Inventing Livonia:
The Name and Fame of a New Christian Colony on
the Medieval Baltic Frontier

don
Marek Tamm

“No natural phenomenon has ‘meaning’,
only signs (including words) have meaning.”
Mikhail M. Bakhtin

Introduction:
what does the “invention of Livonia” mean?

The thirteenth century witnessed the emergence of a new region – Livonia – on the mental map of Latin Christendom. Even though the earliest written reports of a region called Livonia come from the last decade of the twelfth century, it wasn’t until the mid-thirteenth century, when the first more comprehensive surveys of the new Christian colony were completed in Western Europe, that the territory located on the eastern coast of the Baltic Sea acquired a tentative shape and character. Livonia is a classic example of the performative power of an act of naming: although geographically, the place had of course existed and been inhabited for ages untold by various peoples who did not lack contact with their neighbours across the sea, it became a region with its own externally defined identity only after the first Christian missionaries and conquerors had given it a name.

“Inventing” is a term belonging to the vocabulary of social constructionism. Social constructionists emphasise the historically and culturally specific

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3 The performative power of naming was first highlighted by John Langshaw Austin: How to do Things with Words, Oxford 1962 (The William James Lectures, 1955). On a more general plane, the works of the Tartu-Moscow school of semiotics have been path-breaking in the field of name semiotics; see for example Juri Lotman, Boris Uspenski: Myth – Name – Culture, in: Semiotica 22 (1978), pp. 211-233. The semiotics’ research convincingly shows that naming not only describes reality but creates it – it is not so much a semantic as a pragmatic phenomenon.
nature of categories and concepts applied to the world, defending the position that no name or description of anything can ever be natural or essential.\(^4\) However, the term “invention” must not be understood here as referring to the creation of something \textit{ex nihilo} but rather to the rethinking of something already extant, providing it with a new meaning. As John Howe and Michael Wolfe have aptly pointed out recently, “[i]n Latin the original sense of ‘invent’, from \textit{invenire}, to come upon, was discovery more than devising.”\(^5\) The constructionist approach to problem posing places the present paper in line with a whole number of earlier works analysing the construction of a certain concept of a given geographical region at a given period of time. Without any pretence at exhaustiveness, one could name studies about inventing America, Australia, Canada, Eastern Europe, Europe, India, Ireland, Japan, New England, and Siberia, the overwhelming majority of which have been made over the last couple of decades.\(^6\) Essentially, these studies are linked by nothing but the conviction that all the examined regions have, at some point or other, gone through important shifts of meaning that can be studied historically, either through travel books, history writing, fiction, or other sources. The methodological aim of both these studies and the present article is aptly summed up by Larry Wolff: “Obviously, the lands of Eastern Europe were not in themselves invented or fictitious […]. The project of invention was not merely a matter of endowing those real lands with invented or mythological attributes, though such endowment certainly flourished in the eighteenth century.


The work of invention lies in the synthetic association of lands, which drew upon fact and fiction, to produce the general rubric of Eastern Europe.7

Thus, when speaking in this article about the invention of Livonia, it is not meant that the Latin authors of the first half of the thirteenth century actually dreamt up a new region on the eastern coasts of the Baltic, but rather that in the Latin writing of the period a new image of this region evolved, which needed to be integrated into Christian discourse. There are three aspects to this image-making process that I am especially interested in: (1) How did the name of the new region, Livonia, come about; (2) How is this new region described in early Latin texts; and (3) How was information concerning Livonia integrated into the religious and geographical notions held previously. Throughout the study, the processual nature of inventing Livonia – i.e., the fact that it is not only the results of the construction that matter, but also its course and character – should emphatically be kept in mind.8

Having said that, I want immediately to specify that the inventing of Livonia was by no means completed by the middle of the thirteenth century; this temporal limit is set only to this article. Rather, the inventing of Livonia went on at full swing up to at least the sixteenth century, when it becomes possible to speak about the region being distinctly consolidated on maps and in history books, as well as – if it is permissible to draw this conclusion so casually – in the heads of the learned elite.9 This is why I call the first half of the thirteenth century the “formative moment” in the process of inventing Livonia – the moment when the first reports were written in the lingua franca of Christendom, reports that often lingered on and continued to characterise the region in later times. The term “formative moment” is borrowed from Erik Ringmar, who defines these moments as follows: “Moments when old identities break down and new ones are created in their places; times when

7 WOLFF, Inventing Eastern Europe (as in footnote 6), p. 356.
8 It must also be noted that I am not interested here in how various power structures, administrative order, political divisions, etc. – that is, all the things that could tentatively be called ‘the making of Livonia’ – took shape in the conquered territory. On these issues, see most recently, for instance, ANDRIS ŠNĒ: The Emergence of Livonia: The Transformations of Social and Political Structures in the Territory of Latvia During the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries, in: The Clash of Cultures on the Medieval Baltic Frontier, ed. by ALAN V. MURRAY, Farnham et al. 2009, pp. 53-71 (true, some of Šnē’s views are disputable).
new stories are being told, submitted to audiences, and new demands for recognition presented.\textsuperscript{10}

Likewise, it was certainly not a unified image of Livonia that took shape in the thirteenth century; rather, we witness here the construction of multiple, contingent, and conflicting “Livonias”, each geared toward the respective needs of different audiences and social groups. Recognising this, however, does not preclude the making of certain generalisations, particularly if we regard these notions as mediating specific cultural codes and transmitting textual traditions, without forgetting the particular circumstances of the context in which they were written. The nature of, and coding used in, the presentation of information about Livonia’s history, environment, inhabitants, and their customs, are of equal interest for me as the information itself.\textsuperscript{11}

**Naming Livonia**

Robert Rees Davies, who has thoroughly studied the ethnonyms of the peoples of the British Isles in medieval times, has made an important observation: “Peoples are artificial creations; they assume a particular shape and definition according to time and circumstance. There is no single formula that adequately covers their relationship with political structures and territorial area. In the process of identification – both self-identification and identification by others – the acquiring of an accepted name and the definition of that name is one important phase.”\textsuperscript{12}


