazaud (Paris: Librairie Renouard), 65.

> Ahead from the ford it is a mile to the village of Baptindorf, where there are six farmsteads, and the village lies on the left-hand side.
>
> When one comes across the ford, there lies Grugelndorf—also one mile from the ford, on the right-hand side—which has eight farmsteads.
>
> Kebendorf is likewise a short way straight out from the ford; it has five farmsteads, the route runs through good, spacious *damerau*, and the ground is hard, too.
>
> Each village also has two points of entry.[87]

In broad strokes, the features here are typical: the route designates a Teutonic departure point, describes a passage through the *wildnis*, and indicates settlements at the destination and along the way. Less typical is the relative density of detail provided about the villages. Not only does it provide the names of villages and the distances from each other and from key landmarks, it actually reports the number of households (*gesinde*) in each. Such details make it clear that despite the geographic challenges, there were clumps of established, even semi-fortified villages in close proximity both to each other and to Teutonic control points. The *wildnis* was not a dead space prowled by beasts and brigands nor only sporadically inhabited by drifting populations of trappers and beekeepers: it was, in many places, settled and cultivated. Moreover, this route's short distances (half a Prussian mile or less, except for the first stretch of three miles), relatively forgiving terrain (an easily-forded river and spacious *damerau*), and lack of campsites (or of any logistical details) altogether suggest the speed with which crusading armies sought to pass through these targeted areas. The Wegeberichte were expertly crafted to inform the carefully planned execution of this strategy.

[87] W. 37: "Czum erstin von Crymol us iij milen uf eynin fort uf der Naweschen, der ist kny tief, vort von dem vorte j mile bis czu Baptindorfe; in demselbin dorfe syn sechs gesinde, und das dorf lyt uf die linke hant; wen man obir den vort kumpt, so lyt Grugelndorf ouch j mile von deme vorte uf die rechte hand wert und hot viij gesinde; so lyt Kebendorf j vierteil wegis vom vorte gerichte us und hot v. gesinde, und der weg ist gut, rume damerow und herte, und iclich dorf hat ij toer." The meaning of the term *toer*, which I have translated here as "point of entry," is not completely clear, but might indicate a certain degree of fortification among the targeted villages.

Entries like W. 37 most frequently name strings of villages as potential sources of plunder along the way towards a final destination. This destination is not always a terminus, however. It is often a threshold, where the route's linear path dissolves into an array of possible directions—a transition often signaled as arrival into a certain *lant*, or area of settlement. In contrast to the specificity of the villages, the term *lant* denotes a broader, fuzzier spatial category that corresponds to the area distributed around a particular focal point. A pattern of movement thus surfaces that resembles an hourglass-like structure, beginning within the wide network of Teutonic control points, then constricting considerably along a designated set of waypoints in the *wildnis* before opening up again and dissolving into an array of possible destinations. Sometimes the contours of this threshold are left ambiguous, simply stating that an army can go anywhere it wishes beyond the final waypoint. W. 89, for instance, follows a typical path until the final destination, from which "one can go wherever one wishes."[88] In many cases, however, the transition is more defined, specifying a particular area of settlement.[89] W. 31 furnishes a particularly illustrative example:

> First from Mergenburg to the river Kuwalke; next from the river through a place called Welunenfelt into the *lant*, seven miles from Mergenburg…with a two-mile-long *graude* in between. The region is called Stenenen, and there are three *Hagen* before it: one can be easily ridden around, and the other two are suitable for clearing.[90]

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[88] W. 89: "von dannen mag man sich wenden, wo man hin wil."

[89] Or potentially into multiple, as in W. 88: "wer is aber das man das heer in dry teylen wolde, so mochte das dritte teil czu Sawalche rythen adir wo man hin wil, wen die lant sind vol" (but should the army wish to split into three, then the third party could ride to Sawalche or wherever it wishes, since the lands are rich).

[90] W. 31: "Czum ersten us von Mergenburg uf die Kuwalke das flys; von dem flise vordan obir eynen ort Welunenfelt bis in das land und ist von Mergenburg vij mile bis in das land und eyn graude ist doczwischen ij mile lang, und das land heist Stenenen und syn dry hegene vor deme lande und der ritet man eynin wol umme, und die andern czwene syn gut czu rumen, und die heyne sin verre vom lande gelegin." This image of a seemingly systematic maze of *Hagen* no doubt influenced the Mortensens' theory of the *Hagenlinie*.

In opposition to Hirsch's conjecture that the *grauden* were woods used for charcoal- or tar-burning, Thomas defined them as woodlands selectively burned by armies, which fit his broader picture of the dramatic environmental impact of the *Reisen*. Thomas, *Litauen nach den Wegeberichten (1885)*, 10–16.

In other cases, the edges of these spaces are hazier, with one *lant* flowing seamlessly into the next:

> The leitsleute Eysütte von Labiau and Tritzt von Labiau will lead four miles from Mergenburg up to Lesten. For a mile along the route from the *lant* around Lesten, one finds *Hagen* that must be cleared. From Lesten to Betigal is all well-settled *lant*. From Lesten, it is two miles to Galve, which is well-settled *lant*, and there is plenty to plunder. From Galve, it is two miles to Joswayde; that is also a settled *lant*. From Joswaide, they will lead out towards Seymen, or wherever one wishes.[91]

Striking here is not just the relative arrangement of each *lant*, but their designation as "settled" or "well-settled" (*besaczet*, *gut besaczet*). Peter Suchenwirt echoed this language in his own description of the region of Samogitia as "so full of people and resources, that we had whatever we wanted; what was gain for the Christians was the pagans' loss."[92] These common descriptors of targeted lands as ripe for plunder often appear alongside the stock phrase indicating where there is "plenty to plunder" (*czü heeren genuk*).[93] This particular expression appears almost constantly, a relentless beat in the rhythm of raiding:

> And the army that bursts forward to Weduckelen will stay the night by the sacred grove Nemacste, where there is a large lake there and plenty to plunder: a rich, settled area one mile into the *lant*. That same night, the army at Caltenenen will likewise encamp along the river called the Anta, where the land is also rich with plenty to plunder; this is two miles into the *lant*. For the third encampment, both armies will come together at Crasyen near the stronghold [*burgwalle*], where there is also rich settled land and plenty to plunder.[94]

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[91] W. 35: "Czum ersten wellen sie füren von Mergenburg iiij mile bis czü Lesten, und von Lesten von deme lande j mile weges vindet man hegene, die müs man rumen. Von Lesten czü Betigal, das ist allis besatczet lant. Von Lesten ij mile weges in das lant czü Galve und ist güt besatczet lant, und man hat czü heeren genuk. Von Galve ij mile czu Joswayde und ist ouch besaczet lant. Von Joswaide wil her fort wege füren kein Seymen, adir wo irn hin habin wellet."

[92] Peter Suchenwirt, "Von herzog Albrechts ritterschaft," lines 290-93: "Daz lant was leute und gûtes vol, / dâmit sô hêt wir unsern lust, / den christen gwin, den haiden vlust."

[93] Paravicini, *Preußenreisen*, 1995, 2:100.

[94] W. 28: "und das heer, das czu Weduckelen sprenget, lyt die nacht bie dem [heiligen] walde Nemacste, do ist eyn grosir see und czu heerin gnug und vol lands, das ist eyne mile in das land. So lyt dieselbe nacht das heer czu Caltenenen an eyme vlise, das heist di Antä, do ist ouch vol land und czu herin gnug, das ist ij mile in das land; das ander nachtleger komin die beide heer czusammen czu Graschyn bie dem burgwalle, ouch vol land und czu heerin gnug." According to W. 7, Nemacste (or, elsewhere, Nemaxste) was a *heiliger wald*.

Here, the army splits into two, each moving on to pillage "rich" (*vol*) and "settled" lands in synchrony, before reuniting to devastate the region around the fortified settlement of Crasyen.

Like villages, *lant* implies people. In most cases, this relationship is implicit: an area is only worth plundering insofar as it is well settled and cultivated. Other cases, however, express the relationship more directly. W. 25 relates that "at Karsov, one finds a certain structure to which *all the land flees*."[95] Even in the brusque staccato of the Wegeberichte, this metonymy aligning land and people projects the sort of haunting image of destruction and displacement that fill the chronicles. Thus a typically medieval logic and practice of raiding violently shaped the Baltic *wildnis* frontier and also stimulated the production of a distinctive geographic archive, compiled and preserved in the form of the Wegeberichte.

VII. Conclusion: Unbidden Guests

On the reverse of an entry describing a route from Trabow to Neugarthen, a Teutonic scribe scrawled the number of captives taken by each *Kämmerer* of six districts in Sambia, altogether totaling seventy-four (**Figure 18**).[96] Thirty-four of these are intriguingly called Tatars—an ethnonym that, by the fourteenth century, generally referred to any of the Turkic-speaking Muslim people under the rule of the Golden Horde.[97] Tatars occasionally appeared as troops alongside the Lithuanians in battle, and, accordingly, appear occasionally in the *Tresslerbuch* as captives,

[95] W. 25: "und czu Karsov do findet man ein hüs, do das lant alle czü flüget."

[96] GStA PK, XX. HA OF 1a, fol. 293v (W. 100). These six *Kammerämter* (Waldau, Kremitten, Kaymen, Schaaken, Rudau, and Wargen) were within the competency of the Marshal. On the development of these administrative divisions, see Vercamer, *Komturei Königsberg*, 93–94, 145–55. It is not clear for Rudau and Wargen what is meant by *Item*; I have taken it to indicate additional captives.

[97] H. Göckenjan, "Tataren," in *Lexikon des Mittelalters*, vol. 8 (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1977), 487–88; Krzysztof Kwiatkowski, "The Muslim People of Desht-i Qipchaq in Fifteenth-Century Prussia," in *Fear and Loathing in the North: Jews and Muslims in Medieval Scandinavia and the Baltic Region*, ed. Cordelia Hess and Jonathan Adams (Boston, MA: De Gruyter, 2015), 143, 150.

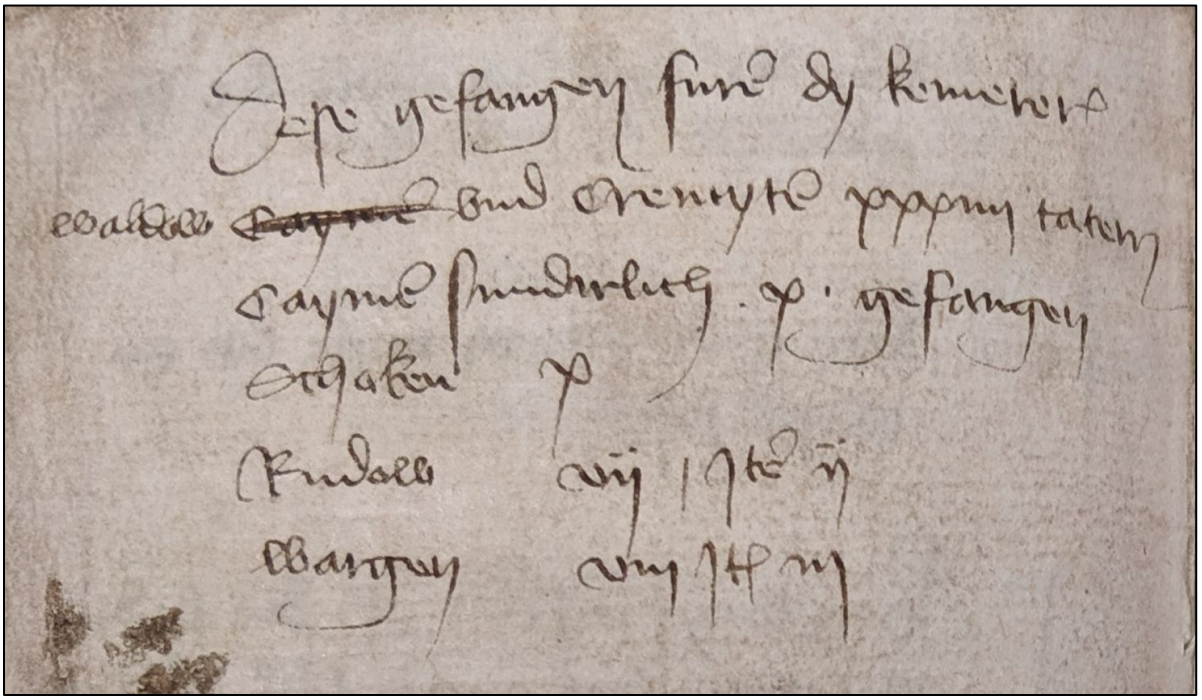

Figure 18. A list of captives on the reverse of a Wegebericht. **Source:** GStA PK, XX. HA OF 1a, fol. 293v (W. 100). Author photo, by permission of the Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin.

sometimes with their wives and children. The remaining forty, just called captives, were most likely Lithuanians from the "rich, well-settled land" that a crusading army had recently pillaged. It is clear that these did not number among the more distinguished hostages whose considerable ransoms afforded more than a hastily written entry on the verso of a Wegebericht.[98] Still, captives like these, along with cattle, were among the most common spoils taken in the course of the *Reisen*, prized not only for their potential value as laborers but also, more practically, for their ability to walk through a landscape that caused constant frustration to baggage trains.[99] How the six *Kämmerer* had entered the scene is less clear. Prussians commonly participated in the *Reisen* in an

[98] I suspect that this list was originally written on the verso of the Wegebericht slip included in a letter sent to Königsberg. That it was copied is clear not only from the condition and quality of the paper, but also from the common scribal error made in writing not "Waldau," but "Caymen," which appears on the line below. If this were the case, it would most likely mean that these captives had been taken before this particular route (W. 100) had been raided.

