ABHANDLUNGEN

Tracing Social Change.
The Case of Old Livonia

by Priit Raudkivi

When, in 1944, Estonia was plunged into yet another regime upheaval and embarked on a thorough reorganisation of all aspects of society, it became imperative to find historical justification for the country's incorporation into the Soviet Union. Estonian historians were entrusted with the task of setting local history on the "right" methodological tracks within the general framework of so-called historical materialism. A few words of explanation for those uninitiated in historical materialism as a social theory. This conception of society was an extension of the class struggle theory conceived by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, which was preached by the leading figures of the socialist camp (Vladimir Lenin, Josef Stalin et.al.), among others; in the USSR, the final documents of various Communist Party forums would provide further methodological adjustments. Social progress is driven by class struggle; based on the ownership of the means of production and the character of proprietary relations, social development can be divided into phases, or social formations. Such was the framework into which the history of Estonia was squeezed during the Soviet occupation. The work on the new periodisation of the history of Estonia was time-consuming, and culminated in 1952 with the publication of "History of the ESSR".[1] The two objectives prescribed by the communist ideology had been achieved: 1) the history of Estonia had been transformed into the history of class struggle; 2) the dominant motif running through all the periods was the positive role of the incomparable Russian nation in local history.[2]

Why bring up a 60-year-old discourse with next to no scientific value and very little relevance outside the Estonian culture and research community? I believe, for one, that there is always something to be learned from even the most bizarre historical writing. The first lesson learned is that any historian striving to serve *Clio* to the best of their ability must be free of existential fear. The team behind "History of the ESSR" did not comprise hard-core, orthodox, blinkered communists raised in a socialist environment. Among the authors were people who had matured into academic researchers during Estonia's brief independence period and who were thus fully aware of the true meaning of ideologically unfettered historiography. The second lesson is provided by the narrative itself: the pre-determined social scheme was filled with historical material, but this was done selectively, strictly supporting the concept of historical materialism. The third lesson is the abuse of Marxism. The past was portrayed as being at the mercy of a mysterious, seemingly universal force (class struggle), traces of which were seen in each and any act of social

1 Gustav Naan (ed.): Eesti NSV ajalugu (kõige vanemast ajast tänapäevani) [History of the Estonian SSR (From ancient times to the present day)], Tallinn 1952.
2 See the M.A. thesis by Helen Lausmaa-Saar: Ajalooteadus Nõukogude Eestis 1944–1952 [History writing in Soviet Estonia 1944–1952], Tallinn 2012.

communication. The fourth conclusion is broader and concerns the science of history in general. I believe namely that the ideologised interpretation of history, forced into a vulgar sociological mould, generated, and even today still generates (after all, we must know our ideological legacy!) – a reluctance, especially on the part of critically-minded historians, to use the resources of social sciences in history. This holds true not only for Estonia, but also for nations that have never felt direct ideological pressure.[3] Much depends on the nature of the individual researcher, of course. However, history and social sciences have always been intertwined. Social scientists cannot do without historians, because the eggs they use for their social science omelette are laid by the historians, to quote the British sociologist Ronald P. Dore.[4] Social scientists draw generalisations about social development based on the materials fed to them by historians. For example, they contemplate the concepts or analytical categories, such as social power or state, employed by historians in their texts. Social scientists also create new categories (such as social vulnerability, social capital,[5] social stress, etc.), which enrich, through the concrete historical context in which they are placed, the scientific perception of the past. Besides, in my opinion, a good histori-cal text should be measured by the sociologising generalisations drawn in the concluding remarks.

Looking at the texts produced by historians, we see that they inevitably make "forays" into other disciplines. Every historian is a psychologist, albeit mostly self-taught. Scientific psychology and the science of history have not yet become friends, despite the oft-expressed need for such friendship.[6] A historian is "an engineer of human souls" only by intuition. Mostly, however, historians are unable to convincingly get under the skin of the people of the past, because in search of behavioural motives and causal relations they would rely on personal models of behaviour. Michel Foucault introduced the concept of *episteme* mean-ing the historical *a priori* that grounds knowledge and its discourses and thus represents

---

3   Peter Burke: History and Social Theory, Cambridge 2009, p. 2.
4   Ibidem, pp. 141-142.
5   The core of the social capital theory is the notion that societal networks have their intrinsic value. According to Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc Wacquant the social capital is the sum of resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition. See John Scott (ed.): Sociology. The Key Concepts, London etc. 2006, pp. 152-155. Most generally, social capital includes three constituent parts, i.e. the communication network, norms, and trust. Putting these elements together, social capital is complexly conceptualized as the network of associations, activities, or relations that bind people together as a community via certain norms and psychological capacities, notably trust, which are essential for civil society and productive of future collective action or goods, as are other forms of capital. See James Farr: Social Capital: A Conceptual History, in: Political Theory 32 (2004), pp. 6-33, here p. 9.
6   Sidney Ratner: The Historian's Approach to Psychology, in: Journal of the History of Ideas 2 (1941), pp. 95-109; Jean Leclercq: Modern Psychology and the Interpretation of Medieval Texts, in: Speculum 48 (1973), pp. 476-490; Bernard Bailyn: The Challenge of Modern Historiography, in: The American Historical Review 87 (1982), pp. 1-24. It is worth mentioning great historians, e.g. Karl Lamprecht, who regard history as applied social psychology. Robert S. Woodworth, an American psychologist argued back in 1931, that an entire pleiad of overseas psychologists had studied sensations, memory, and many other questions, but not human motivation. Robert S. Woodworth: Contemporary Schools of Psychology, New York 1931, pp. 192 f.

the condition of their possibility within a particular epoch.[7] What if we could elaborate on this notion and say that *episteme* has certain sub-forms depending on the positions of socio-political forces in various associations? The exploitation of the captured psychological idiosyncrasies of the past in daily research is even more complicated, however. Nonetheless, I would refrain from labelling "psychohistory" an exciting phenomenon. For example, I believe that Erik Erikson's classic book "Young Man Luther" makes extremely interesting reading, but despite the many truthful nuances, it would be too risky to apply the methods of psychoanalysis in so-called mainstream historiography. In other words: conventional science of history cannot afford the luxury of using analytical categories of questionable social truth as categories of differentiation. On the level of social facts, at least, the researcher has to be firmly grounded in the real world. A completely separate problem, of course, is how to untangle a social fact and give it credibility. At the risk of not sounding very scientific, I maintain that a historian must inevitably use his or her imagination to understand social processes. In other words, every historical fact is a result of certain social processes, and it is the researcher's task to crack them open. It is a matter of choice whether to borrow analytical instruments from a clearly formulated social theory, or to trust one's own judgement. A historian must understand that in potential historiographic discussions, the debate may reach the level of concept semantics, i.e. a need may arise to explain the contents of the concept used in a narrative. More often than not, however, historians do not concern themselves with semantics. I subscribe to Paul Veyne's opinion that the actual essence of concepts is only revealed during research[8] and that concepts will never become fully finalised. Using historiographic legacy without occasionally paying attention to semantic problems, on the other hand, may lead to historiography falling into a decades-old rut.

This article aims to discuss the reasons why, in the first half of the 16th century, the society of Old Livonia failed to find the resources to avoid rapid collapse in the initial phase of the Livonian wars that broke out in 1558. It is a generally acknowledged fact that local wealth collapsed like a house of cards in the so-called Russian-Livonian War.[9] Yet, operating with the notion of Old Livonia, are we able to pinpoint the core of internal relations within this complicated phenomenon? Even Livonia's disintegration – individual social factions appealed to external powers long before the start of the war in 1558 – indicates that separatist sentiments, attitudes that ignored or repudiated the interests of the whole, outweighed the sense of unity. These sentiments, however, hardly emerged overnight. Perhaps, when we use the concept of Old Livonia as an analytical category, we expect the local society to have possessed qualities it never had. *Verfassungs- und Verwaltungsgeschichte* can provide the principal framework for an analysis of social life. However, various regions of Old Livonia

---

7 Lisa Downing: The Cambridge Introduction to Michel Foucault, Cambridge 2008, pp. 9 f., 39 f., 42-46.

8 Paul Veyne: Kas kreeklased uskusid oma müüte? Essee konstitueerivast kujutlusvõimest [Did the Greeks believe in Their Myths? An Essay on the Constitutive Imagination], Tallinn 2006, pp. 205 f.