\textsuperscript{11} Jeffrey J. Cohen, who has studied the twelfth-thirteenth century descriptions of the inhabitants of the British Isles, characterizes his methodological position exactly as I understand it here: “I do not mean to imply that these manifold elements composed some unified or uniform discourse. Rather, in identifying the particles from which collectivity was typically assembled, and in sketching the general parameters within which community could be constructed, I am very much aware that individual writers often displayed a great deal of creativity. […] Nonetheless it seems to me useful to examine what many conceptualizations of group commonality broadly shared, what acts of separation such categorizations were built upon, and what recalcitrant impurities such taxonomies denied.” JEFFREY JEROME COHEN: Hybridity, Identity, and Monstrosity in Medieval Britain: On Difficult Middles, New York – Houndmills 2006 (The New Middle Ages, 67), p. 13. Cf. also LUIGI DE ANNA: Conoscenza e immagine della Finlandia e del Settentrione nella cultura classico-medievale, Turku 1988 (Turun Yliopiston julkaisuja, Sarja B, 180). De Anna has also tried to theoretically reflect on his empirical research, see IDEM: Vieraiden kansojen kirjallisesta kuvasta [On the Written Image of Foreign Peoples], in: Mediaevalia Fennica, ed. by CHRISTIAN KRÖTZL, Helsinki 1991 (Historiallinen arkisto, 96), pp. 21-33.

oration of the name “Livonia” is of key importance in the invention process of the new Christian colony. Nowadays it is generally known that Livonia derived its name from the Livs – the first ethnic group the newcomers came across there.\(^{13}\)

It may be recalled here that the first Christian missions were established at Uexküll (Latv. Ikšķile), Holme (Latv. Mārtina), and Riga, all located within the region inhabited by the Livs.\(^{14}\) Thus it would seem that as a name, Livonia is a synecdoche: one ethnos was made to represent all the ethnic groups inhabiting the region.

The origin of the name “Livs” has long been discussed, but even today it cannot conclusively be said to have been the autonym of the Livs, or to significantly predate the Christian conquest. The most inventive hypotheses as to the antiquity of the name were, in accord with the *Zeitgeist*, made in the nineteenth century. In 1816, for example, Woldemar von Ditmar (1794-1826) published in Heidelberg a Latin inquiry into the origins of the name Livonia, in which he interprets the name *Leuonoi* mentioned by Ptolemy as a reference

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to the Livs.\textsuperscript{15} His idea was approved by one of the first more systematic students of the Livs, Friedrich Kruse (1790-1866), professor of history at Dorpat (Est. Tartu) University, while the Finnish scholar Georg Zacharias Forsman (known under the pen-name of Yrjö Koskinen, 1830-1903) quickly rejected this assumption.\textsuperscript{16} Yet, even if we cannot be quite sure whether the ethnonym “Livs” was invented by Christian immigrants in the second half of the twelfth century, or if it nevertheless has a local origin\textsuperscript{17}, either way there can be no doubt that only at the beginning of the thirteenth century did the name “Livs” (as well as “Livonia”) come into wider circulation.\textsuperscript{18}

\textsuperscript{15} WOLDEMAR VON DITMAR: Disquisitio de origine nominis Livoniae, Heidelberg 1816, pp. 61-62. The same author offers a good survey of all kinds of earlier hypotheses as to the etymology of the word “Livs”, himself supporting its derivation from the Estonian and Livonian word \textit{liiv} (sand) as the most plausible; see esp. pp. 89-104. Ditmar was not, however, the first author to link the Livs (or Livonia) to Ptolemy’s \textit{Leuonoi}, but this idea emerged in late sixteenth century. See for instance DOMINICUS MARIUS NIGER: Geographiae Commentariorum libri XI, Basileae 1557, p. 240: “terra nunc Liuonia dicitur cui nomen facile dedisse Leuoniorum gens magna.” Caspar Peucer’s \textit{Chronicon Carionis} made the theory popular a few years later, see PHILIPPUS MELANTHON, CASPARUS PEUCERUS: Chronicon Carionis expositum et auctum […] ab exordio mundi usque ad Carolum V. Imperatorem, Witebergae 1580, p. 304: “A Lemouijs Liuoniente sunt, quos Efflus vocant hodie. Colonos hoc esse puto Leuonarum, quos in Scandia ponit Ptolomaeus.” I am grateful to Dr. Stefan Donecker for his comments on this point. The last two quotations are taken from his PhD dissertation: STEFAN DONECKER: Origenes Livonorum. Frühneuzeitliche Hypothesen zu Herkunft und Ursprung der “undeutschen” Livländer, unpublished PhD dissertation, European University Institute in Florence, 2010, pp. 93 and 162.


\textsuperscript{18} Since the present article focuses on the invention of Livonia in Latin texts, I shall not discuss the scarce Slavic sources, although it must be considered likely that the \textit{ljub’} mentioned in Nestor’s Chronicle of the beginning of the twelfth century should be taken to signify the Livs. See Povest’ vremennych let, vol. 1, Moskva – Leningrad 1950, p. 10. As an introduction (with bibliography), see ANTI SELART: Livland und die Rus’ im 13. Jahrhundert, Köln et al. 2007 (Quellen und Studien zur baltischen Geschichte, 21), pp. 55-60. Nor do I encompass the possible interpretations as to the name of Livonia in the Scandinavian runic inscriptions and other texts; see KRISTEL ZILMER:
To the best of our present knowledge, the Livs (Liui) are first mentioned in narrative Latin prose by Saxo Grammaticus (c. 1150-1220) in his *Gesta Danorum*, completed around the end of the twelfth and beginning of the thirteenth centuries; nevertheless, it is only with the “Chronicle of Henry of Livonia” (c. 1224-1227) that they gain a permanent place in history.