[99] Paravicini, *Preußenreisen*, 1995, 2:100–104.

auxiliary capacity, so it is possible that these local Prussian officials were occasionally in tow.[100] An alternative explanation might be that the captives had been brought to one of the Order's frontier castles, or further on to Königsberg, from which they were either sold or taken into the Prussian countryside to bolster the agricultural work force. The list is, in a sense, typical of the reports as a whole. It represents acts of violence in a calculated form that is not only detached from the context in which they occurred, but is rather easy to miss. It also leaves us to wonder where these captives went, after they had been accounted for.[101] Or, for that matter, to *whom* they went. It is possible, of course, that baptism could have afforded them an opportunity to assimilate, like other Baltic peasants, into the Order's world. But if the *Kämmerer* distributed them among the Prussian-law villages in their oversight, should we imagine that Prussian property holders valued these frontier captives not only as laborers, but also as a source of social capital?[102]

The Wegeberichte may depict the violence of these frontier raids only periphrastically and sometimes quite cryptically, but other contemporary observers like Wigand von Marburg and Peter Suchenwirt were more forthcoming. Peter's heraldic verse renders the ironic juxtaposition between spectacles of chivalry and brutality with particular clarity. He recalled how the crusaders would

[100] Paravicini, *Preußenreisen* 2:84–85.

[101] Paravicini has noted that despite a recognition among scholars for some time that captives had been taken *en masse* during the course of the *Reisen*, there has been no comprehensive study of captivity and slavery among the Teutonic Knights. Slave-taking was common among other crusading orders in the Mediterranean, notably the Hospitallers. Paravicini, *Preußenreisen* 2:101–2, 101n444. The lack of attention to slavery is rather surprising, given the comparatively vast historiography of free and unfree statuses. Ekdahl has since proposed the self-consciously preliminary, if compelling, argument that most Lithuanians taken in the course of the wars were enslaved to fill high labor demands in Prussia following the decline of eastward migration after the Black Death. "The Treatment of Prisoners of War during the Fighting between the Teutonic Order and Lithuania," in *Fighting for the Faith and Caring for the Sick*, ed. Malcolm Barber, The Military Orders 1 (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2008), 263–69. Such a reliance on the labor of slaves (who could not, at least according to canon law, be Christians) might constitute another reason for the continuation of the crusades after the nominal conversion of Lithuania in 1386/87.

[102] On the holding of African slaves as an expression of Cherokee sovereignty in the American South, see Tiya Miles, *Ties That Bind: The Story of an Afro-Cherokee Family in Slavery and Freedom* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 4–6, 25–43.

force the local population to surrender whatever supplies they demanded from the "Prussians": geese, chickens, sheep, cows, horses, and honey ("which was especially beloved among them").[103] The knights would then burn the villages and return to their stockaded encampment to feast on venison and fine wine, washing down the quarry of exotic northern forests with a more familiar luxury. In one scene, Peter described the army's arrival in Samogitia as a wedding, punning on the common term for crusaders to Lithuania as "guests":

> The army brought many a worthy guest
> to a land that is called Samogitia;
> there we found a wedding;
> the guests came unbidden![104]

Elsewhere, he gleefully depicted the taking of captives as they fled their burning villages:

> There we saw many a woman
> with two children strapped to her body,
> one in the back, and one in front,
> spurred onto the back of a horse
> and ridden away, barefoot![105]

The scene takes on a particular sense of irony when, at the end of the expedition, Duke Albert receives joyous news that his wife has given birth to a baby boy, their first-born son.[106]

It is telling that the crusaders in Suchenwirt's poem make little distinction among the people they fought, indiscriminately calling them Russians, Lithuanians, and especially Prussians. Their identification as pagan evidently dehumanized them enough that any further ethnic, cultural,

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[103] Peter Suchenwirt, "Von herzog Albrechts ritterschaft," lines 344-48: "Di Preuzzen prâchten gar genûg / gens und hüner, chaf und chûe, / pferd und plunder und honiges vil, / daz was irs herzen ôsterspil."

[104] Peter Suchenwirt, "Von herzog Albrechts ritterschaft," lines 256-63: "Daz her prâcht manigen werden gast / in ein lant, daz haizt Sameit; / dâ vant man eineu [*sic*] hôchzeit; / di gest chômen ungepeten!" On "guests" and their courtly activities on crusade in Prussia, see Paravicini, *Preußenreisen*, 1989, 1:288–309.

[105] Peter Suchenwirt, "Von herzog Albrechts ritterschaft," lines 333-37: "Man sach dâ vil manigem weib / zwai chint gepunden an irn leib, / ainz hinden und ainz voren; / auf einem pferd ân sporen / cham si parfûz her geriten!"

[106] Peter Suchenwirt, "Von herzog Albrechts ritterschaft," lines 523-30.

or linguistic specificity mattered little for the knights themselves. As we saw in the stories of Martin von Golin, whose legendary acts of violence in the Prussian wars earned almost hagiographic praise in the chronicles of Peter of Dusburg and Nicolaus von Jeroschin, it was the number of pagans slaughtered that mattered more than who they were. But for the participants of the *Reisen*, people were not the only currency in this economy of violence. The treacherous undertaking of traversing the hostile landscape of the *wildnis* was also central to the special repute that their long, expensive, and dangerous journey to the Baltic would garner.

I have argued in this chapter that the Wegeberichte are best understood neither as the crystallization of certain spatial perceptions nor as a spatially arrayed catalog of landscape features—neither maps nor gazetteers. I propose instead that they constitute a different kind of geographical archive—a collection of blueprints for the mobilization of expert knowledge of logistics, geography, and demography according to the particular rules and rhythms of violence on the Prussian-Lithuanian frontier, where they aided in the permanent reconfiguration of local landscapes, populations, and economies over the long duration of the conflict.[107] What I have called the "logic of raiding" thus differs from the more capacious settler-colonial "logic of elimination," not only for its specificity, but also for the ends with which—and the people against whom—the violence was carried out. The Order's primary objective here was not cultivation, but devastation. The "Wilderness" landscape thus emerges as the dark twin to the prophecy of Prussia's Promised Land, as Alfred Thomas intimated nearly 150 years ago.

[107] Cf. Pluskowski, *The Archaeology of the Prussian Crusade*, 187–90; Mortensen and Mortensen, *Besiedlung*, 1937, 1:32ff.

But the tenacity of Lithuania and its people complicates a simple narrative of Western victimization, as historians like Rowell have reminded us.[108] The sophistication of Lithuanian diplomacy, military, and economy rivaled or equaled that of its neighbors; and their fearsome reputation as warriors, which Peter of Dusburg referenced in his chronicle, was well earned in the course of a conflict where they were just as often the aggressors. The point here is neither to dilute the violence perpetrated by the Order and the Western crusaders answering its call, nor to reignite the long historiographic trope, beginning even before Peter wrote his chronicle, of the existential struggle between the Christian bulwark and the pagan empire.[109] What we see instead is an adaptive, and ultimately effective, paradigm of Indigenous sovereignty that must shape our understanding of the shared and contested space of the *wildnis*. The next chapter explores the complexity of the encounters along this frontier, focusing on the processes underlying the production of the Wegeberichte as the reconstitution of Indigenous knowledge. Mobilizing this knowledge was critical to the Order's strategy for gaining control over a frontier resistant to its narrative.

[108] "It is evident that Lithuania was by no means merely an unfortunate victim of Teutonic aggression. In 1326 the Knights stood by, helpless as the pagans ravaged Brandenburg from Prussia, as Diemar of Lübeck laments, for Lithuanian diplomacy had foxed them into neutrality. In September 1329, the Knights did not know which way to turn as Gediminas' allies ravaged southern Prussia, and Livonia was laid waste by the grand duke's army." Rowell, *Lithuania Ascending*, 261.

[109] Cf. Berend, *At the Gate of Christendom*.

CHAPTER SIX: "THEY WILL LEAD THE WAY IN THE WILDERNESS"

I. A Summons to Königsberg

Late one November around the year 1400, the Grand Marshal in Königsberg received a letter about recent happenings at the frontier commandery of Insterburg, about sixty miles due east. "Gedutte and his company have mercifully returned home," wrote the Procurator. "They have reported on what you sent them out to investigate, and laid out the routes up to a mile from the Nemunas, as well as a route that goes right over the Nemunas into the area of settlement [on the other side]."[1] The Procurator then relayed the routes as Gedutte and his men had described them—a nine-day trek across a series of frozen lakes and rivers—before closing with a few other bits of information that the leitsleute had brought back with them: "they also found many people settled in the wilderness, and that the Lithuanians have traveled from the Nemunas up to Lake Zereens, three miles away from Merken." The letter ends poised on the edge of violent advances from both sides of the frontier. At the same time that it describes inroads for a marauding crusader army, it notes the gathering threat of a Lithuanian attack. Gedutte and his leitsleute, whom the Marshal had evidently sent himself, were crucial in the preparation for either eventuality.

[1] GStA PK, XX. HA OBA 438: "Gedutte mit syner geselleschaft von gotes gnoden wol gesunth syn heim komen unde haben alle ding wol entrichtet dor umme ir sy hath us gesandth unde habin dy wege geczeichent bis eyne mile von der Memel unde uff eynen weg der obir di Memel recht geeth in das landth." Gedutte's report corresponds to Theodor Hirsch's aggregate W. 57 (*Die littauischen Wegeberichte*, SSRP 2, [Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1863]) from three different versions: GStA PK, XX. HA OBA 438; GStA PK, XX. HA OF 1a, fol. 275r; and Königsberger geheimes Archiv MS A186, fol. 255, which is now missing from OF 1-1a. For further background on OF 1-1a, see pp. 296-98 above.

The Procurator's report hints at the system by which the Marshal orchestrated networks of informants from his base of operations in Königsberg. Another short letter sheds further light on how this system worked.[2] This time, it was the Marshal writing to the Grandmaster in Marienburg about progress he had made on orders the Grandmaster had given him. The Marshal relates that he had summoned his leitsleute and several Commanders to convene in Königsberg, along with the Commanders' own delegations of leitsleute. He explains that a separate slip—now lost, but originally enclosed with the report—detailed two routes that had been drawn up in this gathering, along with measurements of the current thickness of the ice. The Marshal's report not only illustrates a key mechanism by which the leitsleute directly informed planning in Königsberg, but indicates that officials at other commanderies actively oversaw local companies of leitsleute. In the previous chapter, I argued that the Wegeberichte, long studied as a sort of pre-cartographic gazetteer of historic places, should not be understood as maps (in a broad sense) nor as navigational tools (in a narrow one), but as logistical blueprints assembled according to the particular logic of frontier raiding. The two reports clearly demonstrate how these blueprints (sometimes folded into the body of these letters, other times written separately on accompanying slips of paper) were products of this kinetic system.