9 Hans Kruus: Vene-Liivi sõda (1558–1561) [Russian-Livonian War (1558–1561)], Tartu 1924. My purpose was not to analyze the extensive historiography of Livonian wars, where various methodologies have been used in attempts to determine the reasons for the failure of Livonian statehood. Undoubtedly this is an interesting question which deserves additional historiographical analyses.

were subjected to different powers and, in situations that presumed communication across the territorial borders, may have adopted disparate rules and behavioural strategies.

Seeking an answer as to why Livonia disintegrated so fast leads to the question of social change, which should in fact be one of the main targets of the science of history. Diversity in power relations also means diversity in the preconditions for social change in different domains. Social sciences use various definitions for social change, such as growth, evolution, downfall, decadence, etc. These presume changes in the internal development of one or another phenomenon. However, it is equally common to look for outside impulses, in which case the notions borrowing, diffusion, imitation, etc. are used. A social change can also be driven by certain factors that do not manifest themselves through written sources,[10] for example the endurance of environmental conditions that either damage or destroy the resources necessary for a community's survival.[11]

Over 350 years Livonian society inevitably had to undergo certain modifications. The problem, however, is the direction of this change. Was it just individual socio-political forces that were subject to change, leading to a general transformation, or is this too much to expect from Livonia? I am going to work here from a fairly long-standing hypothesis that a better understanding of the local domestic political context requires a closer look at the specific composition of Livonian society. I postulate that the key to understanding the behavioural strategies of individual social and political forces in the Livonian domestic political arena may well lie outside the local historical context. Livonia was territorially homogeneous, unlike its neighbours to the east and south. Its internal structure, however, reveals a much more varied picture. At least in the earlier Baltic German historiography, Livonia's territorial homogeneity was cemented by an ethnic category (German and the so-called German type development) and its importance. Next, I will postulate that by using the ethnic category as an analytical instrument, historiography has been too attached to the consensual perception which stresses the unity of Livonia.[12] I then pitch the ethnic category against the thesis that the socio-political structure was an open one, the principal discerning feature of which was that post-conquest – and with the exception of part of the vassaldom – society did not start reproducing itself locally. However, as far as the second estate was concerned, Livonia was open to newcomers for the entire duration of its existence. The only estate that reproduced itself locally was the peasantry. I would like to expand on the thesis of openness using the concept of a quasi-colonialism of the local socio-political structure.[13] Historiography has traditionally perceived Old Livonia as a wave of *Ostsiedlung*,

10 See Baiylin, The Challenge (see note 6), pp. 9 f.
11 See Ted Steinberg: Down to Earth: Nature, History and Power in History, in: American Historical Review 107 (2002), pp. 798-820.
12 Priit Raudkivi: Vana-Liivimaa maapäev. Ühe keskaegse struktuuri kujunemislugu [The Old Livonian Diet. The formation of a medieval institution], Tallinn 2007, pp. 108-111.
13 The terms "colony" and "colonization" should be used with caution. The author does not use these terms in the modern sense, where the foundation of colonies serves the interest of the metropolis or mother country. See Robert Bartlett: The Making of Europe: Conquest, Colonization and Cultural Change, 950–1350, Princeton 1993, pp. 306 f. In the case of Livonia, the mother country of a number of social-political forces – the Hanseatic League and German Order – remains exclusive. In Livonia the constellation of different colonial powers, in the opinion of the author of

or German eastern colonisation, and earlier historiography in particular has described the territory with the term "German colony". Generally, however, this refers to a new ethnic element emerging beside the indigenous peoples who spoke the Baltic and Finnic languages. There appear to be a multitude of reasons for a historiographic revision which would more explicitly explain the German colonial movement, since the current Livonian discourse only dates back to the turn of 20th century. The revision clearly needs to be substantial.[14] I will therefore postulate that quasi-colonialism, a constant influx of fresh influences from outside Livonia was the pervading motif of the local socio-political structure as long as the country existed. The colonisation of Livonia was distinct in several respects. First, in terms of social segregation it was not a colonisation in a full sense. It is a well-known fact that unlike in the *Ordensstaat* (the Prussia-based state of the Teutonic Order) to which medieval Livonia is often compared, no German peasants came to Livonia. A second and very important aspect is that for some social and political structures that established themselves in Livonia, the territory represented a mere scene for economic and political ambitions. By these I mean the Teutonic Order and the Hanseatic League. Their existence would not have been in jeopardy, had the Livonian mission failed for some reason. For the Teutonic Order and the Hanseatic League, Livonia was nothing more than an extended playground, albeit with obligatory partnership relations. Both institutions had their own specific interests with respect to their main goals. And last, but not least, as a power factor the Teutonic Order was integrated into an already established framework: in Livonia, the Teutonic Order did not have the same power as in Prussia – with the exception of perhaps the Bishopric of Courland which was established on the basis of the Order's military might. The constant struggle for authority between the Order and the episcopal power, which reached a new level in the mid-13th century with the creation of an archbishopric for the Prussian and Livonian churches,[15] characterised Livonia's internal relations throughout the existence of the local statehood.

The Livonian branch of the Teutonic Order was part of a brotherhood which functioned according to stringent rules and whose main duty was to fight against non-believers and schismatics. Such groups with explicitly defined tasks can be extremely strong due to their

---

this article, gave rise to a completely unique communication network, which has no counterpart at least in the impact outreach of German culture.

14 See Priit Raudkivi: Saksa migratsioonist Liivimaale keskajal. Kriitilisi märkmeid [The German migration to Livonia. Some critical remarks], in: Acta Historica Tallinnensia (2011), Vol. 17, pp. 16-36. In the article, I have contested some older Baltic-German historiography standpoints, where, according to the respective author, the toponym "Germany" and the ethnonym "German" in the context of the Middle Ages have been abused. In the second half of the 19th century and also in the 20th century, Baltic-German historiographers have used both terms in a contemporary sense, being strongly influenced by the unification euphoria and rhetorics of Germany in 1871. I have argued in previous discussions: Did the brothers of the order and high clergy exert any other identities in addition to what was dictated to them through their membership in these catholic structures? Or in other words: can we talk about a German sense of national identity? I am inclined to believe that the identity which derived from the catholic framework was the most decisive, also in internal Livonian reciprocal communication.

15 The formation of an archbishopric for both Prussia and Livonia was a complicated political intrigue lasting from 1246 to 1255, which resulted in the subjection of the churches of Prussia and Livonia (except the chair of the Bishop of Tallinn) to the new archbishop. See Raudkivi, Vana-Liivimaa maapäev (see note 12), pp. 33 ff.

strict functionality. However, this strength has its limits, and these groups may descend into an existential or legitimacy crisis if their main functions are restricted and become contested in the course of social progress. As a rule, they are not prepared for self-modification or a flexible response to social change – for a multitude of reasons. Applying Niklas Luhmann's system theory, the Order should be defined as a self-referencing system (*selbstreferentielle Systeme*).[16] Such systems tend to operate independently from other systems, following their own rules of behaviour. The above-mentioned quasi-colonialism becomes evident in the Order's reproduction mechanism,[17] and shows the Order as a system that, without exception, adheres to its own code of behaviour. It is important to note that the status of a full knight, or knight-brother (*Ritterbruder*) remained off-limits for the sons of the vassal families and burgesses of Livonia. Thus, we can say that the Order was a closed system and its communication with local partners in anything other than the existence of the Order as a corporation, non-constructive. Naturally, this affected internal communication within Livonia.