A first-hand witness of the conquest and Christianisation of the eastern coast of the Baltic Sea, Henry of Livonia is the first to offer a thorough-going written survey of the local peoples and their names. In most cases, particularly in the first half of his chronicle, Henry uses the name “Livs” (Lat. *Lyvones*) only for such peoples as spoke Livonian. But as Jüri Kivimäe has recently, and justly, pointed out, in the later chapters of his chronicle Henry makes increasing use of the term *Lyvonenses*, referring not specifically to the Livs as a Finno-Ugric tribe but to all the Christian inhabitants of the new colony. Describing the battle fought against the Russians at the village of Puide, in August 1219, Henry uses both the phrase *exercitus Lyvonensis* and the general term *Lyvonenses*, which should in this context be understood as a common name signifying the Rigans, the Latvians, and the Livs. The same meaning should be given to the phrase frequently employed in the chronicle, *episcopi Lyvonensibus* – not the bishops of the Livs, but the bishops of Livonia.
Thus, Henry’s chronicle offers a glimpse into the germinal stages of the transformation of the “Livonians” from the name of an ethnic group and the land it inhabited to a general name signifying the new Christian colony and its inhabitants. While using the term *Lyvones* or *gens Lyvonum* in order to refer to the Livs, Henry employs the terms *Lyvonenses* or *gens Lyvoniensis* to signify the Livonians (that is, all the Christians of the new colony). Still it is true that by the place name Livonia (*Lyvonia*), Henry as a rule means the habitat of only the Livs, distinguishing it clearly from the neighbouring regions of Lettgallia and Estonia.

In written documents, the name Livonia first comes up in the correspondence of the papal curia, where it very quickly became, from the viewpoint of Rome, a general term signifying the eastern coast of the Baltic. True, the very earliest bulls display some uncertainty as to the naming and geographical placing of the new territory subjected to the Church. Tellingly, when the pope Clement III (r. 1187-1191) confirms in 1188, in a letter to the Archbishop of Bremen, the appointment of the latter’s subordinate Meinhard as bishop of Uexküll, he places the new bishopric in *Ruthenia*. But only a couple of years later, Clement III writes directly to Bishop Meinhard, now addressing him explicitly as “the Bishop of the Livonians” (resp. “of Livonia”) (*episcopus Livoniensis*). Pope Innocent III (r. 1198-1216) employs in his early letters both the terms “province of the Livonians” (*provincia Livonensis*) and

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24 E.g. HCL X.15, p. 46.
26 E.g. HCL X.15, p. 46.
27 On the general context of the papal letters, see IBEN FONNESBERG-SCHMIDT: The Popes and the Baltic Crusades, 1147-1254, Leiden – Boston 2007 (The Northern World, 26);
28 Liv-, Esth- und Curländisches Urkundenbuch [later abbreviated as LUB], 12 volumes in 2 series, ed. by FRIEDRICH GEORG VON BUNGE et al., Reval et al. 1853-1914, vol. 1/1, no. 10, col. 11; “Clemens episcopus, servus servorum Dei, venerabilis fratri, Bremensi archiepiscopo […]. Eapropter, venerabilis in Christo frater, tuis iustis postulationibus clementer annuimus et Ixscolanensem episcopatum, quem tu et clerus tue cure commissus, per ministerium Meynardis sacerdotis, religiosi et discreti viri, in Ruthenia, sancti Spiritus gratia donante, acquivisse dicimini”. One can agree with Anti Selart’s view that such a geographical reference reflects rather the Bremenian idea that Uexküll was situated in Russia, than the papal notion of the geography of the Eastern Baltic. See SELART, Livland und die Rus’ (as in footnote 18), p. 75.
29 LUB 1/1, no. 11, col. 12 (April 1190).
30 Thus Innocent III, writing about Meinhard in October 1199 and describing his new see as “the province of the Livonians” (*provincia Livonensis*): “Accepimus enim, quod cum bone memorie M[einardus], episcopus Livonensis, fuisset provinciam Livonensem ingressus”. LUB 1/1, no. 12, col. 14.
“church of the Livonians” (*Livonensis ecclesia*), as well as simply “Livonia” (*in partibus Livonie*). But the further the conquest is carried, the more frequently do the names of the other regions of the Eastern Baltic appear in the pope’s letters, and the general picture becomes more complicated, even if Livonia does, as a rule, remain the general name applied to the new Christian colony throughout the further correspondence of the curia.

In narrative writing, the name “Livonia” can first be encountered in a letter written by Sido, provost of the Augustinian house of Neumünster, to Gozwinus, priest of Haseldorf, in 1195/96:

> “Behold, how the vineyard of the Lord of Hosts flourished in the bishopric of Lübeck and bore its fruit, how it stretched its tendril as far as the sea and how its branches reach beyond the sea into Livonia. Indeed, it was planted in Oldenburg by Vicelinus, the first bishop, and it extended its branches to Mecklenburg, through Bishop Emerhardus, contemporary of Vicelinus, and then expanded as far as Ratzeburg through Bishop Evermondus; now it has been transplanted to Livonia by Meinhard and grows to the greater honour of God.”

It is worth noting here that in this Latin text, the name of Livonia is represented in its German form, *Liflandia*. That this is not accidental, would seem to be proved by the fact that the statutes of the General Chapter of the Cistercian Order, of the year 1209, speak of Albert Bishop of Livonia (r. 1199-1229) as *episcopus Liflandren*, a title also pointing to a German form of the name. Thus we must take it into account that even though written docu-

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31 Ibidem.
33 A good example is provided by a letter from Pope Honorius III to Bishop Albert, of 1219: “Specialiter aitem Estoniam, Seloniam et Semigalliam, terras de novo in Livonia acquisitas”. LUB 1/1, no. 45, col. 50.
ments have handed down the name of Livonia to us in its Latin form, the German form would have been concurrent parallelly in oral communication, too.