Given how critical the leitsleute clearly were to the Order as spies, scouts, and navigators, it is curious that we know so little about them. Most entries refer to them cursorily and formulaically. They "will lead the way" (*wil furen den weg*), "have traveled a route," (*haben den weg gegangen*), "know the way" (*wissen den weg*), or "know their way around" (*sich bekennen in*) from a point of origin to a certain destination or set of destinations. As we saw in the last chapter, moreover, they were not only responsible for reconnaissance in advance of military

[2] GStA PK, XX. HA OBA 649.

expeditions, but also active participants. The complicity of the leitsleute in the devastation of areas with which they were intimately familiar raises questions about the motives underlying their entanglement with the Teutonic Order. Although they say little directly about the shadowy identities of the people responsible for their creation, the Wegeberichte afford clues that, taken together, tell a story of pragmatism, mobility, and the mercurial politics of assimilation.

Nicholas Thomas's theory of entanglement and creative recontextualization is an especially helpful model for conceptualizing the interactions between the Order and the leitsleute beyond the limitations of colonial binaries.[3] As products of these encounters, texts like the Wegeberichte afford valuable insights into the exchanges between a Western polity and Indigenous agents, revealing how ostensibly distinct religious identities, political alignments, and ethnic backgrounds could coalesce and, just as soon, diverge. All participants, moreover, were aware of this fluidity—its possibilities and its limitations. This chapter argues that the Wegeberichte offer a window into Westerners' recontextualization and repurposing of knowledge as a tool of Teutonic lordship, thus exemplifying two entwined processes: the generative collaboration of Indigenous people with a colonial polity, and that polity's efforts to gain control over, and ultimately divest itself of, reliance upon a group it came to fear as dangerously destabilizing.

II. The *leitsleute*

Prosopographic analysis of the leitsleute named in the Wegeberichte is a first step in investigating their involvement with the Teutonic Order.[4] One hundred thirty-three individual leitsleute appear

[3] Thomas, *Entangled Objects*, 4–5. For further discussion, see p. 53 above.

[4] As Päsler has suggested: *Sachliteratur*, 335.

across the OF 1-1a compilation.[5] In addition to personal names, scattered details like kin relations, status, or title also provide starting points for investigating identities, relationships, and networks. To begin, the leitsleute came from and were associated with places themselves, and the Wegeberichte are in fact quite informative in this regard. Of the 133 named leitsleute, twenty-one have recognizably Germanic (e.g., Dietrich, Hans, Heinrich) or Slavic (e.g., Pavel) names, while the remaining 112 have distinctively Baltic names (e.g., Eykint, Eysütte, Zada).[6] More than half are identified at least once with either a toponymic or a place of provenance. One leitsmann named Kynne, for example, appears sometimes as "Kynne of [or from] Balga" (*von der Balge*) and other times as "Kynne from the area of Balga" (*us dem gebite czur Balge*).[7] Almost 90 percent of the leitsleute with toponymics have Baltic names.

Ethnic or socio-linguistic categorization based on personal names is thorny and potentially misleading, of course. Categories like "Prussian" and "Lithuanian" themselves entail problematic aggregations of Indigenous identities, while Christian names imply neither ethnic background (a Baltic convert could take the name of a Western sponsor) nor even religious affiliation (baptism could serve purely strategic ends, with conversion being accordingly short-lived). The lives of certain Baltic converts like the Lithuanian brothers Thomas and Hans Surwille illustrate the influence of sponsors in adopting Christian names as well as the advantages that could come with

[5] In collating the attestations of individuals into a prosopographic database, I have assumed a relatively limited number of leitsleute. On this premise, I tracked the certainty with which two or more attestations match, based on criteria including name, associates, places traveled, and context. Highly probable matches are counted as the same individual.

[6] Reinhold Trautmann catalogued Baltic names from Teutonic sources, but categorized them according to outdated ethnocentric principles (for OF 1-1a, for example, he mentions only Prussians and Scalovians, not Lithuanians). Modern Lithuanian onomastic studies' focus on post-medieval sources, on the other hand, limits their relevance. *Die altpreußischen Personennamen*. Cf. Darius Ivoška, "Litauische Personennamen in den Ordensdokumenten," *Acta Linguistica Lituanica* 73 (2015): 38–54.

[7] W. 6, 7, 15: "von der Balge"; W. 24, 27: "us dem gebite czur Balge."

the strategic choice of godparents.[8] Both Thomas and Hans are so visible in the record because of the status they attained through baptism. Thomas, who probably took the name of one of two English nobles on crusade in Prussia in 1365, appears as a landed knight from at least 1377, and even served as a Procurator from 1389–1391. Hans was also named as a knight from at least 1385. Both brothers served the Order in valuable roles as translators, mediators, and even guides—the *Annals of Thorn* mention that they were called on for expertise in navigating the region where they had once lived; and sure enough, Hans is named as a leitsmann in W. 85.[9] For Baltic Christians of lower status, the dimensions of spiritual kinship relations are less visible. It is reasonable to expect that naming practices among the laity aligned with those in the areas from which the majority of Western migrants had come—namely northern and central Germany, where it was common (at least by the fifteenth century) to have three godparents, one of whose names transferred to the baptized infant about half the time.[10] How might this general rule have governed the naming of Christian Prussians like Wissetünge, our star witness from chapter four? We can assume that Wissetünge was baptized as an infant since he was born in episcopal territory at least several

[8] Paravicini, "Vom heidnischen Gegner," 261–64; Rowell, "Unexpected Contacts," 568–69.

[9] *Franciscani Thorunensis Annales Prussici (941-1410)*, ed. Ernst Strehlke, SSRP 3 (1866; repr., Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1965), 139. Paravicini, "Vom heidnischen Gegner," 263n59. For further detail about this episode, see pp. 346-47.

[10] Christof Rolker, "Patenschaft und Namengebung im späten Mittelalter," in *Konkurrierende Zugehörigkeit(en): Praktiken der Namengebung im europäischen Vergleich*, ed. Christof Rolker, Gabriela Signori, and Gabriela Signori (Konstanz: UVK Verlagsgesellschaft, 2011), 30–31. Rolker, for one, argues that godparents in northern Europe had largely lost the co-parental roles that had long been associated with baptismal sponsorship, especially since the late Carolingian period. They were, nevertheless, still intimately involved with naming practices. On the rising importance of godparents in the creation of fictive kin networks in the early Middle Ages, cf. Joseph H. Lynch, *Godparents and Kinship in Early Medieval Europe* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986), esp. 172-73, 333-39. According to Lynch, it took until the tenth century for the onomastic link between godparent and catechumen to form fully.

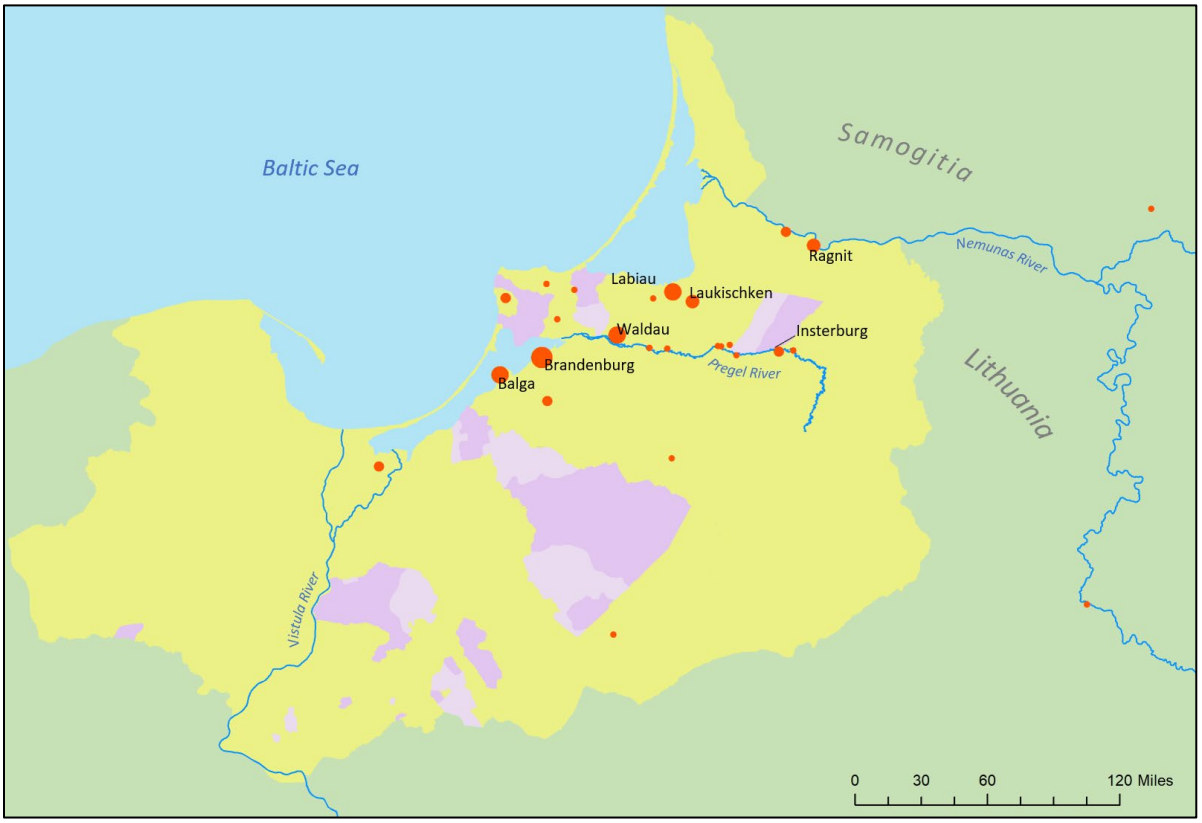

Figure 19. Map of the distribution of leitsleute toponymics. Each dot indicates an identifiable place associated with a toponymic. Larger dots indicate multiple leitsleute. Sixty-four total toponymics net thirty-five individual places, twenty-eight of which can be geolocated. The only two places outside of Teutonic Prussia (yellow) are Garthen and Seymen in modern-day Belarus and Lithuania, respectively. It is also notable that no toponymics are associated with locations in episcopal territory (purple).

decades after the area had been conquered and settled. This means that either one of his sponsors must have been a Prussian named Wissetünge, or else he was given an Indigenous name of some other significance (perhaps his father's?), even if one or more of his sponsors had been named Hans, Peter, Heinrich, or the like. Such conjectures aside, we are left, more or less, where we began: Baltic names imply Indigenous background, but Christian names are ambiguous.

If forenames offer only a spotty indication of ethnic or cultural background, what can toponymics tell us? Very little, it seems, at least about origins. The prominence of Baltic names and, more broadly, the prized familiarity with frontier places suggests that the leitsleute originated from, or dwelt along, the frontier. The handful of leitsleute about whom we know anything beyond the Wegeberichte, like Thomas and Hans Surwille, confirm this assumption. Plotting toponymics

given in the Wegeberichte, however, reveals locations almost exclusively within Teutonic Prussia. (**Figure 19**).[11] Ten leitsleute, for example, are attested with multiple toponymics. A certain Briole appears three times, linked to three different settlements in close proximity.[12] The places with which the leitsleute were associated thus fail to identify origins or even fixed residences, illustrating instead a considerable degree of mobility. This fluidity is, in fact, crucial to understanding their relations with the Teutonic Order. In lieu of signaling either origins or stable residences, toponymics were assigned (and reassigned) as a means of identifying and tracking the members of the itinerant group—a sort of administrative finding aid rather than elements intrinsic to Indigenous identities.[13] The limited number of leitsleute with toponymics at all (which were, moreover, evidently subject to change) suggests that this group was, on the whole, difficult to pin down.

Rationale behind the Order's attempts to fix the locations of the leitsleute in official record must be found in its heavy reliance on them, and not only as guides. Statuses in the Wegeberichte indicate that certain leitsleute were assimilated into the Order's administrative structures in roles that spanned the social spectrum. Two leitsleute are identified as *diener*, for example.[14] Often the

[11] The Mortensens formulated a similar hypothesis in their brief discussion of the leitsleute in *Die Besiedlung des nordöstlichen Ostpreußens bis zum Beginn des 17- Jahrhunderts*, vol. 2 (Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1937), 19–22.

[12] Namely, Pliwisken (W. 39), Insterburg (W. 42), and Colenen (W. 58). That this is the same person is clear from context.