The Hanseatic League was clearly an equally self-referencing institution and, for the following reasons, its role can also be viewed as quasi-colonial. The Hanseatic towns in Livonia were members of the League, their existence was based on the east-west trade, and the functioning of the whole system depended on the merchants' communication networks. Riga, Reval (Tallinn) and Dorpat (Tartu) – these three influential Hanseatic towns were interested in Livonia as a separate, homogeneous structure only insofar as it served the purpose of their existentialist function. Merchants who constituted the leading social stratum in the Hanseatic towns of Livonia, viewed themselves rather as Hanseatic merchants in Livonia than as Livonians. Membership of the Hanseatic League – essentially a state without an official capital or territory – was the dominant aspect of the social identity of a Hanseatic merchant.[18] Merchants comprised the cities' elites and communicated with their local partners, carefully protecting their own interests. In many senses, the Hanseatic League was reminiscent of a state: it was able to wage wars, influence elections, and participate in international agreements. An important landmark for the Hanseatic League was the first major Hanseatic Diet in 1356, which co-ordinated the activities of Hanseatic towns. However, the Livonian cities' assembly or urban Diet (*Städtetag*) as an institution co-ordinating the activities of local towns must have been established even earlier – probably as early as 1350.[19]

---

16 Niklas Luhmann: Sotsiaalsed süsteemid [Soziale Systeme. Grundriss einer allgemeinen Theorie], Tartu 2009, pp. 469 f.

17 Hartmut Boockmann: Herkunft und Einsatzgebiet. Beobachtungen am Beispiel des Deutschen Ordens, in: Zenon Hubert Nowak (ed.): Ritterorden und Region – politische, soziale und wirtschaftliche Verbindungen im Mittelalter, Toruń 1995, pp. 7-19. The regional recruitment dynamics of knight brothers of the Livonian branch of the Teutonic Order are well documented, both geographically and temporally, in the study by Lutz Fenske and Klaus Militzer: Ritterbrüder im Livländischen Zweig des Deutschen Ordens, Köln et.al. 1993; See also Sonja Neitmann: Von Grafschaft Mark nach Livland. Ritterbrüder aus Westfalen im livländischen Deutschen Orden, Köln et.al. 1993.

18 Hendrik Spruyt: The Sovereign State and Its Competitors: An Analysis of Systems Change, Princeton 1994, pp. 122 f. The Hanse has been compared to a guild whose members were imposed to clear prescriptions and prohibitions, but at the same time also guaranteed with common suretyship. See Ruth Schmidt-Wiegand: Hanse und Gilde. Genossenschaftliche Organisationsformen im Bereich der Hanse und Bezeichnungen, in: Hansische Geschichtsblätter 100 (1982), pp. 21-40.

19 See Wilhelm Greiffenhagen: Die alt-livländischen Ständetage, in: Beiträge zur Kunde Ehst-, Liv-

Similarly, the bishop's authority in Livonia may qualify as quasi-colonial. How is this to be understood? My argument is based on the example of the Bishopric of Dorpat and builds on Tõnis Lukas' prosopographic study of the composition of the Cathedral Chapter of Dorpat.[20] A total of 295 canons (capitulars) who held capitular office between 1224 and 1558 have been identified; 184 (62%) of them were born locally. A steady growth in the number of canons with a Livonian background can be observed from the establishment of the bishopric until its collapse. Foreign-born capitulars came predominantly from Central and Northern Germany or Prussia, and were mostly sons of burghers. Lukas, however, notes that the papal curia also exercised its right of reservation, shaping the cathedral chapter according to its own preferences. It is unclear, though, which traditions, which ties between people or institutions can explain the rush of high-ranking clergymen from various regions of Germany to the Bishopric of Dorpat. And what is equally important: Did the increasing number of Livonian-born members in the cathedral chapter help this institution turn its face towards Livonia? Could the Livonian capitulars even have had an identity other than that of a high-ranking clergyman? Let us not forget that an individual of high rank could strongly influence the domestic political climate of Livonia. Take, for instance, Bishop of Dorpat, Dietrich Damerow, at the end of the 14th century,[21] or Archbishop of Riga, Johannes VI Ambundii, a few decades later.[22] Both bishops lacked earlier ties with Livonia, yet skilfully exploited the social capital they had accumulated to assert themselves in their rivalry with the Order. So what was their social capital built on? Both Damerow and Ambundii were, so to speak, men of the world. The former had been private secretary to Emperor Charles IV and had forged useful ties all over Europe, all the way to British royalty. Archbishop Ambundii was respected and highly valued by the papal curia as well as the Emperor. Without doubt, these contacts served as strong social capital which both men attempted to use in the domestic political context. Damerow's confrontation with the Order pushed the country to the brink of a civil war, and had a broad international dimension. Compared to Damerow, Ambundii's actions were more balanced and seemingly served the interests of Livonia as a whole. However, this had nothing to do with Livonian patriotism – if this concept can be used at all in the context of medieval Europe. A clergyman appointed Archbishop of Riga at the Emperor's request, as was the case with Ambundii, could only act within the framework of the position that bound him to Livonia. His primary concern was the restoration of the Archbishop's authority as the primate of Livonia as well as of Prussia in response to the

und Kurlands 1 (1872), H. 4, pp. 347-363. This was the point at which Hanseatic towns in Livonia began to forcefully coordinate their activities. In 1350–1404, the towns held 55 assemblies. This calculation is based on Oskar Stavenhagen (ed.): Akten und Rezesse der livländischen Ständetage, Bd. 1 (1304–1460), 1. Lfg., Riga 1907.

20 Tõnis Lukas: Tartu toomhärrad 1224–1558 [The Canons of Tartu Bishopric 1224–1558], Tartu 1998. Unfortunately, due either to language barriers or a lack of information, the study by Tõnis Lukas has been prevented from reaching international scientific circles.

21 Bernard Jähnig: Zur Persönlichkeit des Dorpater Bischofs Dietrich Damerow, in: Beiträge zur Geschichte Westpreußens 6 (1980), pp. 6-24.

22 Bernard Jähnig: Die Rigische Sache zur Zeit des Erzbischofs Johannes Ambundii (1418–1424), in: Udo Arnold (ed.): Von Akkon bis Wien. Studien zur Deutschordensgeschichte vom 13. bis zum 20. Jahrhundert. Festschrift zum 90. Geburtstag von Althochmeister P. Dr. Marian Tumler O.T. am 21. Oktober 1977, Marburg 1978, pp. 84-105. It is worth noting that the local Diet of the towns came into being earlier than that of the Hanse as a whole.

steps taken by the Order. The latter had come very close to establishing control over the whole of Livonia by incorporating the archbishopric into the Order. However, these powerful moves by the bishops were no more than episodic. This illustrates the role of the external factor in local relations; even a seemingly strong social capital was insufficient to initiate a social change. Damerow and Ambundii's actions were not sustainable and there was no guarantee that their successors would have a similar charisma or comparable social capital. Besides, we should not forget that the Archbishop of Riga and the bishops of Ösel-Wiek and Dorpat also acted as landlords. How did this practice affect the development of vassaldom? Firstly, the *landfremd*[23] bishop-landlord may not have interfered with his subjects' lives at all, seeing that adapting oneself to the established habitus was inevitably time-consuming. Of course, much depended on how many years (life or tenure) the bishop-landlord was given. On the other hand, rash and self-conscious interference with the vassals' lives would alienate them from the suzerain. Any new bishop was a potential source of instability for the liegemen. As regards trust (an element of social capital), it can be concluded that vassals could never trust their new liege lord. Quasi-colonialism is thus clearly manifest among bishops and capitulars. As long as the papal curia exercised its right to appoint high clergy, Livonia was susceptible to external influences. Such a practice clearly affected the development of the second estate.

While quasi-colonialism makes full sense in the Livonian context, it actually makes it more complicated to pinpoint the "nerve of social life" in Livonia as a whole. As discussed above, Livonia was uniform in character. The interpretation of Livonian statehood, however, is somewhat problematic. The issue was discussed extensively by Pärtel Piirimäe in his analysis of the perceptions of Livonian statehood.[24] Piirimäe argues that the statehood of Old Livonia was dominated by territorial structures and territorial identity. The horizontal integration and uniform social identity of the estates were too weak to place the statehood of Old Livonia on a new foundation and forge a homogeneous state.[25] This conclusion about the final years of Old Livonia's political structure is based on the configuration and functions of the Old Livonian Diet (*Landtag*) during the period 1494–1535, and possibly identifies the reason for the rapid disintegration of Livonia in the initial phase of the Livonian wars. Though substantial, Piirimäe's theory fails to comprehensively answer the question, and the problem remains: Why did a homogeneous state never become a reality, and why did the social strata, or estates, fail to shape a common identity on the horizontal level?

23 The adjective *landfremd* describes how union partners of towns and vassals designated the Order in the framework of the Prussian Union established in 1440, to characterise the relation of the brothers of the Order to the land where they acted. In other words, Prussian towns and vassals did not consider the members of the Order, unlike themselves, to be genuinely tied up with the land. In my opinion, this term quite remarkably describes the nature of the Order; it offers food for thought and is useful when analysing the internal political relations of Livonia. This adjective is equally relevant when characterising the Episcopal institution, or at least the bishops who arrived in Livonia from outside the country.