The first brief survey of missionary and military activities in the new region of Christendom is given by Arnold of Lübeck, in his “Chronicle of the Slavs”, around the year 1210.36 Arnold uses just one name, Livonia, to refer to the region, which suggests that the new general term had already been more or less established. Arnold describes how, “In the year 1186 of the incarnation the venerable Meinhard founded the Episcopal see in Livonia”, optimistically summing up the situation as of the beginning of the thirteenth century: “Thus the church of God grew in Livonia through the venerable man Albert, well endowed with provosts, parishes, and monasteries.”37 Examining the works of Caesarius of Heisterbach (see below for more detail), who wrote several reports about missionary work on the eastern coast of the Baltic, we see that he, too, employs only one name, Livonia, to refer to the whole region, calling all its inhabitants Livonians (*Livonenses*).38

Papae fungi, quia monachos vel conversos nostros sibi liceat sine licentia abbatum assumere et secum adducere.” It is not without interest to note that the editor of the Statutes, Canivez, read *Lismorensis*, that is the bishopric of Lismore, in Ireland (*IDEM*, p. 364), instead of *Liflandren*. Six years later, Livonia is already spelt in the Statutes in its customary form – *Livonia*; see *IDEM*, p. 468 (1217/14): “De abbatis quae sunt in Graecia, Livonia et Norvegia provideant patres abates ut ad minus in anno tertio visissent.”

But one should also mention an intriguing reference in the *Gesta Innocentii III* (composed around 1204-1209), the anonymous author of which asserts that the archbishop of Denmark, Anders Sunesen (d. 1228), had in the autumn of 1207, after a winter spent in Riga, sent to Pope Innocent III a detailed account of the triumphs of the Livonian Christian mission in which he optimistically claimed “that whole of Livonia had been converted to the Christian faith and no one remained there who had not accepted the sacrament of baptism, and the neighbouring peoples were, for the most part, ready for this” (“quod tota Livonia erat ad fidem Christi conversa, nullusque in ipsa remanerat qui non recepisset sacramentum baptismatis, vicinis gentibus ad hoc ipsum ex magna parte paratis”). See *Gesta Innocentii III: The Gesta Innocentii III. Text, Introduction and Commentary*, ed. by DAVID GRESS-WRIGHT, unpublished PhD dissertation, Bryn Mawr College, 1981, ch. VIII, p. 315. For the English translation, cf. JAMES M. POWELL: The Deeds of Pope Innocent III by an Anonymous Author, Washington, D.C 2004, p. 235. Unfortunately, Sunesen’s account has not been preserved, but it is not impossible that Sunesen’s letter was a main source for Arnold of Lübeck’s description of Livonia. See KASPAR KOLK: Lüübeki Arnold: Liivimaa pööramist [Arnold of Lübeck: On the Conversion of Livonia], in: Tuna. Ajalookultuuri ajakiri 2 (2004), pp. 50-57.

Arnold of Lübeck: Chronica Slavorum, ed. by GEORGIUS HEINRICUS PERTZ, Hannover 1868 (Scriptores rerum germanicarum in usum scholarum ex MGH, 14), ch. V.30, pp. 213-214: “Anno incarnationi 1186. fundata est sedes episcopalis in Livonia a venerabili viro Meinardo […]. Creavit igitur ecclesia Dei in Livonia per venerabilem virum Albertum, bene disposita prepostis, parrochii, cenobiis.”

Thus we can say that at least for the authors writing at some distance from
the region, Livonia became the general name applied in the first decades of
the thirteenth century to the new Christian colony which covered broadly the
territories of modern Estonia and Latvia and was inhabited by diverse ethnic
groups. Yet the name Livonia did not remain static in the thirteenth century
but was in constant flux according to the position of the writer, the expansion
of the conquest, and the growth of knowledge, taking on a clearer outline only
during the centuries to follow.39 Thus, in the thirteenth century “Livonia” con-
stituted a kind of “flowing signifier” which may, in retrospect, afford of an
interpretation, but not of a definition.

Describing Livonia

Reading the very earliest descriptions of the Eastern Baltic region in me-
dieval Latin texts, we do not yet meet Livonia in them.40 Adam of Bremen
devotes the fourth part of his “Deeds of Bishops of the Hamburg Church”

Caesarius of Heisterbach and the Livonian Crusade, in: Aspects of Power and
Authority in the Middle Ages, ed. by Brenda Bolton and Christine Meek, Turnhout
2007 (International Medieval Research, 14), pp. 305-325; Marek Tamm: Communic-
ating Crusade: Livonian Mission and the Cistercian Network in the Thirteenth Century,
Mission in Cistercian Stories of Early Thirteenth Century, in: A Storm Against the
Infidels. Crusading in the Iberian Peninsula and the Baltic Region in the Central Middle
Ages, ed. by Iben Fonnesberg-Schmidt and Torben K. Nielsen, Turnhout 2012
(forthcoming).

A good example of the relative vagueness of the term “Livonia” even at the end of
the thirteenth century is provided by the “Livonian Rhyme Chronicle”, lines 8923-8928:
“Kûren und Nieflant/ die sint über ein genant/ in vremden landen, daz ist wâr./ wer
mochte daz geschriben gar,/ wie icelîch gegende ist genant?/ man heizet ez allez Nie-
flant.” Livländische Reimchronik, ed. by Leo Meyer, Paderborn 1876, p. 204. English
translation by Jerry C. Smith, William Urban: The Livonian Rhymed Chronicle,
Bloomington 1977, p. 109: “Now Kurland and Livonia are spoken of as one in foreign
lands, for who wants to write down the name of each and every region? The entire area
is referred to as Livonia.” On Nieflant as one of the medieval German names for Livo-
nia, see Victor Diedrichs: Nieflant, in: Mittheilungen aus dem Gebiete der Ge-

It is not my aim here to list all the early references to the regions lying on the eastern
coasts of the Baltic Sea. These have been collected with dedication by several earlier
generations of researchers, even if they often interpreted the collected material rather
uncritically or too imaginatively. As a rule, when dealing with materials predating the
last decades of the twelfth century, it is practically impossible to decide which of the
Eastern Baltic regions has precisely been kept in mind by one or another of the writers
whose horizon encompassed the Baltic Sea. In the main part, these descriptions fall into
the category of the so-called geographical mirabilia essentially unconnected to the re-
gion described. So far the best brief overview of the early reports is given by: Leonid
Arbusov: Die mittelalterliche Schrifthüterlieferung als Quelle für die Frühgeschichte
der ostbaltischen Völker, in: Baltische Lande, vol. 1: Ostbaltische Frühzeit, ed. by
Carl Engel, Leipzig 1939, pp. 167-203.
(c. 1075-1076) to the “Description of the Islands of the North” (*Descrip
tio insularum aquilonis*), picturing the region as consisting mainly of solitary
islands in the middle of the Baltic or “Barbarian” Sea (*mare barbarum*). In
somewhat greater detail, Adam dwells on three regions of the Eastern Baltic:
Curonia (*Churland*), Estonia (*Aestland*) and Sambia (*Semland*), comple-
menting these descriptions with reports about the “Land of Women” (*terra
feminarum*) inhabited by Amazons and Cynocephali. Nor is any distinct
region called by the name of Livonia yet known to Saxo Grammaticus in his
*Gesta Danorum* (c. 1208), even though he does mention the Livs on a couple
of occasions.