[13] On lower officials' identification of city dwellers by places of residence, cf. Smail, *Imaginary Cartographies*, 30–37.

[14] Preiwus, *diener* to the Commander of Ragnit (W. 15) and Tolnege, in the service of an unnamed Commander (W. 17). Two others less specifically identified as *knechte* (W. 39, 43) probably also fall into this category, as unfree *diener*. Note that the *diener* resemble the distinctive *dienstmänner* (ministerials) of German courts only in name. On the ministerials, see John B. Freed, "Nobles, Ministerials, and Knights in the Archdiocese of Salzburg," *Speculum* 62, no. 3 (1987): 575–611; Benjamin Arnold, "Instruments of Power: The Profile and Profession of Ministeriales within German Aristocratic Society (1050-1225)," in *Cultures of Power: Lordship, Status, and Process in Twelfth-Century Europe*, ed. Thomas N. Bisson (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), 36–56.

younger sons of Prussian nobility, *diener* most commonly served in the Order's convent-castles, but were occasionally in the employ of German noble families. Their duties and legal status varied accordingly.[15] Some operated in the highest circle as trusted doctors and legally trained advisers to the Grandmaster, and could therefore hold considerable influence. As attested in the Handfesten, it was common for *diener*—especially at such high levels—to receive property after their term of service had ended. On the other hand, younger or lower-status *diener* were responsible for more menial (if no less crucial) duties of local administration, serving as couriers or runners, for example. In addition to the attributions as *diener*, a certain Graude von Mergenberg is said to be a *Witing*, an exclusively Indigenous service class distinct from the *diener*, although largely overlapping in their roles.[16] Contemporary protocols stipulated that each fortified convent-house in the northerly Commanderies should retain at least six *witinge*, who fulfilled a variety of roles: as garrison troops, as overseers of construction and upkeep, as couriers, and so on. Unlike the *diener*, however, the *witinge* were set apart visually, socially, and even fiscally. They were uniformly clothed, sat at a designated table (the so-called *witingstisch*) in the Teutonic refectories, and were paid in cash levied by a special tax called *witing gelde*. Another leitsmann, Gayline, is identified as a *tolk*—a title attributed exclusively to Indigenous members of higher Teutonic officials' retinues, and accordingly entailing higher status than either the *witinge* or *diener*.

[15] Wenskus, "Nichtdeutsche Bevölkerung des Preußenlandes," 423; Wenskus, "Preußen als Territorialstaat," 364; Thielen, *Verwaltung*, 115. On the *diener* specifically, see Sławomir Jóźwiak, "*Dieners* in the Service of the Teutonic Order in Prussia in the Second Half of the 14th Century-the First Half of the 15th Century: The Group Size, Maintenance, Accommodation," *Zapiski Historyczne* 83 (2018): 8–35.

[16] W. 47. Vercamer interprets the special treatment of the *witinge* as more of a privilege than a derogatory form of segregation in Vercamer, *Komturei Königsberg*, 294–95. Cf. the less judicious analysis of Wenskus, "Preußen als Territorialstaat," 365; Thielen, *Verwaltung*, 115. On the Indigenous Prussian origins of the *witinge*, Vercamer follows Wolfgang Fritze's hypothesis that the status was itself a Slavic loanword referring to a sort of service nobility, likely of a martial nature. Cf. Wolfgang H. Fritze, *Untersuchungen zur frühslawischen und frühfränkischen Geschichte bis ins 7. Jahrhundert* (New York: P. Lang, 1994), 38. Whatever the case, the correlation between Prussian heritage and *witing* status attests to the likelihood that at least some of the leitsleute, like Graude, were Prussian.

Working as translators, diplomats, and mediators, the *tolke* were indispensable to the management of legal and diplomatic affairs.[17]

Although the Wegeberichte directly attribute special status to only a handful of leitsleute, the statuses that do appear afford several important insights. First, their broad range indicates that even if the leitsleute constituted something of a distinct group, their activities do not seem to have conferred a special status. To act as a leitsmann, in other words, does not seem to have been a legal obligation, but more of an elective service, as attested by other clues in the Wegeberichte and sources like the *Tresslerbuch*. At the same time, it is clear that the leitsleute were integrated into the fabric of Teutonic administration. As scouts and spies, their primary association with things military has precluded them from inclusion in past discussions of Indigenous status in the colonial Baltic. Historians like Reinhard Wenskus, Peter Thielen, and Grischa Vercamer have focused instead on untangling the evidence of binary statuses attributed in sources like the Handfesten: free and unfree, German and non-German, *dienstpflichtig* and *zinshaftig*, and so on. Here, again, the leitsleute resist neat classification.

As to what the leitsleute actually did, scouting activities themselves entailed a combination of navigation, reconnaissance, and espionage. In a letter sent to the Marshal in the early fifteenth century, the Commander of Rhein recounted how he had ventured out to a place called Lyck in the company of his leitsleute "and other freemen from the area."[18] The Commander had been informed about brigandage in the wilderness around the stronghold of Garthen (by this time in the hands of the Lithuanians), and instructed his men to "check the roads" and "go through the *wildnis*"

[17] Wenskus, "Nichtdeutsche Bevölkerung des Preußenlandes," 423; Wenskus, "Preußen als Territorialstaat," 364. Hirsch's rendering of "Gayline de tolk" (W. 3) does not account for an *r*-abbreviation mark on GStA PK OF 1a, fol. 283v.

[18] GStA PK, XX. HA OBA 2973. The Commander's wording may offer another clue into the puzzle of legal status, but the association here between leitsleute and freemen is too ambiguous to make much of.

themselves in order to learn the brigands' intent in the area. This insight into the logistics of espionage is illuminating enough. But what is perhaps even more striking is how the Commander alternately referred to his own men as leitsleute and *struethir* ("brigands"), and to have urged them to obtain information about the area "doing harm to no one they should come across and bringing back a witness without undue violence."[19] In the end, his men bring back a Rus' artisan and his son, who offer compelling information about two Lithuanian dukes' activities. Whether the Rus' inhabitant and his son came willingly to Lyck as the Komtur requested, or were coerced into acting as informants is not clear. Nevertheless, the report as a whole illustrates how thin the line could be between brigands and leitsleute who, in carrying out their orders, were evidently accustomed to leveraging at least a threat of violence. Similarly, one Wegebericht, after describing the routes that Gedutte and his "company" (*geselleschaft*) had just safely finished scouting, concludes with information about settlements and population density in the area, as well as the recent movements of Lithuanian troops.[20] In the *wildnis*, the leitsleute were the Order's eyes, ears, and even hands.

The Order was acutely aware, moreover, that the skills and knowledge of its Indigenous agents were potentially disastrous in the wrong hands. Contemporary chronicles describe leitsleute leading armies into trouble or getting lost. Wigand von Marburg tells the story of a Teutonic army that, failing to find a ford across the Nemunas River to enter the region around Garthen, fatefully chooses to follow a leitsmann: all but six men drown in attempting to cross at the place he designates.[21] Fords also posed dangers besides the possibility of drowning. The *Annals of Thorn*,

[19] GStA PK, XX. HA OBA 2973: "und [ich] befüel den das sie die wege eigentlichen solden beseen und die wildnisse durchgeen also sie beste mochten in den heiligen tagen ab sie etwas kunden dirfarn was ere meynunge in den landen were…ouch solden sie nymandis vordries thun ab sie imandis wurden ankomen sunder kunden sie mit beqwemkeit eyne czeuge bringen das were meyn wille wol."

[20] W. 57.

[21] Wigand von Marburg, *Cronica nova Prutenica* 156, ed. Theodor Hirsch, SSRP 2 (Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1863), pp. 650-51. Losing the way did not always strictly entail negative consequences, however. Peter of Dusburg even relates

for example, tell of the Lithuanian "ford sentries" (*custodes vadi*) awaiting to attack crusaders at river crossings and to warn of their advance.[22] Frustrated in their efforts to cross the Nemunas in 1385, the Marshal enlisted the aid of Hans and Thomas Surwille, who, as "Lithuanians born nearby," possessed knowledge of fords in the area that enabled an expedition to pillage the area for twenty-one days.[23] The episode illustrates the importance of trustworthy Indigenous allies like the Surwille brothers, but also implies the fragility of such alliances. Had the brothers plotted to dupe the Order and lead its expedition to an unreliable or heavily guarded ford, the loss of manpower, resources, and strategic advantage would have been disastrous. Thomas and Hans, of course, had strong ties to land, titles, and family on the Order's side of the Nemunas. But for less familiar or prominent leitsleute, the bond of trust may have been somewhat thinner.

Stereotyped anxiety about the changeability of Indigenous people—and the consequent effort to secure their loyalty and fix them in place, whether by force or by friendship—is a hallmark of colonial power structures that we must avoid reifying (Symes's metaphor for medievalists as unwitting "minor colonial officials" might once again come to mind).[24] Heather Roller warns against this in her work on eighteenth-century Amazonia, where Portuguese officials constantly fretted over the need to freeze Indigenous communities in place.[25] Mobility need not imply endemic native capriciousness, nor even state oppression. Roller's Amazonian communities, for

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how the error of certain guides leading an army astray for two days is actually divinely inspired, since the army ends up catching its target at an opportune moment. Peter of Dusburg, *Chronicon terrae Prussie* 3.308, ed. Max Töppen, SSRP 1 (Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1861), pp. 175-76.

[22] *Franciscani Thorunensis Annales*, 139.

[23] *Franciscani Thorunensis Annales*, 139: "Thomas et Joannes dicti Surbil nati Lituani prope istud vadum infra existere medio miliari sciverunt."

[24] Symes, "When We Talk about Modernity," 717.

[25] Heather F. Roller, *Amazonian Routes: Indigenous Mobility and Colonial Communities in Northern Brazil* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2014), 6–11.

example, were constantly on the move, yet rooted by strong sense of local identity. Tiffany Shellam has similarly characterized the mobility of nineteenth-century Aboriginal Nyungar as fluid, yet "grounded" by the networks in which they were situated.[26] Mobility can constitute a key means by which Indigenous people selectively engage in colonial projects, as when Roller's Indian crewmen developed strategic relationships with white canoe directors during long forays into the Amazon's jungle interior.[27] The leitsleute exercised considerable agency in selectively lending information and guidance to help (and perhaps sometimes hinder) the Order. At the same time, the Wegeberichte also illustrate Nicholas Thomas' argument that once Indigenous knowledge has been exchanged and creatively recontextualized as colonial property, new uses and meanings effect a permanent shift in power relations between Western consumers and native purveyors.[28]

Leitsleute origins, in any case, must be sought beyond politicized toponymics. While any number of individual circumstances could have prompted relocation across the frontier, evidence in the Wegeberichte points to three principle causes. The first entails a shift (at least temporary) of loyalty, particularly by regional Lithuanian nobles. A particularly high-profile example of the Order's friends on the other side of the *wildnis* was the "duke" Switrigal, who took the opportunity to enlist the Order's help in his bid for the ducal crown of Lithuania in May of 1402.[29] With a contingent of men in his service, Switrigal is himself attested as a leitsmann.[30] Another noble

[26] Tiffany Shellam, "Nyungar Domains: Reading Gyalliput's Geography and Mobility in the Colonial Archive," in *Conflict, Adaptation, Transformation: Richard Broome and the Practice of Aboriginal History*, ed. Ben Silverstein (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2018), 80–95.

[27] Roller, *Amazonian Routes*, 57–91, 127–64.

[28] Thomas, *Entangled Objects*, 4–5.

[29] Rowell, "Background to Grunwald," 47.