24 Pärtel Piirimäe: Liivimaa maapäev Wolter von Plettenbergi ajal (1494–1535) [The Livonian Diet during the reign of Wolter von Plettenberg (1494–1535)], in: Ajalooline Ajakiri (2008), 1/2 (123/124), pp. 45-88. See the German version published as Staatenbund oder Ständestaat? Der livländische Landtag im Zeitalter Wolters von Plettenberg (1494–1535), in: Forschungen zur baltischen Geschichte 8 (2013), pp. 40-80.

25 Piirimäe, Liivimaa maapäev (see note 24), p. 85.

There are a multitude of state formation theories, and the question is, in fact, which social formation qualifies as a state. Leaving aside the various definitions of state, from John Locke to Talcott Parsons and Franz Oppenheimer, let me postulate that the key characteristic in this respect is the existence of a central government. It is territorial centralisation that provides the state with the capacity to establish itself autonomously, to quote one of the most eminent experts on social power, the Neo-Weberian Michael Mann, who uses the phrase "autonomous power of the state".[26] An alternative term that could be used here is the ability to self-regulate. However, two heatedly debated problems immediately come to mind: What is a social structure as such, and how does social power function within it? I will base my argument on a simple suggestion that social structure should be treated as a framework around social life. Social life, in turn, requires trust between the people within the framework. Thus defined, social structure is the opposite of chaos and disorganisation. Within the framework of a social structure people behave according to certain norms, generally called culture. Culture includes certain elements which underlie social behaviour and which are followed in mutual communication. A distinction must be made between social values and norms. Social values are moral principles of behaviour, while social norms are concrete instructions, the rationale behind certain behavioural restrictions. Social structure is always characterised by hierarchy and interest groups, whose members' targeted behaviour challenges mutual trust; in other words, behavioural norms are in constant change, prompting, in turn, changes in social structures.[27] Introducing the category of social power warrants the question: How was the power divided in Old Livonia, and where did its sources lie? Michael Mann's discourse on social power[28] provides a good basis on which to discuss the elements of social power in the context of Old Livonia.

In Western societies the process of state formation was slow and characterised by the immaturity of the power instruments. Explaining the functioning mechanism of state power, Mann divides it into four "overlapping and intersecting sociospatial networks of power": a) ideological, b) economic, c) military, and d) political. Ideological power might be defined as representing the behaviour principles of an individual or a group established in society as a universal language of communication among its members. In the context of medieval Europe this is identified as Christian faith which is clustered around the papal curia and prescribes the generally accepted norms of behaviour. Economic power is perceived as a set of rules enforced by an individual or a group with the aim of controlling production and distribution. The primary task of military power is territorial defence, and if necessary, offensives beyond the borders. However, military power must also be able to clamp down on members of the public to ensure observation of the ideological, economic and political norms within society. The primary function of political power is territorial regulation, the ability to keep the social order together within a certain territory. The collaboration of these four networks creates an entity with features that allow it to be classified as a state. A comparison of medieval and modern statehood reveals a major difference between the degrees of

---

26 Michael Mann: The autonomous power of the state: its origins, mechanisms and results, in: Archives européennes de sociologie 25 (1984), pp. 185-213.
27 Scott (ed.): Sociology (see note 5), pp. 157-160.
28 Michael Mann: The Sources of Social Power, Vol. I: A History of Power from the Beginning to 1760 A.D., Cambridge et.al. 1986.

integration and bureaucratisation of these four networks. In medieval Europe there were no autochthonous states in which all four networks emerged and evolved without any external impulses. In Mann's opinion, the ideological and military powers are sociospatially transcendent. Let it be said that the centre of ideological power may be located geographically far from its areas of influence, but its instructions serve as guidelines for locations, or are exported as the only true and correct set of rules and regulations. Ideological power has the ability to supervise compliance with the rules and assess the performance of the executors, thus affecting the behaviour of rivalling parties. Ideological power is able to mobilise the agents of economic, political and military power. The density of the mutually supportive economic and political network is probably paramount for the proper functioning of a state: the denser the power network, the stronger the state. In a pioneering move, Mann introduced the geographic factor as a marker in assessing the quality (maturity or immaturity) of a medieval state.[29]

As regards Livonia, there can be no doubt that the most important source of ideological power was Latin Christianity with its code of behaviour dictated by the papal curia. Catholicism gave legitimacy to the Livonian crusades, and the resulting political structures fell under the influence of the papal curia – as proved by the cases of Damerow and Ambundii described above. The decisions made by the papal curia when appointing the high clergy of Livonia were not, however, limited to the religious sphere. The bishops were also entrusted with political power – albeit to a somewhat obscure extent in Livonia. The Archbishop of Riga, for example, could be excused for believing that his authority went beyond that of a mere Riga primate and extended over the whole territory of Livonia. After all, much depended on the Archbishop's person and the backing his goals received in and outside of Livonia. In other words, it was all about the span of the political power field. The Archbishop's institution had the obligation and the right to operate within the competence of ideological power, i.e. the religious sphere, using the instruments of political power – but that was all. The bishop's authority did not extend to the economic or military domains (elements of social power) throughout Livonia; in these two spheres, bishops were merely able to exercise their landlord's rights within their landed property. Thus, we can postulate that the Archbishop was unable to lay claim to the central power in Livonia.

As regards political power in Livonia, the situation was more complicated, though paradoxically also straightforward. The only local force that possessed a more or less explicit plan for the political governance of the whole of Livonia was the Livonian branch of the Teutonic Order. Earlier Baltic German historiography has interpreted this as an attempt by the Order to govern the state.[30] Although this interpretation has been dismissed as too modern,[31] I believe there is some truth in it. The Order aspired to establish protective sovereignty (*Schutzherrschaft*) over the bishoprics with the methods they understood well.

29 Ibidem, pp. 22-28; See also Michael Mann: Putting the Weberian state in its social, geopolitical and militaristic context: a response to Patrick O'Brian, in: Journal of Historical Sociology 19 (2006), pp. 364-373.

30 Oskar Stavenhagen: Der Kampf des Deutschen Ordens um den livländischen Einheitsstaat im 14. Jahrhundert, in: Baltische Monatsschrift 53 (1902), pp. 145-149, 209-228.

31 Bernhard Jähnig: Der Kampf des Deutschen Ordens um die Schutzherrschaft über die livländischen Bistümer. Ritterorden und Kirche im Mittelalter, in: Zenon Hubert Nowak (ed.): Ritterorden und Kirche im Mittelalter, Toruń 1997, pp. 97-111, here p. 97.

This political struggle, the struggle over the archbishopric in particular, can be perceived as the crux of Livonia's domestic political history.[32] The Order failed to spread a protective umbrella over Livonia, however, and its ambition to become the sole military power in the land was thwarted. Concurrently, the non-existence of a political power centre forestalled the concentration of economic power. After all, a state is defined by its having a territory, and taxation of this territory proves crucial in organising and bolstering territorial defence. The introduction of a common taxation also implies the spreading of informational capital, as well as cultural unification. The consolidating effect of culture has an impact on mental structures and assists in the formation of a common identity.[33] However, even if the Order had successfully assumed the function of a protective shield over the bishoprics of Livonia, this would only have represented one of the central government's tasks.

The above characteristics describe but a few of the principal domestic political forces operating in Livonia. It was in fact a diverse group and for several of its members, the impulses for change came from outside the local context. Such a constellation of political and economic forces hardly inspired optimism for a consensus on domestic political issues. Yet, historiography agrees that the 1420s witnessed the emergence of an all-Livonian Diet (*Landtag*) as a nerve centre of local political life. The Latvian historian Ilgvars Misāns describes the Diet as follows:

> "Wenn damit auch die Bedeutung des Landtages geringer war, so bot er doch den verschiedenen politischen Kräften Livlands die Möglichkeit, ihre Interessen in Einklang zu bringen und sich über gemeinsame politische und ökonomische Maßnahmen zu verständigen. Folglich ist es gerade dem Landtag zu verdanken, daß wir über Livland als einen einheitlichen politischen Organismus sprechen können."[34]

I fully subscribe to Misāns' opinion: the Diet's chief shortcoming was the non-existence of an executive arm. Nevertheless, an array of questions regarding the formation, functioning and role of this institution remain unanswered. Yet, I contend that all of these can be subsumed in one central issue: By dealing with the Diet as an analytical category in Livonia's internal policy, are we not exaggerating its importance, ascribing to it qualities that it did not possess? Used in a narrative, phrases such as: "the Diet decided", "the Diet was unable to solve the problem either" communicate excessive expectations of this institution, measured on a scale comparable with that of modern parliamentary bodies. In other words, the actual social weight of the Diet remains obscure. Furthermore, it is not clear whether its decisions in fact led to social changes in Livonia at all.