A qualitative change in the way Livonia is described took place in connec-
tion with the expansion of the crusading movement to the eastern coasts of
the Baltic Sea, at the beginning of the thirteenth century. Contemporaneously
with the conquest of the region, there took place its textual defining, mapping,
and integration into the Christian cultural geography. The will to know went
hand in hand with the will to power. Following Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak,
we could characterise this process with the term “worlding”, referring to the
way in which writing in general, or textuality, has provided a rhetorical struc-
ture to justify colonial expansion. It is based on “the assumption that when
the colonisers come to a world, they encounter it as uninscribed earth upon
which they write their inscriptions”.

The fact that the earliest descriptions of Livonia, in the early thirteenth
century, represent the new region in the rhetorical key of the “promised land”

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41 ADAM OF BREMEN: *Gesta Hammaburgensis Ecclesiae Pontificum*, ed. by BERNHARD
SCHMIDLER, Hannover 1917 (Scriptores rerum germanicarum in usum scholarum ex
MGH, 2), ch. I.62, p. 58. Cf. WOLFGANG SCHLÜTER: Die Ostsee und die Ostseeländer
in der Hamburgischen Kirchengeschichte des Adams von Bremen, in: Sitzungsberichte
der Gelehrten Estnischen Gesellschaft 1902, Dorpat 1903, pp. 1-28; OLAF SILD:
Bremensi Adam ja tema teated “Aestland’ist” ja “Churland’ist” [Adam of Bremen and
His Information about “Aestland” and “Churland”], in: Usuteadusline ajakiri 2 (1930),
pp. 66-74; VOLKER SCIOR: Das Eigene und das Fremde. Identität und Fremdheit in den
Chroniken Adams von Bremen, Helmolds von Bosau und Arnolds von Lübeck, Berlin
2002 (Orbis mediaevalis, 4), pp. 29-137; TORSTEIN JØRGENSEN: “The Land of the
Norwegians is the Last in the World”: A Mid-eleventh-century Description of the
Nordic Countries from the Pen of Adam of Bremen, in: The Edges of the Medieval
World, ed. by GERHARD JARITZ and JUHAN KREEM, Budapest 2009 (CEU Medievalia,
11), pp. 46-54.

42 ADAM OF BREMEN (as in footnote 41), ch. IV.16-18, pp. 244-246.

43 Cf. footnote 19 and PAUL JOHANSEN: Saxo Grammaticus und das Ostbaltikum, in:
Grammaticus on the Balts, in: Saxo and the Baltic Region. A Symposium, ed. by TORE
NYBERG, Odense 2004 (University of Southern Denmark Studies in History and Social
Sciences, 275), pp. 63-79.

44 GAYATRI CHAKRAVORTY SPIVAK: The Post-Colonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies,
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is highly eloquent. These descriptions are dominated by allusions to the fertility and favorable natural conditions of the region.\textsuperscript{45} The key note is given already in the very first description of Livonia known to us, namely “The Chronicle of the Slavs” by Arnold of Lübeck:

“In the year 1186 of the incarnation the venerable Meinhard founded the Episcopal see in Livonia that was placed under the patronage of Mary, Blessed Mother of God, in a place that was called Riga. And since because of the goodness of the earth this place is abundant in many riches, it has never been lacking in servants of Christ and planters of the new church. For this land is fertile in fields, plentiful in pastures, irrigated by rivers, also sufficiently rich in fish and forested with trees.”\textsuperscript{46}

It is worth noting that emphatic accounts of the fertility of Livonia remained characteristic of the descriptions of this region in medieval, as well as early modern ages; they became one of the \textit{Leitmotive} of the invention of Livonia. In his influential “Cosmography” (1544), Sebastian Münster writes that Livonia “is a good land, sufficiently fertile: plenty of forest, fields, waters rich in fish and many large lakes”.\textsuperscript{47} Even as late as the beginning of the seventeenth century, the Polish Catholic priest Dionysius Fabricius, writing in Fellin (Est. Viljandi), asserts in the same vein:

“The harvests, too, are very abundant in this province [Livonia – M.T.], so that it gives all kinds of grain, and though the land is tilled with less care and lies towards the north, in the vicinity of Sweden, the crops planted in spring still ripen in three months. The province is a generous nourishing mother to cattle and herds, offering sufficient feed to them. It is rich in forests and wastelands alternating with swamps; the pastures and meadows are fecund, hay is copious. […] The fields are so fertile that most of the peasants may rejoice as they harvest the crop from their seed.”\textsuperscript{48}


\textsuperscript{46} Arnold of Lübeck (as in footnote 37), ch. V.30, pp. 213-214: “Anno igitur incarnati 1186. fundata est sedes episcopalis in Livonia a venerabili viro Meinardo, intitulata patrocinio beate Dei genitricis Marie, in loco qui Riga dicitur. Et quia idem locus beneficio terre multis bonis exuberat, nunquam ibi defuerunt Christi cultores, et novelle ecclesie plantatores. Est enim eadem terra fertilis agris, abundans pascuis, irrigua fluviis, satis etiam piscosa et arboribus nemorosa.”

\textsuperscript{47} Sebastian Münster: Cosmographia Universalis, Basel 1550, fol. 787.