[30] W. 92, 100.

leitsmann was Clausigail czu Girmau, who offered to lead crusaders to his brother Mynnegail's estate (*hoff*) along the way toward a destination about forty miles west of Vilnius.[31] Manors and villages of the Lithuanian elite surface frequently in the Wegeberichte, like islands in an archipelago; but who was friend or foe at the moment of the route's reporting is not always clear. Clausigail, for one, does not indicate whether he intended to lead Teutonic armies to plunder the property of his brother, or that of his brother's neighbors. Either way, such active kinship ties spanned the frontier, and leitsleute could leverage their relationship with the Order as a tool in disputes back home. Scouting itself could, in fact, be a family affair. At least ten leitsleute appear in the record working closely in tandem with a brother, father, or son.[32]

Other leitsleute were themselves the victims or descendants of frontier violence. One entry identifies a group of four "Old [*alte*] Scalovians" well acquainted with the *wildnis* south of Vilnius.[33] The Scalovians were not, in fact, from the southeast, but from a northwestern border region of Prussia. Their long history of resistance to Teutonic lordship in the thirteenth century shaped later perceptions of them. Peter of Dusburg's story of Girdilo—the well-established and trusted Scalovian who tricked Teutonic officials into granting him a large army, which he subsequently led into a deadly trap—activates a Scalovian stereotype through a sensationalized act of treachery.[34] The story conveys deep-seated anxiety about Baltic assimilation. Over a century after Peter claims the last Scalovians converted, emigrating to Prussia and leaving behind a land

[31] W. 74.

[32] Six of these ten leitsleute (that is, three of the five pairs) only ever appear with their paired family member, and Eykint vom Goldberg appears only once without his brother Skawdegede. The brothers Rexa and Twirbut von Brandenburg constitute something of an exception, with Rexa appearing in three routes with his brother and five routes without him.

[33] W. 61.

[34] *Chronicon terrae Prussiae* 3.226, p. 148.

"bereft of inhabitants," these four leitsleute appear in the Wegeberichte.[35] Whether their service was coerced or voluntary, their relationship to the *wildnis* was rooted in a history of violence.[36] From similar circumstances, leitsleute designated specifically as "refugees" (*vlier*, *flyer*) constitute a third attested origin. In October of 1387, a refugee named Mikal from southern Lithuania came directly before the Marshal to offer his services, claiming to "[know] a ford that is good passage over the Merkys river, where a hundred men can ride side-by-side."[37] Like Clausigail, Mikal evidently recognized an opportunity in the Order's dependence on his expertise, and sought to profit from its intervention in the region he had fled.[38]

III. Networks and Knowledge in the "Wilderness"

From crown-hungry nobles to displaced exiles, the leitsleute comprised a diverse group. In exchange for wealth and status (or, at least, protection), they transferred a body of knowledge shaped by their relationships to the lands and peoples beyond Prussia.[39] The Order's officials framed their reports to account and adjust for variations and limitations, accordingly attesting to their informants' knowledge of particular routes or areas and ignorance of others. Mikal the refugee's report is a good example, claiming that the leitsmann "knows" the ford near Krakenik

[35] *Chronicon terrae Prussiae* 3.188, p. 135: "sicque terra illa fuit sine habitatore multis annis."

[36] Hirsch assumed they were prisoners, although his reasoning is vague. *Die littauischen Wegeberichte*, 691n17.

[37] W. 80.

[38] From the outset of the *Reisen*, the Order imagined itself the rightful lord of Lithuania—a fictive lordship it projected as the legal basis of a number of charters concerning property in Lithuania. It was not uncommon to grant Lithuanian refugees property in Prussia on the condition that they reclaim their property in Lithuania as soon as the region was subjected to Teutonic rule; the reclamation could additionally entail giving up the new Prussian property. See, for example, two documents issued to *vlier* in 1291 and 1303: GStA PK, XX. HA OF 112, fols. 13v, 8r.

[39] A number of leitsleute appear as recipients of payments in the *Marienburger Tresslerbuch*, ed. Erich Joachim, facsimile of first edition (1896; repr., Bremerhaven: Otto Knieß, 1973), 14-15, 68, 180-81, 200, 215, 232, 241, 317, 336, 359, 398, 494, 511, 534, 549-50, 577-78, 580.

and "is well acquainted with" the area around Salsenike.[40] Aside from the typical opening statement that a leitsmann "has traveled" (*hat gegangen*) a particular route, these verbs of knowing regularly signal each one's relationship to the places he lists, often adding the modifier "[very] well" (*wol*) for emphasis. By identifying Mikal the refugee's knowledge of a "good" ford and close familiarity with the area from which he had come, the official responsible for the report vouched for both the logistical usefulness of his highly specialized contribution as well as his reliability as a guide.

At the same time, these verbs of knowing could also limit (sometimes quite narrowly) their respective guides' scope of expertise to prescribed sets of places. Hannus, another refugee, is attested in only one entry, which relays his knowledge of two fords across the river Nerge:

> Hannus, who is the *vlier* at Tapiau, knows these fords over the Nerge. First, he knows a ford upstream from Kernow, as far [from Kernow] as a cry can be heard…The other ford is straight up from that one, a good two cries' distance below Syderndorf.[41]

Apart from the verbs themselves, it is striking to note the unusual way that Hannus measures distances. The Wegeberichte, as we have seen, normally render distances with a regular terminology combining the metric exactitude of the *Geometria Culmensis* (miles, cord- and rod-lengths, feet, and so on) with the ubiquitous military equipment of the expeditions (one river might a bow-shot wide and several lances deep, for instance). Hannus' reference to one or two cries' distance gestures to a system of sonic measurement interwoven with metrics of distance and time.

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[40] Three verbs are especially prominent: *wissen*, *sich bekennen*, and *sich verweisen*. While all three occupy a similar semantic register, *wissen* tends to be used for discrete topographic features ("he knows a ford") while the reflexive verbs indicate familiarity with a route or a certain region ("he knows his way to Vilnius"; "he is familiar with the Šalčininkai region"). The verb *sich verweisen* is also common, used interchangeably with *sich bekennen*.

[41] W. 69: "dese vorte weys Hannus, der czu Tappiow ist der vlier, obir dy Nerge. Czum ersten weys her eynen vort obinwendig der Kernow, als verse man eynen ruff gehorin mag, nicht verre von des koninges were; der andir vort ist vort uff von deme, wol czwene rufe undir Syderndorfe." I am unsure what is meant by *were*; perhaps some sort of hydraulic feature such as a weir, dam, or artificial pond.

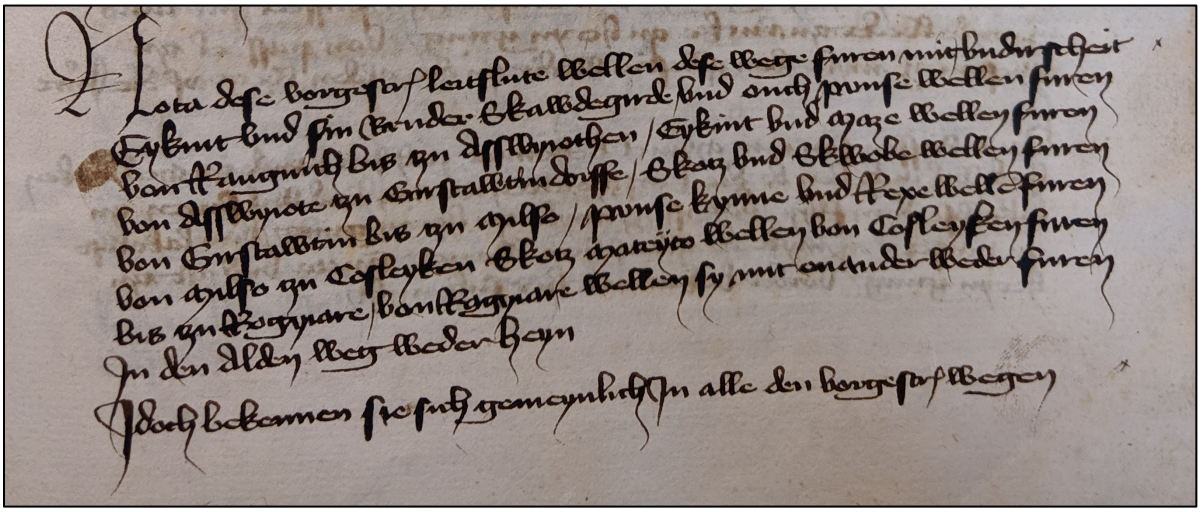

Figure 20. A Wegebericht divides leitsleute by areas of expertise. On six parallel lines, waypoints are named, followed by relevant leitsleute. **Source:** GStA PK, XX. HA OF 1a, fol. 237v. Author photo, by permission of the Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin.

The implication of callers and listeners at the root of Hannus's system hints at the communicative soundscape informing their perception of space. In other words, Hannus' knowledge about the fords—and about the navigation of the spaces between and around them—was at once the product of personal experience and cooperative action.

Some routes are more directly informative about the collaborative nature of navigation and reconnaissance, attributing certain segments to respectively expert guides and dividing responsibility according to individual specializations (**Figure 20**). One entry ends with an explanatory note that that the leitsleute it has listed propose leading the route in shifts:

> Note: these aforementioned leitsleute offer to lead these routes with some variation among them.
>
> Eykint and his brother Skawdegirde, and also Bunse, will lead from Ragnit to Asswyiote,
>
> Eykint and Maze will lead from Asswyiote to Girstawtendorf,
>
> Skotz and Skwobe will lead from Girstawtin[dorf] to Milso,
>
> Bunse, Kynne, and Rexa will lead from Milso to Cosleikindorf,
>
> Skotz and Mateico will lead from Cosleikindorf to Rogyare,

> From Rogyare they [Skotz and Mateico] will lead back towards the first route taken inward.[42]

The note divides a long route among a group of leitsleute, assigning guides to segments in groups of two or three that link up with one another at particular waypoints. These waypoints are not evenly spaced, nor did the guides distribute themselves evenly. Eykint, for example, knows the way from Ragnit through Asswyiote up to Girstawtendorf; Bunse accompanies him to from Ragnit to Asswyiote, falls out, then picks up again after Girstawtendorf, where Eykint leaves off. Furthermore, the end of the long note is punctuated with a short disclaimer that, "in any case, they collectively know their way along the routes outlined above." This brief editorial intervention invites us to picture the scene on a cold December day in 1386, when no less than nine leitsleute—now, perhaps, speaking in German to the officials and now conferring with one another in their native tongues—gathered together with commandery officials and scribes to outline the long, fifteen-day trek deep into Samogitia and back. The scribe neatly transcribed their instructions into a schematic itinerary to fold up and send along the Marshal.

Imagining the moment of the text's creation requires some creative license, given the paucity of detail in the sources themselves, but it is important to do so: it is not the report's content alone that is significant here, but also the circumstances of its composition. Records of encounters between officials and Indigenous people on other frontiers might help by way of analogy. Take, for example, the Australian "fringe," where British soldiers, convicts, settlers, and officials regularly sought Indigenous aid in navigating and negotiating a landscape both unfamiliar and

[42] W. 7: "Nota: dese vorgescrheben leitslüte wellin dese wege furen mit undirscheit. Eykint und sin brudir Skawdegirde und ouch Punse wellin furen von Rangnit bis czu Asswyioten, Eykint und Maze wellin furen von Asswyiote czu Girstawtindorffe, Skotz und Skwobe wellin furen von Girstawtin bis czu Milso, Punse, Kynne und Rexe wellin furen von Milso czu Cosleikin, Skotz, Mateico wellin von Cosleykin furen bis czu Rogyare, von Rogyare wellin sy mit enandir wedir füren in den aldin weg wedir heym. Idoch bekennen sie sich gemeynlich in alle den vorgeschreben wegin."

unhospitable to foreigners accustomed to milder Hibernian climes.[43] In the shadow of extreme violence, then, peaceful encounters could unfold. Some Aboriginal people, for their part, sought to form advantageous relationships with the colonists by offering geographic information, often in informal conversational contexts. Colonial minutes relay the language, gestures, and even illustrations with which Aboriginal informants articulated their relationships to local people and places, in turn inscribing these relationships into the written record.

Tiffany Shellam has described one such encounter in southwestern Australia between a Nyungar tribesman named Gyalliput and a British official, John Morgan.[44] In early 1833, Gyalliput and a companion travelled to the town of Swan River in order to act as mediators in the violent conflicts that had arisen between the local Nyungar and the rapidly expanding settlement. At the bottom of a letter that Morgan was writing to London, Gyalliput sketched a map of his native encampment far to the south of Swan River.[45] As he drew it, he described it to Morgan in the recitative style ("part spoken, part song") common among Nyungar people at the time, which Morgan transcribed as follows:

> That place no. 1 womanar [*sic*], children, pickaninny. – That place (no. 7) – married men – that place (no. 2) single men – some morning sun get up very early – married go down – wake up the single men, – single men get up when sun get up very early. – all go down (to no. 6 a lake) catch fish, then go up (to no. 5) catch kangaroo – bring him down dare (no. 3) fire – roast him. – all men sit around so (entering the action to the word) upon ham.[46]

[43] Tiffany Shellam, *Shaking Hands on the Fringe: Negotiating the Aboriginal World at King George's Sound* (Crawley: UWA Press, 2009), 27–48.