In the interpretation of the role of Diets, it seems, the role of the second and third estates is somewhat overrated. For a Diet to take place, the presence of the top two domestic political players – the Master of the Livonian branch of the Teutonic Order and the Archbishop –

---

32 Ibidem, pp. 97-111.
33 Pierre Bourdieu: Parktilised põhjused: Teoteooriast [Practical Reason: On the Theory of Action], Tallinn 2003, p. 128.
34 Ilgvars Misāns: Wolter von Plettenberg und der livländische Landtag, in: Norbert Angermann, Ilgvars Misāns (eds.): Wolter von Plettenberg und das mittelalterliche Livland, Lüneburg 2001, pp. 55-71, here p. 55.

at the negotiating table was imperative. Once an agreement was reached, the Diet could proceed. However, the sociological schemes that purportedly prove the relevance of the second and third estates in the genesis of the Diet, are far from convincing. Jan Kostrzak has attributed the formation of this institution to the mutual accommodation of Livonian estates, claiming that the congregations of estates in the 14th century cumulatively led to the emergence of the Diet as a governing body, which structure and procedural principles finalised in 1435.[35] Years ago, the author of the present article partly contested this interpretation, pointing out that the 14th century saw a variety of Diets with different purposes and convening mechanisms which were hardly in a position to lead to a smooth qualitative shift in the mutual relations of the estates. Let me put it this way: it is highly problematic to stress the importance of the second and third estates in the genesis of the Diet.[36] Pärtel Piirimäe's study of the Livonian Diet during the reign of Wolter von Plettenberg indicates the application of the so-called "king's mechanism": estates were summoned to the Diet through the mediation of the landlord.[37] It is, rather, the political factor that needs to be stressed, as is explicitly expressed in the analysis of the Diets of the early 15th century. Archbishop of Riga, Ambundii, had strong social capital,[38] which enabled him to bring Order principals, bishops, vassals as well as representatives of towns to the negotiating table – action that can be well interpreted as an attempt to take the reins of political life in Livonia. However, the practice of regular consultations collapsed when Ambundii died. The Diets were discontinued, and the confrontation between the Order and the episcopal power reached a new and acute phase when, in 1428, the Order arranged the murder of a delegation of clergymen on their way to the papal curia to complain about the brutality of Teutonic knights.[39] This allows a few significant conclusions to be made. Firstly, from the Order's perspective, co-operation with Ambundii was a temporary concession to the bishop's power rather than a long-term commitment. The idea of sharing power was not compatible with the knights' perception of Livonia, and is further proof that the Order was a self-referencing system, as per Niklas Luhmann's definition. Another important conclusion can be drawn regarding the involvement of Livonian towns during the period under discussion. For the Hanseatic cities the short-lived "accord" between the Archbishop and the Order was an unpleasant surprise rather than a perceived need for more coherent domestic communication. Symptomatically, parallel to the Diet, Livonian towns held their own conventions, discussing the strategies of joint action against potential trespasses by the Order and the bishops.[40] This, too, may qualify as self-referencing.

---

35 Jan Kostrzak: Die Ständeprobleme in Altlivland im 15. Jahrhundert, in: Hartmut Boockmann (ed.): Die Anfänge der ständischen Vertretungen in Preußen und seinen Nachbarländern, München 1992, pp. 151-158.
36 Raudkivi, Vana-Liivimaa maapäev (see note 12), pp. 44-70.
37 Piirimäe, Liivimaa maapäev (see note 24), pp. 56 f.
38 See Jähnig, Die Rigische Sache (see note 22), pp. 84 f.
39 Friedrich Amelung: Baltische Culturstudien: Aus den vier Jahrhunderten der Ordenszeit, 1184–1561, 1. Halbbd., Dorpat 1884, pp. 142 f.
40 Leonid Arbusow jun. (ed.): Akten und Rezesse der livländischen Ständetage, Bd. 1 (1304–1460), 3. Lfg. (1417–1424), 4. Lfg. (1424–1450), Riga 1926, 1928, no 271 f., 292-302, 307-310, 330, 332, 339, 349-351, 415.

Tracing Social Change. The Case of Old Livonia

27

It is also symptomatic that the Order sought and found partners while under existential threat, as evidenced by the background to the 1435 Livonian Confederation.[41] The crushing defeat that the Order suffered at the hands of the Lithuanians in the Battle of Swienta on 1 September unleashed significant developments. The confrontation within the Order between Rhinelanders and Westphalians, the former representing the pro-Prussian camp, and the latter seeking greater autonomy for the Livonian Order, was manifested in the outcome of the battle which claimed the lives of the Livonian Master and seven high-ranking Order functionaries (*Ordensgebietiger*), all of them Rhinelanders. There is evidence of little or no consensus among the leaders of the Livonian Order with respect to the campaign against the Lithuanians. Elections of the new Master gave the Westphalians a chance to reinforce their position and shake off the Prussian dictate.

The resolutions adopted at the 1435 Walk (Valga) Diet are summed up in five documents. One way or another, these resolutions touched Livonia's domestic political nerve, creating the prerequisite for broader social change. The Order agreed that the archbishopric's high clergy could keep their Augustinian habits (i.e. continue living by the rules of the Order of St. Augustine) for all eternity, which essentially meant that the Order would abandon its policy of incorporating the archbishopric.[42] Secondly, the Archbishop and the Order agreed to postpone the question of the territorial ownership of Riga (one of the biggest bones of contention throughout the history of Livonia) for twelve years.[43] Unmistakably the most important document was "eiine fruntliche eyntracht," or confederate agreement that was signed on 4 December 1435 and had a six-year guarantee. The signatories undertook to comply with the following principles: disagreements between the signing parties were to be settled peacefully with the assistance of impartial arbitrators; envoys of the agreement partners were to be allowed free and unimpeded passage and correspondence; seigneurs were to settle conflicts with their subordinates in accordance with the relevant laws; none of the signatories were to be involved in military conflicts (partake in wars) outside Old Livonia without the consent of the partners to the agreement (those who violated this clause were to be deprived of the support of the other partners); in the case of an enemy assault, the partners were to commit themselves to jointly organise local defence; privileges and rights of the partners to this agreement were to be mutually honoured and respected.[44]

However, caution must be exercised in assessing the confederate agreement, so as not to overrate it as a definitive watershed in the state formation process. The question to be answered first is who benefited most. "Eiine fruntliche eyntracht" certainly served the interests of the Livonian Order (speaking of its confrontation with external partners rather than the internal conflict between Rhinelanders and Westphalians). After the defeat in the Battle of Swienta the Order was no longer able to offer military protection to Livonia.

---

41 One possible assessment of the confederation is given by Priit Raudkivi: Miejsce konfederacji z Walk (Valga) (grudzień 1435 – grudzień 1441) w inflanckiej wspólnocie politycznej [The Place of Walk Confederation (December 1435 – December 1441) in Livonian Statehood], in: Zapiski Historyczne 54 (1989), No. 1, pp. 7-25.

42 Arbusow jun. (ed.), Akten und Rezesse (see note 40), 1, 4, no 415. The document is sealed by the Bishops of Curonia, Dorpat and Ösel-Wiek – the high clergy. Neither the second nor the third estate had anything to do with this document.

43 Ibidem.

44 Ibidem.

In 1397, the Livonian branch of the Order had waived the right to wield power over the subjects of Livonian churches during territorial defence efforts and campaigns outside Livonia's borders.[45] In other words, the Order had offered exclusive military protection to the whole of Livonia. The confederate agreement provided for a combined effort of military forces all over the country for the purpose of defending the territory. However, this was merely a pledge to be honoured for the following six years. No trace of organisational activity can be detected which would indicate a definite or projected shift in matters of territorial defence (compulsory defence tax, etc.). Nor did any other provision come with a long-term guarantee, except for the indefinite right to wear Augustinian robes that was granted to the Riga Cathedral Chapter. It is thus obvious that all the partners viewed the confederate agreement as transient, and that for many domestic political issues a reversal was to be expected at the latest after the six years had passed.