\textsuperscript{48} Dionysius Fabricius (as in footnote 13), pp. 440-441: “Estque haec provincia etiam frugum fertilitate berrima, quippe quae omnis generis frumenta producit, et quamvis
The rhetoric of the “promised land” emphasizing on the one hand the fecundity of the new region, yet on the other hand the paganism of its inhabitants, creates perfect premises for the politics of conversion and colonialism or, as Jeffrey J. Cohen writes in connection with the early Christian descriptions of the British Isles: “Divine favor also meant that these latter day Hebrews had license to treat other peoples as if they were Canaanite Anakim, perilous and perhaps not fully human peoples whose lands of milk and honey might be unapologetically colonized.”

As far as the sources that have come down to our days allow us to presume, information about the Lord’s new vineyard on the Baltic Sea spread to the core areas of Christendom at a relatively sluggish pace. Searching for accounts of the conquest and conversion of Livonia in European historiography of the first half of the thirteenth century, we find only a few short references in, for instance, Oliver of Paderborn’s “History of the Reign of the Holy Land” (c. 1220), Bartholomew of Lucca’s “Annals” (c. 1236), or Alexander the Minorite’s “Commentary on the Apocalypse” (1235-1249); only slightly more attention is paid to events in Livonia in Arnold of Lübeck’s “Chronicle of the Slavs” mentioned earlier, as well as in Albert of Stade’s “Annals” (c. 1240-1260), and in Alberic of Trois-Fontaines’ “Chronicle” (c. 1220-1252).

Medieval cartography may not necessarily reflect the actual geographical knowledge of the time; however, it does strike the eye that Livonia makes its
appearance on the maps of Europe relatively late. The only thirteenth-century map depicting the eastern coast of the Baltic that is known to have survived (as a copy) till our days is the so-called Ebstorf map of the world, which probably dates from the last years of the century. Although that largest known medieval mappa mundi (12,74 m²) perished in World War II, a relatively faithful copy of it made at the end of the nineteenth century remains at our disposal. In the Eastern Baltic region, the map is acquainted with Curlant (Curonia), Semigallia (Semgallia), Prucia (Prussia), and Sanelant (Sambia). But it also makes special mention of and depicts the town of Riga in Livonia (Riga Livonie civitas). Next, we encounter the Eastern Baltic region on a few portolan charts from the fourteenth century, but it is only on fifteenth-century maps that Livonia finally gains a clearer outline.

In my view, a key role in the initial stages of the invention of Livonia was played by religious orders that settled in the new region early on, yet remained at the same time tightly linked into the orders’ communication networks. In the first half of the thirteenth century, it was primarily thanks to the Cistercian and mendicant international networks that information about the new Christian corner of the world on the eastern coast of the Baltic Sea reached the scholarly public in the West. While in the first decades of the century information was communicated mainly by the Cistercian network, from the 1240s onward the Franciscan and Dominican orders assumed the role of the main communication channels.

The first Cistercians arrived in Livonia very early, beginning in 1187 when the first Bishop of Livonia Meinhard (d. 1198), who had been consecrated the

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year before, invited the Cistercian Theoderic (d. 1219) to his aid. The Cistercians permanently settled in Livonia at the beginning of the thirteenth century, when around 1205 the first Cistercian monastery in the new colony was established at Dünamünde (Latv. Daugavgrīva), near Riga. Probably around the year 1230, work started on establishing a second Cistercian house in Livonia, this time in Falkenau (Est. Kärkna) in the bishopric of Dorpat. The importance of the Cistercians in Livonia is clearly evidenced by the fact that a significant number of the first bishops of the new Christian colony came from among the White Monks: Bertold, the second Bishop of Livonia (1196-1198), Theoderic, the first Bishop of Estonia (1211-1219), Bernard the first Bishop of Semgallia (1218-1224), as well as Gottfried, the first Bishop of Ösel (Est. Saaremaa) (1227-1234), and Wesselin (1219-1227[?]), who was appointed by the Danes as the new Bishop of Estonia in Reval (Est. Tallinn) after the death of Theoderic. From our present viewpoint, however, it is important that all the Cistercian high clerics were relatively well integrated into their Order’s communication networks and it was primarily via them that information about the new region called Livonia reached Western Europe.

It is mainly thanks to the former Abbot of Dünamünde and later Bishop of Semgallia, Bernard of Lippe, that news about Livonia found its way into the works of the popular Cistercian author Caesarius of Heisterbach. All in all, Caesarius mentions Livonia on thirteen occasions in his various books, giving three longer accounts of the events that had come to pass in the new missionary region both in his Dialogus miraculorum (1219-1223) and in the unfinished Libri VIII miraculorum (1225-1227). In view of the great popularity of Caesarius’s works, especially of his Dialogus miraculorum, in the Middle

59 HCL I.10, pp. 4-5.
60 C. LORE POELCHAU: Die Geschichte des Zisterzienserklösters Dünamünde bei Riga, St. Ottilien 2004 (Studien und Mitteilungen zur Geschichte des Benediktinerordens und seiner Zweige, Sonderdruck); WOLFGANG SCHMIDT: Die Zisterzienser im Baltikum und in Finnland, in: Suomen Kirkkohistorialliset Seuran Vuosikirja 29-30 (1939-1940), pp. 32-68.
62 For a more detailed analysis, see TAMM, Communicating Crusade (as in footnote 38), passim.
Ages, his texts must be regarded as a significant contribution into the invention of Livonia.

Another documented instance of the circulation of information concerning Livonia in the Cistercian network is provided by the “Chronicle” of Alberic of Trois-Fontaine. This voluminous Cistercian history of the world contains nine entries on events in Livonia for the years 1194-1232, most of them concerning the activities of the Cistercians and the handovers of spiritual power. Alberic probably derives his information from two Cistercian sources: Theoderic Bishop of Estonia, and the papal legate Baldwin of Aulne. Although Alberic’s chronicle attracted but scant attention in the Middle Ages, it nevertheless offers valid proof of the circulation of information concerning Livonia in the Cistercians’ oral network of communication.