[44] Shellam, "Nyungar Domains"; Shellam, *Shaking Hands*, 154–76.

[45] Shellam, "Nyungar Domains," 82.

[46] Shellam, 88. The numbers that Morgan recorded refer to locations on the map. In the phrasing "upon ham," Gyalliput echoed the British idiom for sitting on one's behind.

Rather like the Nyungar tribesman's map, the Wegebericht exhibits a telling combination of orality and ad-hoc consensus: "the grounded geography," to borrow Shellam's expression, "of a mobile networker" (or, in this case, a whole network).[47] The collated contributions of each leitsmann were parsed and consolidated according to the logistical considerations of the Teutonic officials present, who then transcribed the result into a concrete, written form. In all, the report and its creation illustrate that, like the boundary descriptions in the Handfesten, the schematic vocabulary and structure of the texts—and, by extension, of the landscapes they rendered in writing—bely something more fluid and complicated. The guides' respective areas of expertise were not divided by hard lines, but blended mutably and often ambiguously, more a watercolor than a mosaic.

Other entries, if rather less talkative, deepen this impression. As we saw in the last chapter, the Wegeberichte frequently refer to the "resource-rich" and "well-settled" lands or regions of the frontier. They often identify one or more of these regions as prime targets for plunder along a route, at a route's terminus, or further beyond that. In some cases, a report might name a guide familiar with the region but whom it does not otherwise associate with the route itself. One such report, led by a trio of leitsleute, ends where the region around a place called Leste is said to begin. Here, it claims, an otherwise unmentioned leitsmann is quite knowledgeable.[48] This does not mean that the trio was necessarily unfamiliar with the region they had reached, of course (they are supposed to have ridden into it, after all). But it does indicate a liminal point at which another leitsmann's knowledge became superior, or beyond which they refused to go. Such transitions are,

[47] Shellam, 82.

[48] W. 32: Dirse, Möde, and Pobilte lead the way "bis ins lant czü Leste; in deme lande vor weis sich wol Waynegede czü Bradenborg."

in fact, frequent, and are likely to occur when a route, like a river at its delta, ends its directional course by emptying into a target region.[49]

Transitions like this are often even more ambiguous. One route leading into the resource-rich region around the Samogitian stronghold of Crasyen, for example, names several guides able to go further, as needed.[50] Others, even if they suggest a savvy guide, are less precise, simply advising that an army can go beyond the route's terminus "wo man hin wil" (wherever they wish). Sometimes this seems to amount almost to a boast, as when the prominent leitsmann Merune is reportedly able to lead further in whatever direction desired from a certain "mountain" (*berge*) called Attasewalgo, being "well acquainted in all places in that region."[51] Merune is named as the sole leitsmann in 16 routes—10 percent of the texts' total of 160 routes. His apparent proclivity for acting alone (at least in the extant Wegeberichte) is, however, an exception to the rule. Cooperation among groups of leitsleute is evident in the chaining of individual specializations like a sort of relay race, although, as we have seen in W. 7's note, the points where one guide's knowledge might stop or pick up again are not always predictable.

Cooperation in itself cannot always compensate for thresholds of familiarity, however. Sometimes the knowledge of the leitsleute simply ends, usually with a plain statement that one or more guides are not knowledgeable beyond a certain waypoint. In a typical example, the (aptly named) leitsmann Hans Wissen admits that beyond the Lithuanian stronghold of Parsepil, "he is not knowledgeable."[52] Sometimes the reports are more emphatic, as in the case of the leitsleute

[49] E.g., W. 34.

[50] W. 28: "vordan bekennen sich dese nochgeschrebin, is das man vorder czyhen wil."

[51] W. 67: "wil man denne ken der Wille adir dy Nerge abe, wo man wil, do wil her füren und bekennet sich do in allin enden wol."

[52] W. 9: "vorder bekennet her sich nicht."

Ywan and Ostepko, who "are completely unfamiliar" with the area between a certain campsite along the Nemunas and the settlement of Nowgarthen.[53] In other cases, the limit is less clear-cut. One rather unusual entry lists a number of places "around" (*umb*) which the leitsmann Urban Russe von Johannisburg knows his way. "Around Wolkewiske," it states, "he is very familiar within a distance of up to four miles to the northeast."[54] Another entry is even more equivocal, enthusiastically advertising its guide, Dietrich, as well acquainted in all places once he crosses the Nemunas River, before abruptly noting that beyond a given waypoint, he could continue in one direction but not another.[55]

The liminality and incompleteness of these fluctuating topographies of knowledge defied the rigid structure and vocabulary of the Wegeberichte. Guides had affinities for particular places and regions, prompting them to collaborate in pairs, groups, and chains. The language and organization of the entries themselves, moreover, reveals how the edges of knowledge changed and overlapped, sometimes as seemingly hard lines but most often subtler and more difficult to trace. In sum, the formation of networks among leitsleute of differing specializations cooperating along certain routes demonstrates how the mutable edges of Indigenous knowledge could coalesce, such that entanglement with a colonial power precipitated new configurations of Indigenous relations and practices.

[53] W. 99: "do czwüschen bekennen sie sich nichtisnichten." Besides the emphatic tone (*nichtisnicht*), it is also unusual that the guides are unfamiliar with the area *between* waypoints, rather than *beyond* them.

[54] W. 84: "item umb Wolkewiske vorweis her sich wol bis off iiij nö [*sic*]."

[55] W. 72.

IV. From *Weg* to *Wegebericht*

Seeking to harness this kinetic body of Indigenous knowledge as a stable and reliable resource, the Teutonic Order devised a hierarchical system for tracking, verifying, and cataloging their informants and the knowledge they purveyed, beginning along the waterlogged routes themselves and ultimately ending within the watermarked pages of the archive. At the top of the hierarchy, the Grandmaster acted in some capacity as a supervisor in this process, but it was the Marshal in Königsberg who emerged as the more active and central figure in managing the leitsleute. A short report which the Marshal addressed to the Grandmaster around 1400 lends some insight into the administrative structures he oversaw. The Marshal relates that he had summoned his leitsleute and several commanders to convene in Königsberg, along with the commanders' own delegations of leitsleute. He explains that a separate slip (now lost) enclosed with the report detailed two routes that had been drawn up in this gathering, along with measurements of the current thickness of the ice.[56] The Marshal's report not only illustrates a key mechanism by which the leitsleute directly informed planning in Königsberg, but indicates that officials at other Commanderies actively oversaw local companies of leitsleute.

Local officials, like those whom the Marshal summoned, played a role beyond supervision and coordination: they also acted as primary gatekeepers of the information flowing upwards through the command hierarchy. Some Wegeberichte specify that an official promised first-hand confirmation that his leitsleute were providing trustworthy and useful information. In response to the Marshal's query as to whether certain routes were reliable or not, the Procurator of Insterburg wrote, in one particularly informative report, that the few "bad" stretches could be managed or circumnavigated; adding that, having ridden out himself, he could personally attest to the route's

[56] GStA PK, XX. HA OBA 649.

viability.[57] Teutonic officials were sensitive to their reliance upon information and guidance provided by the leitsleute in formulating logistical decisions, as attested by the Marshal's own letter. Moreover, latent anxieties regarding the physical and social mobility of the leitsleute could only have exacerbated the tension. Vetting procedures were consequently effected as active measures to gauge the quality of information at its source, through official agents appointed to frontier posts. While higher-ranking officials like Procurators and Commanders appear to have been priority candidates, lower-ranking members of the Order could stand in if needed. One report even attests to a local priest's accompaniment of three leitsleute into the frontier region along Prussia's southeastern border in 1396.[58] As the first step in the process of reuse, this careful evaluation was a prerequisite for the recontextualization of intellectual property held to be potentially destabilizing.

Following these initial stages, scribes acting on behalf of local officials generated a report, which then traveled along the Order's postal routes for use by the Marshal or other high-ranking officials. This commitment to paper was itself a critical step in the recontextualization process, representing the translation of colloquial knowledge into written record. Teutonic scribes accordingly employed language that framed the reports as abstractions of face-to-face communications. Among the reports' most common formulations is the verb *czeichnen*, a difficult term to define precisely.[59] In its most concrete sense, *czeichnen* could denote the etching of

[57] W. 39. Wigand von Marburg nicely illustrates this chain of command as well, describing how Insterburg's Procurator rode out "into the wilderness [*ad deserta*] against the pagans" after sending ahead eight men "to test out the routes" (*ad experiendum vias*). *Cronica* 69, p. 557.

[58] W. 62. The identification of this official as a priest is primarily based on his distinctive title (Herr) and three-part name (Kuncze von der Vesten), which matches the profile of a priest appearing in a list of witnesses to a property grant in the southeastern border village of Aweyden in June of the following year. GStA PK, XX. HA OBA 544.

[59] The heading of W. 43, for example, indicates that the entry's contents were "marked down" (*geczeichnit*) at Labiau. GStA PK, XX. HA OF 1, fol. 244v.

distinctive marks into trees, stones, or other objects, as was common in the marking of property boundaries. This ancient meaning does not fit the verb's usage in the Wegeberichte, however. In contrast to boundary clauses documented in Teutonic grants and privileges, there is no mention of specific landmarks like individual trees, while one entry states that the routes had been "marked" only *after* the officials and leitsleute had gathered together in Königsberg.[60] Others employ a secondary passive construction denoting that the leitsleute "*had* [a route] marked," rather than marking it themselves.[61] Altogether, the term's usage in the Wegeberichte is more abstract and more oral—the quasi-narrative outlining of routes and landscapes in the presence of scribes.[62]

Names of people and places potentially strange or unknown to Teutonic scribes (and also likely subjects of divergence among the leitsleute themselves) were among possible complications in this communication. This brings us back to the Procurator of Insterburg's report to the Marshal, with which we began this chapter. The report mentions the movement of Lithuanian armies toward a certain lake called Zereens, which the original letter designates as "den zee zereens azer[…]" (**Figure 21**).[63] The phrase presents several paleographic peculiarities across all three versions. In the original, the scribe initially wrote "die zee" (which he corrected to "den zee") and appended an ambiguous abbreviation to the end of the last word, "azer."[64] Both later copies, moreover,

[60] W. 39.

[61] E.g., W. 51: "Dese wege hat Sqwabe von Lawkisken unde Gastart von Labiow *lassin czeich*[*n*]*en*" (emphasis added).

[62] Direct verbs of speech—namely *sagen* (to state, say) and, especially, *sprechen* (to speak)—likewise reflect the orality of exchanges taking place in a cloud of languages and dialects.

[63] GStA PK, XX. HA OBA 438.

[64] Hirsch transcribed the trailing abbreviation as an *x* (W. 57, p. 690).

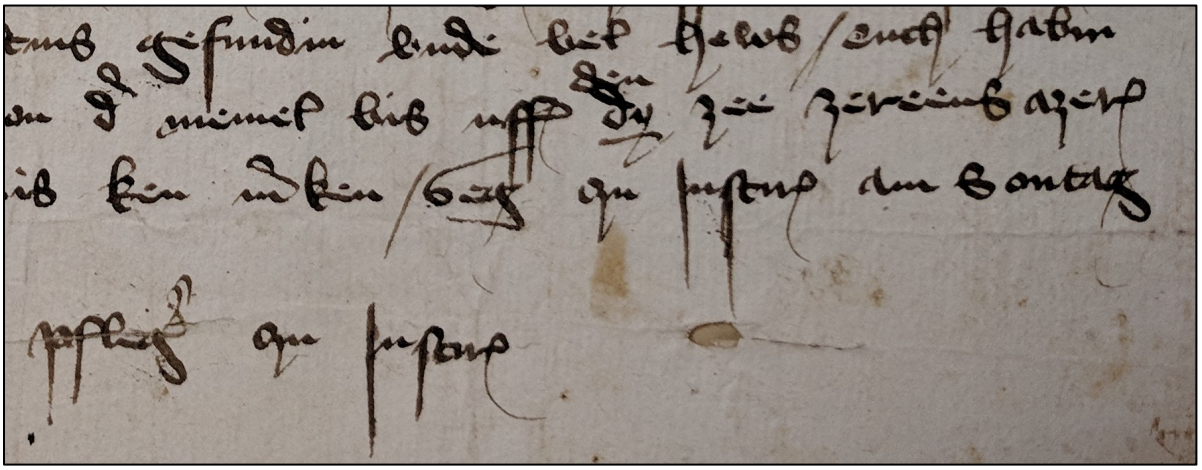

Figure 21. Naming a lake in a Wegebericht. **Source:** GStA PK, XX. HA OBA 438. Author photo, by permission of the Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin.

rendered this final word as "*M*er[…]" rather than "*az*er[…]."[65] Two explanations seem most likely for this orthographic divergence. First, it could be an error on the part of the later scribes. Initial *m*'s can closely resemble initial *az*- ligatures in contemporary hands, and while the original scribe did not form *m*'s this way, the later copyists did. An accusation of carelessness may be overly hasty, however, especially since the later scribes (assuming that at least one worked from the original) should have noticed how *m* was formed elsewhere in the original, as in the word "Memel" closely preceding the phrase.