However, the communication between Livonia's domestic forces during the six-year period suggests that the central problem was the in-house rivalry of the Rhinelanders and Westphalians regarding the filling of the *Ordensgebietiger* positions.[46] The Westphalians used the Diet to their own ends, embarking on a complicated political intrigue in which the individual confederation partners held different attitudes towards the Master issue.[47] That the Westphalians eventually prevailed over the Rhinelanders did not result in the Order's greater acceptance of its partners. The Order had simply reached a new phase in its evolution. As an institution the Diet failed to rise to a new level during the six-year time frame of the confederate agreement. Furthermore, I have not been able to detect any indication of a major breakthrough in the development of estates or in political realities, as suggested by historiographers.

The following provides support for this position. Allowing the Riga Cathedral Chapter to live by the Augustinians' rules was too major a concession on the part of the Order. The triumph of the Westphalians over the Rhinelanders did not tone down the Order's ambitions. The conflict escalated further in 1451. Even though the relevant accord had been endorsed at the 1436 Council of Basel, the Order managed to enforce an arrangement that stipulated that the Archbishop and capitulars must belong to the Order. Compared to the incorporation policy of the late 14th century, the new submission principles were less rigid (e.g. the Order would abandon the visitation rights and guarantee free election of capitulars), but the Order and the archbishopric's higher clergy were nonetheless closely bound to the good will of the knight-brothers. Symptomatically, the newly minted partners burned all the earlier documents relating to incorporation in the late 14th century, as well as the agreement bilaterally signed in Walk on 4 December.[48] In 1452 the Kirchholm agreement was concluded, placing the city of Riga under two feudal seigneurs, the Order and the Archbishop.[49] The two leading forces thus solved the "ownership" of Riga – or

---

45 Stavenhagen (ed.): Akten und Rezesse (see note 19), 1, 1, p. 115, no 1.

46 See Carl August Lückerath: Paul von Russdorf, Hochmeister des deutschen Ordens 1422–1441, Bad Godesberg 1969, pp. 174-183.

47 Arbusow jun. (ed.), Akten und Rezesse (see note 40), 1, 4, no 432, 440, 444, 453. See also Raudkivi, Vana-Liivimaa maapäev (see note 12), pp. 97-108.

48 Arbusow jun. (ed.), Akten und Rezesse (see note 40), 1, 5 (1450–1454), Riga 1929, no 536 f.

49 Ibidem, no 551-554.

so they thought – which had been postponed by 12 years in 1435. In fact, the Kirchholm agreement created new tensions. Both the Order and the Archbishop perceived Riga as an object of their contract, ignoring its rights as a possible subject. The issue was, naturally, beyond the competence of the Livonian Diet.

The author has been unable to trace any evidence of a social change or increased mutual trust in the Livonian domestic communication between 1441, the end of the Walk confederation, and 1452. Even though no research is available on the Diet as the principal forum of communication in Livonia during this period, the problems discussed at the 1472 Diet speak volumes. Echoing the 1435 Diet and the issues debated there, an agreement with restricted duration was concluded, with partners pledging ten-year adherence to its provisions. In fact, the commitments made by the partners provide a fairly adequate idea of communication between the domestic forces in Livonia. The 1472 agreement emanated from the struggle between the Order and Archbishop Silvester Stodewescher over the supremacy of Riga and subordination issues regarding the Archbishop and knight-brothers.[50] It is reasonable to suggest that if partners pledged to abstain from certain activities for the next ten years, these activities must have been on the agenda for some time before the agreement was reached. The practice of unauthorised retaliation (*Selbsthilfe*) was to be abandoned; landlords were to abstain from violence towards their subjects; Cathedral Chapter elections were to be free; war was not to be waged outside Livonia without the partners' approval; joint territorial defence was to be organised against enemy invasion; freedoms, rights and privileges were to be mutually honoured.[51] The covenant is declarative and indicative of tense confrontation between landlords and their subjects. The document also suggests that the Order brethren had interfered with the Cathedral Chapter elections in a bid to install their minions. The provision regarding joint territorial defence was also little more than declarative, and no information is available of any concrete plan of action.

Whereas the published documents of the Livonian estates' assemblies (*Ständetage*) allow an insight into the communication among Livonia's political forces up until 1472, no printed sources are available in a compact form until 1494. However, there are records covering the incumbency of the Master of the Order Wolter von Plettenberg (1494–1535), and these have been thoroughly researched by Ilgvars Misāns and Pärtel Piirimäe.[52] No less importantly, Plettenberg, also dubbed the greatest Master of the Livonian Order of all times, has earned a special place in historiography.

Plettenberg's tenure was without doubt one of the most interesting periods of transition in the history of Livonia, the Baltic Sea region, and Europe. Livonia was facing an increasing threat from Russia, which in turn intensified the general social stress. Secondly, a few years after the outset of the Reformation in Germany (1517), the Prussian territory of the Teutonic Order was secularised in 1525 and turned into a duchy; this represented a major challenge for the Livonian branch. Thus a whole complex of closely interlaced problems emerged sparking a diversity of responses from the individual social forces of Livonia.

---

50 Gert Kroeger: Erzbischof Silvester Stodewecher und sein Kampf mit dem Orden um die Herrschaft über Riga, in: Mitteilungen aus der livländischen Geschichte 24 (1930), pp. 147-280.
51 Albert Bauer (ed.): Akten und Rezesse der livländischen Ständetage, Bd. 2 (1460–1494), 2. Lfg. (1467–1472), Riga 1938, no 156.
52 See Misāns, Wolter von Plettenberg (see note 34) and Piirimäe, Liivimaa maapäev (see note 24).

By the time Wolter von Plettenberg assumed office, it was not clear what role the Diet played in Livonia, or what hopes the new Master of the Order could place in this institution. Plettenberg had had a long career in Livonia, and was well versed in the local relations. However, could the highest officer of a religious military order make compromises with a domestic partner without jeopardising the Order's whole existence? It was obvious that the Order had fallen into a legitimacy crisis[53] which had been present since the late 14th century, or the formation of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Another question is how the Livonian branch itself perceived this legitimacy crisis, and how its partners saw it. Presumably, Plettenberg understood the realities better than any earlier Livonian Master. He faced a dire need to increase the brotherhood's social capital through personal trust.

In 1495 Plettenberg and Archbishop Michael Hildebrand summoned a Diet in Walk to discuss various defence and domestic issues. One of the key issues was the Russian threat. The *Rezess* lists Livonian prelates before the Order delegates, which suggests that Plettenberg had not assumed command and that the two principal political forces were demonstrating mutual respect.[54] It should also be mentioned that the Riga, Reval and Dorpat municipal delegates to the Diet had prepared an account of the imprisonment and further fate of Livonian merchants in Russia,[55] indicating that the Diet had certain social weight in the eyes of the cities as an institution on which they could rely in time of need. Plettenberg's personal authority and social standing seem to have been high, as were the expectations of his diplomatic skills in the above-mentioned conflict with Russia. In 1496/97 several separate gatherings were held in Wenden (Võnnu) with Plettenberg in attendance.[56] It can therefore be concluded that, even as the most representative local forum, the Diet lacked sufficient authority among Livonian merchants, or it was not considered competent to solve problems – unlike the Master of the Order.

The key issue on the agenda of the 1498 Walk Diet summoned by the Master and the Archbishop was countrywide preparation to counter the threat of Russian invasion.[57] Both were able to reach an accord on a war tax to be exacted from the vassals; however, it remains unclear whether the strategy was indeed put into effect, as the Russian invasion did not take place. The cities' representatives protested against the proposed defence tax. Their first argument was that they had no authority to endorse the agreement; secondly, their correspondence reveals the intent to hire mercenaries to deal with the Russian threat.[58] This response, symptomatic as it is, indicates beyond doubt that for the cities, Hanseatic interests dominated over those of Livonia.