As noted above, sources appear to indicate that from the 1240s onwards, the mendicant orders – the Dominicans and the Franciscans – supplanted the Cistercians as the main shapers of the image of Livonia. Representatives of both these orders settled in Livonia at a pretty early date – the Dominicans established their first monastery in Reval in 1229 or, more likely, 1239; in Riga, in 1234, and in Tartu before the end of the thirteenth century. The Franciscans’ centre in Livonia was their first, and, for a long time, only monastery in Riga, established around the middle of the thirteenth century. The members of the mendicant orders had an important role to play in the political and religious life of mid-thirteenth century Livonia. Their contacts with the broader network of mendicant orders are evidenced by the first two geographical surveys of the Eastern Baltic region, both authored by mendicant friars. First, there is the encyclopaedia of Bartholomaeus Anglicus, completed around 1245, *De proprietatibus rerum* (“On the properties of things”); and second, the anonymous geographical treatise *Descriptiones terrarum* (“Descriptions of the lands”), dating from about 1255. Book 15 of the English Franciscan’s hugely popular encyclopaedia gives in its 175 alphabetically ordered chapters a survey of the world’s various regions, and for the first time, the eastern coast of the Baltic Sea also deserves some attention in Latin geographical writing: separate entries are dedicated to Livonia (*Liuonia*), Lithuania,

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64 See footnote 55.
nia (Lectonia), Samland (Sambia), Semgallia (Semigallia), Revalia (Rialia), and Vironia (Vironia).\textsuperscript{68} Descriptiones terrarum is presumably just a fragment of a more extensive work, either lost or never written down, which was supposed to describe the origins and customs of the Mongols. The text – whose author has not been conclusively established yet – was in all likelihood written by some mendicant friar standing close to the Archbishop of Riga, Albert Suerbeer (d. 1273).\textsuperscript{69} In its present form, this unique manuscript, discovered in Dublin only in 1979, constitutes a brief overview of the regions of East and North Europe, including, among other things, reports of about ten Eastern Baltic regions (Livonia, Lithuania, Samland, Curonia, etc.).\textsuperscript{70}

At somewhat greater length, the anonymous author of the Descriptiones terrarum dwells on the beginnings of the Christian mission in Livonia, communicating to more distantly placed readers the story of the German merchants reaching the River Düna (Latv. Daugava) and their clashes with the lo-

\textsuperscript{68} For a more detailed analysis, see MAREK TAMM: Signes d’altérité. La représentation de la Baltique orientale dans le De proprietatibus rerum de Barthélemy l’Anglais (vers 1245), in: Frontiers in the Middle Ages. Proceedings of the Third European Congress of the FIDEM (Jyväskylä, June 2003), ed. by OUTI MERISALO, Louvain-la-Neuve 2006 (Textes et études du Moyen Age, 35), pp. 147-170. No critical edition has been prepared of Bartholomaeus’ encyclopaedia, to date. In the following, I use one of the oldest surviving manuscripts of the encyclopaedia (dating from the end of the thirteenth century) held in the Bibliothèque Nationale (later abbreviated as BN) in Paris (MS lat. 16098); a transcription of the chapters of this manuscript that discuss the Eastern Baltics has been presented in my article quoted above.


nal inhabitants, which by the middle of the thirteenth century would probably have been well known within the region itself:

“To the north of Curonia, there lies Livonia; there is one Archbishop and seven suffragens there, four of them in Prussia and three in Livonia. This land first received salvation from merchants. Pushed by a storm, they found themselves in a broad river called Düna that flows out of Russia. And they saw a people simple and unarmed. Cautiously and without hurry they negotiated their consent to raise a stone wall around a small fortress on an island in the said river, lest wolves and robbers come at night to pester themselves and the cattle they had procured there. And having mixed some mortar, they set out on [building] a pretty strong castle. But as the local people saw it, they said among themselves: “Let’s allow these people to raise the stones, but when they are finished, let’s circle [these walls], yoke numerous strong oxen and horses to them and pull them all down at once.” As they came up with the said instruments and saw many of their number fall to the arrows of the enemy, they took counsel together and made eternal peace with the merchants. And that is how Christians began to disperse there.”

It is worth noting here that the story about hauling away a castle (or building) is a folktale motif with international dispersal, cropping up in the Livonian context also, for instance, in Franz Nyenstädt’s “Chronicle of Livonia” (1604), where it is associated with the men of Ösel attempting to haul into the

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71 Various versions of this story are also related both in the “Chronicle of Henry of Livonia” and in the “Livonian Rhymed Chronicle”, see HCL I.2-6, pp. 2-3; Livländische Reimchronik (as in footnote 39), lines 127-228.


74 ANTTI AARNE, STITH THOMPSON: The Types of the Folk tale. A Classification and Bibliography, 2nd rev. edition, Helsinki 1987, no. 1046 (Threat to haul away the Warehouse), cf. no. 1325B-D (attested only in Irish folklore).
sea the fortress of Söneburg, erected on their island.\textsuperscript{75} It is not impossible that what we have here is an example of the imposition of a universal narrative structure on the description of a given reality.

\textbf{Integrating Livonia}

The above example brings us to our last important point: the significance of the dominant cultural codes and earlier textual traditions in the invention of Livonia. Jeffrey J. Cohen has cogently emphasized the conservative nature of medieval classifications: “Collective identities in the Middle Ages tended to be conservative categories. ‘New’ peoples were typically slotted into pre-existent taxonomies and did not necessarily force classificatory systems to expand.”\textsuperscript{76} The descriptions of Livonia originating in the first half of the thirteenth century reflect not so much the character of the region and its inhabitants as the political and sociocultural convictions of the medieval Christian authors. Even if the majority of the reports come from authors who had either visited the region themselves or been in contact with eyewitnesses, these reports are nevertheless coded in a manner that does not allow us to proffer any very certain statements about the actual practices, natural environment, or world picture of the inhabitants of the eastern coast of the Baltic Sea. I have called this kind of integration of new regions into an earlier cultural tradition “intertextual integration”, meaning by it a method of interpreting new geographical and religious information in the light of old authoritative texts.\textsuperscript{77} Having said that, it should be specified that the cultural coding and high intertextuality of the texts does not mean that they necessarily distort reality. Rather, the difference between the denotational and connotational levels of the texts should be kept in mind: while on the first of these levels, the texts aim at a mere description of reality, on the second level that description is provided with a certain meaning. My foremost aim here is precisely to draw attention to the connotational meanings – that is, the culturally coded nature – of these descriptions of the eastern coasts of the Baltic Sea.