It seems more likely, then, that the divergence stems not from scribal error (at least, not a careless one) but from linguistic differences. The original word, "azer," is most likely a rendering of the Lithuanian word "lake" (modern *ežeras*) that Gedutte, the guide had used in conveying the report's information, either himself or through a translator. The rather awkward abbreviation may reflect the scribe's unfamiliarity with the term (he had, after all, already written the term in German) or perhaps an uncertainty how to decline the borrowed word. When the report was copied,

[65] GStA PK, XX. HA OF 1a, fols. 250v, 275r (emphasis added); Hirsch references a third attestation on fol. 255r, which seems to have . The incongruence did not escape the notice of Hirsch (p. 690nc), who remarked on the similar forms of *az*- and *m*-, but eschewed further explanation.

subsequent scribes' unfamiliarity with the Lithuanian term (and with the distant frontier landscape) may have been the cause of a misreading. Alternatively, however, the "azer" could have been read as "mer" because this was a word for "lake" or "sea" in other, more familiar, regional languages (*mer* in Livonian, for example)—evidence for a diverse array of contact vernaculars. Whatever its cause may have been, the divergence illustrates the detachment of first-hand knowledge from its original context in the process of its transmission. From the first moment of communication to the last copy made years or decades later, Gedutte, whose noted familiarity with the wilderness began this article, was alienated from the record in whose genesis he had conspired, even if the record retained some of the immediacy of contact between the leitsleute and Teutonic administrators.

Language explicitly framing the Wegeberichte as speaking documents, alongside other unintentional traces of their orality, begin to illuminate what is arguably the most crucial, and the least recoverable, point in the flow of information from leitsmann to Wegebericht. In their consignment to written record, pathways through fickle waterways and tenebrous forests became fixed into the self-assured permanence of ink, and the living knowledge of Indigenous people became abstracted as the concrete, archived property of the state.

With each copy of the original oral reports, this alienation between institutional knowledge and its original Indigenous context grew more pronounced. The composition of the OF 1-1a manuscript illuminates this longer history. MS A186, the progenitor of OF 1-1a, was assembled as a single register during Prussia's transition from Teutonic territory to secular duchy after 1525.[66] Rather than seeking to distance themselves from the records and structures of the religious order they were supplanting, the early dukes instead sought to organize and preserve its rich archives.

[66] On Prussia's transition from crusader state to secular duchy, see Kurt Forstreuter, *Vom Ordensstaat zum Fürstentum: geistige und politische Wandlungen im Deutschordensstaat Preußen unter den Hochmeistern Friedrich und Albrecht, 1498-1525* (Kitzingen: Holzner, 1951).

Despite attaining its most enduring form in the early sixteenth century, however, the register's contents had been copied over one hundred years earlier with the clear intention that they would be gathered together.[67] Some editorial headings group together multiple entries that sometimes span multiple folios.[68] Still other entries only make sense in reference to others: a scribe noting, for example, "the same" leitsleute (or, even simply "he") instead of repeating names. The leitsmann Merune is implicitly noted on OF1a 241r (W. 68) by a pronoun alone, referencing his named appearance in a route on the opposite folio, 240v (W. 67). Another implicit mention on 230r (W. 82), however, has no such reference point: the preceding folio is blank on both sides. An archival logic evidently underlay the documents' copying and assembly, but they appear largely fragmented and haphazard in their current state.

The manuscript's curious compilation prompts the question of why the Wegeberichte were copied and assembled in the first place. Their existence (and survival) attests to the value they evidently held for the Order as its relationship to the Lithuanian frontier began to fundamentally change around 1400. The 1398 Treaty of Salinwerder brought the Lithuanian wars to a seemingly triumphant close, with the duke Vytautas acknowledging the Order's eternal rights to Samogitia, the coveted western Lithuanian lowlands bridging Prussia with the Order's northern holdings in Livonia. Peace, however, was tenuous, and the Order's refusal to extinguish its territorial ambitions galvanized Lithuanian resistance on both local and regional scales. In 1402, the Order pillaged the important stronghold of Garthen and the region south of Vilnius; just a few months later, a destructive uprising in Samogitia targeted the Teutonic Commandery of Memel. Vytautas sided with the rebels, while the Lithuanian nobleman Switrigail took the opportunity to enlist the

[67] Päsler, *Sachliteratur*, 329.

[68] GStA PK, XX. HA OF 1a, fol. 283r groups five entries (W. 47, 32, 33, 34, 49) under a single heading.

Order's help in his own bid for power. A familiar pattern of frontier conflict arose in which the Order sought to stabilize lands and peoples resistant to its lordship; and the leitsleute—and with them, the Wegeberichte—therefore remained critical resources. By 1409, the Order's erstwhile ally Vytautas sided with his cousin Jogaila (wearer of the Polish crown since 1386), and united Polish and Lithuanian forces crushed Teutonic troops in July of the following year, permanently reconfiguring Baltic power relations.

In this atmosphere of rebellion and shifting loyalties, anxieties about the trustworthiness of Baltic allies and subjects must have intensified: hence the logic underlying the creation and use of the Wegeberichte. As Päsler has observed, the texts do not seem to have served any practical navigational use. Without discounting the possibility that they served as templates for producing copies, as needed, for consultation by outgoing armies, their content was simply not detailed enough to be of much use to anyone except those already intimately familiar with the lands traversed.[69] Furthermore, they do not conform to any regular organizational scheme. Päsler's reservations about whether the "discontinued and incomplete collection" served any function at all in its surviving form, however, likely arises from the mistaken assumption that such a function could *only* be navigational.[70] While the documents certainly record spatial information, their primary purpose as original letters was to assure the accountability of particular leitsleute offering to serve as guides to particular destinations. In this sense, the letters functioned more as contracts or testimonials than as navigational devices. When it came to organizing the *Reisen*, the Marshal could consult incoming Wegeberichte to choose reliable leitsleute whose routes had already been vetted by local officials on the border.

[69] I agree with Päsler on this point. Päsler, *Sachliteratur*, 336.

[70] Päsler, 338–39.

The later compilation of these letters, then, gestures to a slightly different motive. By 1402, the resistance of local populations jeopardized the Order's control of a region it had finally conquered after over a century of conflict. Wishing to secure its hold over Samogitia, to continue expanding its territorial lordship over the frontier, and to stabilize the Indigenous agents upon whom it relied for both objectives, the Order began to archive information about both people and places. As Randolph Head has argued, late medieval and early modern states derived power not just through the active *use* of documents per se, but through the organization and management of records.[71] In this way, the knowledge and expertise of Indigenous people were recontextualized once again as tools of lordship. Halted by the crises of 1410 and its aftermath, the Order's experiment never quite reached fruition. But at an anxious moment of near triumph, the Wegeberichte represent the vestigial traces of a late medieval state's effort to fortify its lordship through the epistemological stability of its archives. What final form the Wegeberichte may have taken if the Order had been successful in its experiment remains an open, and likely unanswerable, question.

V. Conclusion: In Königsberg, Again

The commitment of oral traditions and embodied knowledge to written record has long been seen as a distinctive hallmark of the paper-hungry administrative culture of the later Middle Ages. With the rising availability of paper and trained bureaucrats, late medieval states exercised authority through archives. M.T. Clanchy's study of high medieval literacy and documentary culture operationalizes the neo-Weberian dictum that administration is effectively a form of knowledge-

[71] Randolph Head, "Knowing Like a State: The Transformation of Political Knowledge in Swiss Archives, 1450–1770," *The Journal of Modern History* 75 (2003): esp. 747-53.

based control—a paradigm closely matching the Order's efforts to position itself as, in the Mortensens' ironic turn of phrase, "lord of the wilderness" (*Landesherr der Wildnis*).[72] Proceeding from its exchange with the Baltic's Indigenous people, however, the Order's collection and compilation of knowledge extends beyond the norms of medieval statecraft. This undertaking predated cartographically oriented colonial powers' reconfiguration of Indigenous geographies into maps, which were designed to render foreign landscapes as legible subjects. Force was not always necessary, even if the threat of its deployment was always present. Like the British colonizers of Australia, the Teutonic Order retained traces of its Indigenous sources' original context in its documentary record. Rather than maps, however, the Order—in close collaboration with the leitsleute—generated reports that, rigidly schematic though they were, retained the narrative contours of the information they assembled. In this sense, then, the Wegeberichte arose from shifting power dynamics and webs of exchange as the dialectic precipitate of entanglement. Somewhere between Indigenous spatial perceptions and Western geography, they muddied the boundaries of these categories even as the Order strove to render them more distinct. A distinctly new and fluid form of knowledge gradually materialized—before falling from use, just years after its genesis, as the calcified miscellanea of a debilitated state.

[72] Clanchy, *Memory to Written Record*, 66–67, 154–84; Mortensen and Mortensen, *Besiedlung*, 1937, 2:55–66.

CONCLUSION

During the 1930s and 40s, the Nazi regime undertook the mass resettlement of Eastern Europe, where it held that the German race had been deprived of its natural territorial rights. By imagining the "alien wilderness" of Eastern Prussia and Poland as lands of endless forests and marshes—landscape descriptions strikingly familiar to those expressed in the medieval sources explored in this dissertation—German nationalists drew on a cultural vocabulary that had suffused popular literature, music, posters, and slogans for decades.[1] Novelists like Karl May, whose late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century works later influenced Hitler's own imagination of Eastern settlement, had long relished the excitement of frontier adventures. Fictional works blended the evocative imagery of the American West—wide-open plains, wild rivers, savage natives, and hardy pioneers—with heroized historical narratives of the German *Drang nach Osten*. The medieval period of Eastern settlement between the eleventh and fourteenth centuries became a favorite setting for encounters with the wild landscape and its Slavic inhabitants, who stood as perennial obstacles in the Eastward march of German civilization.[2] As David Blackbourn has elegantly put it, these historically situated fantasies of the medieval *Ostsiedlung* had been "mentally spliced with an equally idealized American frontier society to create a hybrid—an emotion-laden narrative that

[1] Blackbourn, *The Conquest of Nature: Water, Landscape, and the Making of Modern Germany*, 293–303, here 303.

[2] Blackbourn, 293–303.

served as an argument for overturning the Versailles Treaty and 'restoring' German influence in the East."[3]

The affinity between these two frontiers was not lost on American audiences. Frederick Jackson Turner had himself been familiar with German ideas of the Eastern frontier when he formulated his famous frontier theory of American history.[4] But it was disproportionately scholars in Germany who looked westward. Disenchanted with the loss of territory and humiliated by costly indemnities following the close of the First World War, German scholars from a range of disciplines saw in the American West a trophy to be won from the inferior races currently living there. One major difference between these otherwise analogous frontiers, however, was the historical claim of the colonizers. In contrast to the United States, German scholars of the era believed that Germany's right to the East was not merely a matter of Manifest Destiny. Eastward expansion could be seen as the modern continuation and reclamation of a national narrative deeply rooted in the medieval past.[5]

The Middle Ages, therefore, not only offered a captivating setting for frontier fantasies, but also came to serve as a site for the legitimization of increasingly racialized imperialist agendas. Scholars like Ekkehardt Starritz took pains to emphasize the great hardships that medieval pioneers had undertaken in the project to transform the bogs and forests of the Eastern wilderness into a paradise of dikes and farmlands. The great challenges of settlement thus promised greater possibilities. Novelists of the 1930s and 1940s likewise continued to depict the Eastern frontier through the eyes of thirteenth-century emigrants, who, they imagined, saw themselves both at the

[3] Blackbourn, 295.