---

53 Matthias Asche, Magnus v. Hirschheydt etc.: Legitimationsdefizite, Bedrohungspotenziale und Bewältigungsstrategien der europäischen Ritterorden in der Krisenzeit der 1520er Jahre – Fallbeispiele und allgemeine Reflexionen, in: Ordines militares. Yearbook for the Study of the Military Orders 14 (2011), pp. 259-302, here pp. 274 f.
54 Leonid Arbusow (ed.), Akten und Rezesse der livländischen Ständetage, Bd. 3 (1494–1535), Riga 1910, no 2 f.
55 Ibidem, no 3.
56 Ibidem, no 5-7.
57 Ibidem, no 10, §18. See Misāns, Wolter von Plettenberg (see note 34), pp. 59 f.
58 Misāns, Wolter von Plettenberg (see note 34), p. 60.

Ilgvars Misāns postulates that the armed conflict with Russia (which began in 1502) pushed Livonia to the brink of collapse because of the weak sense of unity.[59] Indeed, discussions (predominantly concerning the Russian threat and defence measures) at the Diets suggest that the political forces in Livonia were far from reaching consensus.[60] That the threat was undeniably serious becomes evident from the pessimistic, despondent address of the Riga Archbishop to the 1502 Diet: Livonians can only pray for God to spare them from the Russians, that plague sent by Him.[61]

Until Plettenberg's victory over the Russians at the Battle of Smolin in September 1502, no sign of social consolidation can be detected in Livonia's domestic policy. An attempt to trace social change reveals that communication under the Russian threat is indicative of deep encapsulation and a penchant for safeguarding private interests rather than a growing sense of unity. Plettenberg's efforts to counteract the Russian threat were thwarted by his lack of sufficient social capital and inability to convince partners of the effectiveness of the suggested measures. Even so, the idea of an all-Livonian defence tax can be interpreted as an attempt at consistency in the use of military force – at least, from the power sociology perspective.[62]

The victory at the Battle of Smolin, a small miracle in itself, markedly boosted Plettenberg's authority in Livonia. At the Wolmar (Valmiera) Diet of January 1503 the Master relied on the tactics of personal influence to reach his goals. Ahead of the main session, Plettenberg summoned the cities' delegates to explain to them why the Diet had been convened in the first place, and to castigate those who had failed to demonstrate enough support in the war with Russia. He was especially displeased with the Bishop of Dorpat for his reluctance to sign the proposed peace treaty.[63] At the Diet held in Wenden in May 1503, however, Plettenberg was unable to persuade the cities to accept his plans on the Russian issue. The delegates demanded that these problems be discussed in the presence of all the delegates, instead of being resolved in private negotiations between the Order and the cities.[64]

Plettenberg continued his efforts to spread information about the Russian threat and court the support of the cities, having obviously reached the conclusion that defending Livonia's borders would be hopeless without the cities' backing. In the meantime, he showed great interest in trading issues that the cities were very keen on. Under Plettenberg's direction, the Diet had become the principal venue for discussions on Livonia's domestic and foreign problems.[65] Several historiographers have pointed out that the Archbishop of Riga, Michael Hildebrand, otherwise an equally high-ranking dignitary, paled in comparison to Plettenberg.[66] In fact there were no major disagreements between the Archbishop and the Master of the Order. Hildebrand was always supportive of Plettenberg, and the fact that

---

59 Ibidem.
60 Ibidem, no 12 f., 15.
61 Ibidem, no 20.
62 Bourdieu, Praktilised põhjused (see note 33), pp. 125 f.
63 Arbusow (ed.), Akten und Rezesse (see note 54), 3, no 21, §8-17.
64 Ibidem, no 23, §8-10.
65 Ibidem, no 28 f., 35.
66 Misāns, Wolter von Plettenberg (see note 34), p. 62; Leonid Arbusow jun.: Die Einführung der Reformation in Liv-, Est- und Kurland, Leipzig 1921, p. 116.

before his death he seems to have disappeared from the scene, should not be understood as Plettenberg's victory: he was simply a very old man who died at the age of 76, a very advanced age considering the period he lived in.

When Jasper Linde was Archbishop, Plettenberg retained his position as the prolocutor for Livonia – at least at the 1512 Wolmar Diet.[67] However, there are indications that the new Archbishop later improved his standing.

Turning to new themes, the Diet began to discuss religious issues placed on the agenda by the Archbishop: the shortage of priests, the poor grasp of Christian doctrine among non-Germans, the need for an educational establishment for clergymen. An attempt was made to remedy the shortage of priests by inviting clerics from outside Livonia (enduring quasi-colonialism!). This serves as proof that in certain walks of life Livonia was short of human resources. The urgency for a school to "produce" clergymen was acknowledged, yet no actions followed. The cities were satisfied with the way the spiritual issues were being solved, and insisted that the problems had nothing to do with them.[68]

However, the early Reformation year of 1522 saw a remarkable attempt which, had it succeeded, could have initiated social change in Livonia: a ten-year alliance of the cities and the second estate to jointly safeguard their rights against any violation. Its most significant clause was a ban on external interference in the appointment of clergymen.[69] This principle, had it been enforced, would have shaken the foundations of Livonia to the core. For the Order and the bishops, compliance with this provision would have meant losing a significant amount of political power and much slacker ties with the papal curia. However, this proposal, which was put forth by the cities and vassals, was probably not inspired by a perceived need to remove the source of Livonia's internal instability, i.e. susceptibility to external influences. Unsurprisingly, the Order and the bishops never approved this plan.[70] At the next Diet in Wolmar in January 1523, Plettenberg failed in his attempt to call the cities to order by approaching the municipal delegates individually. Interestingly, there is no evidence of a vassal delegation attending this Diet.[71] Two years later, however, the cities and vassals reconfirmed their alliance and suggested placing the issue of the Evangelical faith on the Diet's agenda[72] – in a bid to spark a major social change in Livonia. I postulate that what happened at the 1525 Wolmar Diet should be considered a litmus test of the ability of Livonian social forces to adapt. A straightforward challenge to the authority of the Order and the Archbishop, it could have sealed the fate of the country. After all, the attitude towards the Evangelical faith (acceptance or rejection) was not only about religion. It was also about trust in further domestic communication.

The response of Livonia's Catholic camp was far from unanimous. Archbishop Blanken-feld, himself a staunch Catholic, was not at all convinced that it was necessary to discuss this problem. Plettenberg, on the other hand, accepted the challenge and summoned the Diet. The composition of this Diet speaks for itself. The most striking fact is the absence of the three major Hanseatic towns. A comparison of two lists – the vassals attending the

67 Arbusow (ed.), Akten und Rezesse (see note 54), 3, no 53.
68 Ibidem, no 53, §30, 57, §45.
69 Ibidem, no 136.
70 Ibidem, no 135, §48.
71 Ibidem, no 138.
72 Ibidem, no 151, §16.

Diet and those who signed the 1522 alliance agreement – gives reason to doubt whether they indeed represented the same viewpoint. At any rate, the 1525 Diet seems to have followed a path prescribed by the Catholics, and culminated with a declaration postponing the discussion of religious matters by three years.[73] In the light of this decision, the alliance of cities and vassals had disintegrated.

The Catholics had thus been able to debilitate Livonia's Protestant camp; however, something happened that same year that fundamentally challenged the Livonian branch of the Teutonic Order: secularisation of the Order's Prussian territories. Though not unexpected, this event radically changed the socio-political configuration on the eastern shore of the Baltic Sea.[74] However, whether or not to opt for the Prussian way was a question to which an explicit answer was required. Let us not forget that the Order's position in Prussia differed from its standing in Livonia. The secularisation of the Prussian branch of the Order thoroughly upset Prussian statehood, whereas the Livonian branch did not have full authority over the land, and its secularisation would have affected only part of Livonia and some relationships among local partners. Ultimately, the decision lay with the top tier of the Livonian branch of the Teutonic Order, and the principles that underlay their rejection of 26 January 1525 are still largely a matter of debate. Juhan Kreem postulates that the Master of the Order served the interests of his peers from the lower nobility.[75] If so, Plettenberg catered to the interests of the Order as a closed corporation, viewing Livonia as a quasi-colonial structure which guaranteed the German lower nobility their livelihood. If secularisation had occurred, the knight-brothers would have entered the social environment occupied by the local second estate, and become integrated into Livonian society. This would have meant a restructuring of power relations in the whole of Livonia, although where power centres would have emerged, and whether society would have become more integrated, is a matter of speculation. It is, however, undeniable that the influential members of the local Order took a negative stand on the threats contained in secularisation.[76] This essentially suggests that under Plettenberg the Order was still striving to become the leading political force in Livonia.