[4] *Pace* William Urban, who has observed that "in Europe the frontier thesis has never been well known, except in Poland." Urban, "The Frontier Thesis and the Baltic Crusade," 45.

[5] Blackbourn, *The Conquest of Nature: Water, Landscape, and the Making of Modern Germany*, 293–95.

edge of the world and on the threshold of endless opportunity. The Nazis embraced these ideas when they took up the project of Eastern resettlement in earnest, framing them more explicitly as statements of racial imperialism. Germany had been wrongfully deprived of its Eastern holdings, "living space" (*Lebensraum*) that its people desperately needed in order to develop. Propagandists heralded a new wave of pioneers as the sturdy *völkisch* bearers of German civilization—humble peasant farmers destined not only to displace the benighted Slavic occupiers of the East, but also to invigorate a society that had gone soft back on the home front.[6]

In contrast to the stable German population that Nazi ideologues located in new settlements and historical narratives, the Slavs were imagined as nomads without history—a portrayal that mapped readily onto denigrating tropes about Native Americans. The equation of Slavs with the Indigenous populations of the Americas had a long legacy in Prussian intellectual discourse, as we saw in the introduction.[7] But unlike the Enlightenment scholars who had lamented the brutal treatment of Indigenous populations in both Eastern Europe and the New World or those nineteenth-century Romantics who saw in certain Native Americans the elusive spirit of the "noble savage," the Nazis employed a template of frontier "Indian Wars" to characterize the pattern of guerilla violence that broke out between local Slavic and Baltic populations and the German settlers sent to replace them. The so-called *Wehrbauer*—the gun-toting peasant farmer—emerged as an embodiment of the Nazi fantasy of self-reliant pioneerism and a reality of frontier violence.[8] The forests became sites of resistance for local Baltic and Slavic populations, and places of fear for German settlers.

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[6] Blackbourn, 296–301.

[7] See p. 16 above; Blackbourn, 303–9.

[8] Blackbourn, 298, 307.

After the war, heroic tales of colonization gave way to more ambiguous narratives of expulsion.[9] Twelve million Germans reversed a decade of eastward migration as they fled the approaching Red Army in 1945. As this diasporic population settled in a newly divided Germany, a more tangible connection was made to the lands beyond the Oder. Suddenly, the people who had inhabited these far-off places were no longer the subjects of fiction, but a tangible reality; and their nostalgia for a lost homeland mingled uncomfortably with the very prophecies of Eastern reclamation that had fueled the tragedies of the preceding decades. A new genre of refugee literature captured the popular imagination, wistfully remembering the East not as a paradise to be gained by hardworking pioneers, but as one now irrevocably lost. Poets like Agnes Miegel, a native of Königsberg, depicted the landscapes of Prussia in lyrics that sang of the history of their settlement and their postlapsarian decay. That the event precipitating the loss of these hauntingly rendered lands had also heralded the end of a genocidal dictatorship put the evacuees' expression of grief at odds with contemporary Germans' efforts to purge themselves of Nazism's ghosts. In other words, the allure of the East did not disappear, but took on different forms, as new melodies echoed old themes. Even absent the imperialist pretensions of nationalist pioneer fantasies, the slippery edges of the world retained a powerful grip on those imagining it from afar. This fascination with the transformation of Eastern European landscapes constituted a central component of what Blackbourn terms the "sustaining myth of the German east," or the conviction that "Germans had a special feeling for [wild] nature, but they also had a special talent for shaping the land."[10]

[9] Blackbourn, 313–22.

[10] Blackbourn, 297, 316.

I have argued in this dissertation that the Christian colonizers of the medieval Baltic, especially the Teutonic Order, cultivated an institutional and international identity predicated on an analogous myth, which I have summarized as the idea of the Promised Wilderness. Like the nineteenth- and twentieth-century formulations of Blackbourn's myth, medieval narratives tied the destinies of Western conquerors and settlers to the settlement of an Eastern region imagined as barbarically wild, whose underlying potential for fecundity and sanctity could be unlocked only by the coordinated efforts of a chosen people. Once transformed, this land would have to be protected, and so the members of the Order portrayed themselves, like other contemporary rulers along the nominal edges of Europe, as a bulwark of Christendom. This role appeared especially crucial in light of the Holy Land's fall to non-Christians in the late thirteenth century. The Teutonic Order articulated the formation of a Christian settler society in Prussia in direct conversation with this territorial loss. The Holy Land would have to be regained; but in the meantime, the territory of this new northern Promised Land should be jealously guarded and carefully managed, its yields multiplied, and its population kept soundly in order. By examining imaginative texts and administrative records produced by medieval colonizers in tandem, I have argued that the epistemological "culture" of colonialism, to adapt Nicholas Thomas's phrasing, does not merely constitute an intellectual veneer for independent socioeconomic processes, but fundamentally shapes the material structures of colonial society.[11]

It is crucial to recognize, however, that although nineteenth- and twentieth-century German nationalists held medieval colonialisms as a mirror for their own fantasies and vanities, they arrived at this recognition by independent means. In other words, the myths that medieval colonizers drew upon in order to justify and glorify the violent subjugation of Indigenous peoples

[11] Thomas, *Colonialism's Culture: Anthropology, Travel and Government*, 2–8. Cf. discussion on p. 60 above.

and environments as civilizing narratives do not constitute the origins of their modern counterparts, which emerged instead from entirely different contexts. Throughout this dissertation, I have looked to postmedieval colonialisms outside of Europe (rather than on more directly comparable medieval contexts) as proxies for understanding medieval patterns, not because these postmedieval colonizers drew on a commonly and continuously held medieval inheritance, but because deeper structures of human colonialism give rise to convergent forms. I therefore see the methodological approach of my study as one of its principal contributions. My research demonstrates how medievalists can contribute to and draw on the larger global history of colonialism without justifying inclusion on the basis of what Marc Bloch once called "the idol of origins"—which, besides failing as explanations of causality, are inevitably pushed backwards in time—or attributions of continuity—which easily fall into the traps of modern progress narratives.[12]

Three characteristics distinguish fourteenth-century Prussia as an especially well suited subject for this case study. First, and perhaps counterintuitively, the descendants of the Baltic's German settlers did not play a defining role in the colonization of the New World, whereas the colonial structures that took form in sixteenth-century Middle and South America, for example, *did* reflect patterns found in late medieval Iberia.[13] In contrast to contexts in which direct transfer of people, materials, and ideas occurred between Europe and the New World, analogous patterns in the Baltic call for different explanations. Second, the Teutonic Order was itself a product of medieval colonialism. It was founded as an institution to support German crusaders participating in the larger European enterprise to conquer and settle the Holy Land, rightful sovereignty over

[12] Marc Bloch, *The Historian's Craft*, trans. Peter Putnam (New York: Knopf, 1953), 29–35.

[13] See, for example, Remensnyder, *La Conquistadora: The Virgin Mary at War and Peace in the Old World and the New*; Tamar Herzog, *Frontiers of Possession: Spain and Portugal in Europe and the Americas* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015).

which contemporary Christians claimed for themselves. Although the Order established regionally distinctive structures of power in Prussia, it thus built on foundations that reflected the broader European context, as Robert Bartlett has demonstrated of later medieval patterns of expansion more generally.[14] Prussia's third distinguishing feature, however, is that unlike other medieval frontiers where, as Bartlett has argued, colonization was largely carried out according to the local designs of independent lords, the settlement of Prussia was carried out by an institution that resembled contemporary states in its administrative structures and in its latitude to exercise independent territorial lordship. The Teutonic Order's leaders (the Grandmasters and their councils of High Officials) appointed a network of revolving bureaucratic offices, constructed fortified centers of power, facilitated the settlement and exploitation of land, asserted control over legitimate channels for the pursuit of justice, and supported itself on the revenues of it all. The state-like nature of the Teutonic Order's lordship in Prussia render similarities to the societies of postmedieval states all the more striking, yet do not bar comparative study with other medieval frontiers. As a state-like entity, moreover, the Teutonic Order's regional administrators produced a body of records in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries that approaches (and may, in cases like the early colonization of Atlantic North America, surpass) the volume of documentation attending the settlement of postmedieval colonial societies. After the secularization of the Order's Prussian branch in 1525, ducal and royal archivists of the Protestant Prussian state organized, preserved, and eventually dedicated themselves to the study of the Order's records—tasks that nationalist German bureaucrats and scholars took up all the more enthusiastically through to the end of the Nazi period. Much of the Order's original documentary record thus survives, even though Prussia itself no longer exists.

[14] Bartlett, *The Making of Europe*.

Between the centralizing tendencies of the Order's administrators and the rapid social, economic, and ecological changes that attend processes of intensive colonization, the resulting density of this surviving archive affords insights not only into the material forms of settlement that took shape in this period, but also into the epistemological structures of power. Exploring the dialectic relationship between these components of colonialism has been a major goal of this study. As for other settler-colonial societies, the entwined transformation of foreign land and its Indigenous inhabitants is central to the myth of the Promised Wilderness. We can see this importance reflected in the Order's attentive appraisal, division, and management of rural space and resources held among its German and Prussian population. The cadastral landscape that emerged from these processes does not reflect the totalizing imposition of Western patterns, however, but the constant negotiation between officials and local inhabitants, resulting in the heavy incorporation of pre-conquest geographies and Indigenous forms of knowledge.

This brings us to one final conclusion: namely, that if we recognize the characteristically colonial nature of the Teutonic Order's conquest and settlement of Prussia, we can also write the medieval history of its Indigenous Baltic and Slavic inhabitants. Throughout this dissertation, I have drawn on Patrick Wolfe's dictum that "a sustained institutional tendency to eliminate the Indigenous population…informs a range of historical practices that might otherwise appear distinct—invasion is a structure not an event."[15] As we have seen, however, the Indigenous population of Prussia was never eliminated, even when, by the mid-fifteenth century, the term "Prussian" had been coopted as a common form of self-reference among a population of mixed Indigenous and immigrant origins. The Order's idea of a homogeneous Latin-Christian society in

[15] Wolfe, *Settler Colonialism and the Transformation of Anthropology: The Politics and Poetics of an Ethnographic Event*, 163; Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," 388; cf. discussion on pp. 54-56 above.

the Baltic, much like the Nazis' idea of a racially pure German society throughout Eastern Europe, amounted to little more than the fantasy of historical narrative. In reality, Prussia's territorial lords fashioned complex social, economic, and legal apparatuses in the effort to absorb Indigenous groups and categories to the structures of settlement and rule imported from Western Europe. This did not mean, of course, that the Order treated the Indigenous population with equanimity or dignity, however persistent the ultimatums of high-minded churchmen in Rome. Instead, the Order's policies towards Indigenous subjects encompassed Wolfe's concept of elimination in both its "negative" (violent removal) and "positive" (assimilation into a new society) aspects.[16] The Order allowed Indigenous Prussians to keep certain structures of pre-conquest society. But it also attempted (with mixed success) to force mass conversion, and it reframed Indigenous legal customs to constitute a regime that exploited their labor, production, military and administrative service, dynastic aspirations, and expertise. Close examination of the Order's records nevertheless reveals that as much as the Order tried to assert control, Indigenous people found ways to leverage their value to garner political and social footing. This "entanglement" between Indigenous agents and colonial officials thus stimulated distinctively new forms of knowledge and intricate symmetries of power.[17]

Altogether, the idea of the Promised Wilderness expressed in the documentary sources of the Teutonic Order stands as a colonial mythology both distinctive to the conquest and settlement of the late medieval Baltic and, at the same time, draws more broadly upon a narrative framework common among settler societies across the global history of European colonialism. Seeing medieval forms of colonial thought and practice as analogous to, but not necessarily at the origins

[16] Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," 387–88.

[17] Thomas, *Entangled Objects*. Cf. discussion on pp. 52-54.

of, non-medieval forms allows us to ask fundamentally new questions about the deeper structures of power that have shaped millennia of colonialisms.

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