What sort of aftermath did the principal domestic political forces in Livonia expect possible secularisation to have? Their conjectures were probably quite different from the long-term scheme sketched above. The Order was led by a skilled politician, Livonian Master Plettenberg, whose potential power monopoly was a source of controversial feelings. Norbert Angermann has pointed out that the controversy was potentially big enough to cause civil war and the intervention of external forces.[77] Besides, by 1526 Plettenberg had gathered solid political capital from manoeuvring between Catholicism and the Evangelical church: by allowing the cities to practice the Evangelical faith, he obtained the backing of Riga and

---

73 Arbusow (ed.), Akten und Rezesse (see note 54) 3, no 208, §8.
74 Klemens Wieser (ed.): Nordosteuropa und der Deutsche Orden. Kurzregesten I (bis 1561), Bad Godesberg 1969, no 389.
75 Juhan Kreem: Der Deutsche Orden und die Reformation in Livland, in: Johannes A. Mol, Klaus Militzer etc. (eds.): The Military Orders and the Reformation. Choices, State Building, and the Weight of Tradition, Hilversum 2006, pp. 43-57.
76 Asche, v. Hirschheydt etc., Legitimationsdefizite (see note 53), p. 280.
77 Norbert Angermann: Wolter von Plettenberg. Der größte Ordensmeister Livlands, Bonn 1985, p. 11.

Reval, while signalling to the Catholics that the Order was not going to give up the old faith. This put the Livonian bishops and Plettenberg in the same boat. Led by Archbishop Blankenfeld, all the Livonian bishops pledged allegiance to Plettenberg.[78] The Master of the Order was thus very close to becoming an autocratic ruler. However, adherence to Catholicism was always risky in Livonia: the accumulated political capital could easily evaporate if the source of its legitimacy was located outside Livonia – as discussed earlier in this article. Archbishop Blankenfeld, who died in 1527, was succeeded by Thomas Schöning. The new Archbishop had a different idea of Livonia's power relations, which did not include the Archbishop's allegiance to the Master of the Order or Riga's subjugation to the Order alone (as had been the case since 1525). To assert himself next to Plettenberg, he needed support from the centres of ideological power: the Emperor or the Pope. Again we see the familiar scheme in which the local power relations depended on the social capital gathered outside Livonia. In 1529, Margrave Wilhelm, the brother of Duke Albrecht of Prussia, was appointed Archbishop's coadjutor, and the Riga primate managed to obtain episcopal regalia from the pope for a considerable amount of money.[79] At the 1530 Wolmar Diet the bishops were again detached from the Order and Riga's joint dependence on the Archbishop and the Master of the Order was restored.[80]

Plettenberg's rise to the status of a "Reichsfürst" in 1530 and his subsequent reorientation towards the Empire further complicated Livonia's domestic political communication. After all, Livonia's attachment to the Empire had never been strong enough to substantiate a systematic use of the Emperor's ideological power as an argument in local power struggles. The Livonian branch of the Order held on to the Emperor's authority for pragmatic reasons, even after Plettenberg's reign, in expectation of material support against the Russian threat – but to no avail.

*

In conclusion it may be said that the constellation of socio-political forces operating in Livonia discouraged the formation of power centres and the development of a unified code of behaviour for the whole of Livonia. The reasons for this are many, but chief among them is compartmentalisation on many levels. The basic antagonism seen in the goals of the individual domestic forces had its roots in the earliest phase of the local statehood. Significantly, it was two internationally based socio-political structures – the Hanseatic League and the Teutonic Order – that were forced into a dialogue in the local political arena. Both, however, only looked after their own existential needs. Neither of these was a product of the local social development, and their reproduction process followed their own specific rules. Any co-ordinated action could only stem from explicit common interests – although these were predominantly of fleetingly topical nature.

78 Arbusow (ed.), Akten und Rezesse (see note 54), 3, no 238 f.
79 A meticulous historiographical analysis is given by Madis Maasing: Saare-Lääne ja koadjuutori-vaenused: keskaegse Liivimaa viimased kodusõjad [The Feud of Ösel-Wiek and the Coadjutor's Feud: the last civil wars in Medieval Livonia], in: Ajalooline Ajakiri (2010), 2 (132), pp. 115-151.
80 Arbusow (ed.), Akten und Rezesse (see note 54), 3, no 281, §43-48.

The susceptibility of Livonia's social structure to external influences is vividly displayed in the practice of appointing high functionaries of the bishopric, i.e. the topmost elements of statehood. The nomination of Catholic bishops could be described as a random game which followed rules established in the mid-13th century. The principal factors that shaped this process were, firstly, the papal provisions, and secondly, the ambition of the Teutonic Order to subject the episcopal power to its control by exerting influence on the main source of ideological power, i.e. the papal curia. This practice lent unpredictability to domestic communication on two levels: firstly, in the communication between the bishop-landlord and his subjects, and secondly, on the all-Livonian scale. Before the Reformation, papal authority as the main source of ideological power also supplied political capital to the Livonian bishop-landlords. How the latter used this capital to shape internal relations, however, depended on the personal traits of the individual bishops and their ability to adjust themselves to the local power games. After all, there was no guarantee that a Livonian native who possessed a clearer picture of the local relationships would assume the seat of a bishop. Let me stress again: the bishop's power was not sustainable.

The response of Livonia's socio-political forces to the challenges presented by the Reformation showed a potential for making the local power relations more coherent and Livonia-centred, and for detachment from the papal curia. Unlike the Hanseatic towns, Livonia's Catholic camp – the Order and the bishops – did not accept this challenge. The fear of change was particularly evident in the Livonian branch of the Order, which tried to justify the *status quo* with the rhetoric of resisting the Russian threat as a Christian outpost, while holding on to another source of universal power, the Empire, in the hope that this would bring help. This, however, was playing the wrong card. Livonia's internal relations during the period from the first contacts with the influences of the Reformation until the start of the Livonian War were characterised by increasing isolation, a deepening confidence crisis, and a search for individual solutions.

Zusammenfassung

Als soziale und politische Struktur brach Alt-Livland in den ersten Jahren des Livländischen Krieges (1558–1583) auseinander. Vorausgegangen war diesem Zerfall das Bestreben einzelner gesellschaftlicher Kräfte, sich angesichts drohender existenzieller Sorgen mehr auf die Hilfe aus dem Ausland zu verlassen, als Ressourcen zur Konsolidierung in Livland selbst zu finden.

Ausgehend von Niklas Luhmanns Systemtheorie werden die Aktivitäten der führenden Hansestädte (Riga, Reval und Dorpat) und des livländischen Zweiges des Deutschen Ordens in Alt-Livland beleuchtet. Sowohl die Mitglieder der Hanse in Livland als auch der Orden waren Teile größerer Systeme, deren Zentren nicht in Livland lagen und deren politisches Verständnis nicht aus Livland stammte. Besonderheiten des Livländischen Ordens und der Hanse waren, dass beide gesellschaftlichen Systeme ihre Reihen nicht aus dem Land selbst ergänzten. Neben den „quasikolonialen" Systemen Orden und Hanse existierte der geistliche Stand, insbesondere die höheren Geistlichen – der Rigaer Erzbischof sowie die Bischöfe von Dorpat und Ösel-Wiek. Da gegenseitiges Vertrauen der in Livland etablierten gesellschaftlichen Systeme sich kaum entwickelt hatte, war der Integrations-

prozess zu einer einheitlichen Zentralmacht mehr als problematisch. Vom Standpunkt des neo-weberianischen Staatsbegriffs aus betrachtet konnte keine der Parteien sämtliche notwendigen Herrschaftselemente – ideologische, militärische, wirtschaftliche und politische Macht – an sich ziehen, um dadurch Anspruch auf die Zentralmacht zu erheben. Auch der livländische Landtag, der zwar über ein gewisses gesellschaftliches Gewicht im Leben des Landes verfügte, erfüllte vor allem eine beratende Funktion. Obzwar die Reformation den Boden für einen breiten gesellschaftlichen Wandel bereitete, blieb diese Möglichkeit ungenutzt. So versperrte die konservative Politik von Orden und Bischöfen den Weg hin zu einem kohärenteren Staatswesen.