Discussing the geographical descriptions of Livonia, I have already pointed out how, from the very first texts on, Livonia was often portrayed in the biblical colours of the promised land, as it were, with emphasis on the fertility and lushness of the region.\textsuperscript{78} This is the rhetorical pattern that enabled the


\textsuperscript{76} COHEN, Hybridity (as in footnote 11), p. 81.

\textsuperscript{77} TAMM, A New World (as in footnote 45), p. 27. In this article I have taken a more detailed look at the cultural coding applied to the descriptions of the Eastern Baltic region.

\textsuperscript{78} The notion of the “promised land” (Lat. \textit{terra promissionis}) in association with Livonia occurs already in the \textit{Chronica Slavorum} of Arnold of Lübeck. See \textsc{Arnold of Lübeck} (as in footnote 37), ch. V.30, p. 214: “Nec defuerunt sacerdotes et litterati, suis
new region to be depicted as “familiar” and “foreign” at once – a place enticingly exotic. What also strikes the eye in the early depictions of Livonia, both in *De proprietatibus rerum* and in *Descriptiones terrarum*, is that no mention is made of any fortified places, towns or other settlements of the urban type in the region, even though we know from archaeological evidence that there were several strongholds and fortified settlements there. 79 In connection with the early descriptions of the Eastern Baltics, Sébastien Rossignol has justly drawn attention to the fact that the absence of any mention of towns and strongholds implies a clear message: “But towns have an identity not only for their inhabitants, but also for the representation of regions as seen from outside. Describing a region would seem almost impossible without mentioning its urban centres. Towns participate in the image constructed for a region, its culture, and society.” 80 Livonia, noted in the geographical accounts of the first half of the thirteenth century only for its abundant forests, numerous waterways, and fertile soil, is clearly classified among “pagan” landscapes in the medieval cultural geography.

An analogous pattern of interpretation is symptomatic also of the accounts of religious life in Livonia, which are characterized by an emphasis on outward ritual: primarily on nature worship and idolatry, divination practices, and cremation of the dead. Medieval descriptions of Livonia clearly show that while geographically, the new region was domesticated relatively quickly, it took much longer for its inhabitants to be accepted religiously, so that throughout the Middle Ages we encounter remonstrations over the cultivation of paganism or religious obtuseness there. 81

A good example of the culturally coded representation of the Livonians religious practices is offered by the entry on Livonia by Bartholomaeus Anglicus, in his encyclopaedia *De proprietatibus rerum*. Livonians, he writes, “had peculiar religious rites, before the Germans forced them from serving demons to the faith and worship of one God. For they honoured many gods with

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79 See most recently, Evald Tõnisson: Eesti muinaslinnad [Prehistoric Strongholds of Estonia], ed. by Ain Mäesalu and Heiki Valk, Tartu – Tallinn 2008 (Muinasaja teadus, 20).


impure and sacrilegious sacrifices, asked demons for prophecies, made use of auguries and divinations.

The Livonians are shown here within the classical pagan scheme, as implied already by the vocabulary Bartholomaeus uses – responsum, auguratio and divinatio. This is the lexicon that had been used ever since the early Middle Ages to mark pagan customs. In a similar key traditionally used for depicting paganism, Bartholomaeus describes the Livonians’ burial customs as opposed in every detail to those practised by the Christians:

“[Livonians] did not bury the bodies of the dead but built a very large pyre and burnt them to ashes. After death they clothed their friends in new garments and gave them sheep and cattle and other animals for their journey. They also consigned slaves and maidservants with other things, and these were burned with the deceased and the rest, in the belief that people so cremated would happily reach some realm of living creatures and there, with the numerous cattle and slaves burnt for the good of their master, find a happy homeland for afterlife.”

The research of modern archaeologists does not precisely confirm the kind of burial described by Bartholomaeus, material evidence indicating that already from the late twelfth century onwards, the inhabitants of the Eastern Baltics practised inhumation burial as well as cremation. Nor does the archaeological evidence support the common graves and grave goods described by Bartholomaeus. But as noted above, the early descriptions of Livonia

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82 BN MS lat. 16098, fol. 146v: “quorum ritus fuit mirabilis antequam a cultura demonum ad unius Dei fidem et cultum per Germanicos cogerentur. Nam deos plures adorabant prophanis et sacrilegis sacrificiis, responsa a demonibus exquirebant, augurii et divinationibus serviebant.”


84 BN MS lat. 16098, fol. 146r-147r: “Mortuorum cadauera tumulo non tradebant, sed pocius facto rogo maximo vsque ad cineres comburebant. Post mortem autem suos amicos nouis vestibus vestiebant et eis pro viatico eius oues et boues et alia animantia exhibebant. Seruos etiam et ancillas cum rebus alii ipsis assignantes vna cum mortuo et rebus alii incendebant, credentes sic incensos ad quandam viuorum regionem feliciter pertingere et ibidem cum pecorum et seruorum sic ob gratiam domini combustorum multitute felicitatis et vitae temporalis patriam inuenire.”

should be read not so much as ethnographic or geographical accounts but rather as attempts at integrating the scanty new data about the new Christian region into the existing system of knowledge. And on quite a few occasions the Christian authors optimistically add that as a result of conquest and conversion, the customs they described are on the retreat in Livonia and that thus the area had been successfully integrated. Thus, too, Bartholomaeus Anglicus, right at the end of his description of the Livonian burial traditions: “It is to be presumed that this province, formerly in the clutches of the heresy of demons, has now in large part, with many subordinate or accessory regions, under the guidance of [divine] grace and in co-operation with the German forces been freed from the aforementioned errors.”

**Conclusions**

At the end of the fifteenth century, only one region on the eastern coast of the Baltic Sea – Livonia – was known to the European learned public. A vivid example is provided by the *Cosmographia* of Ptolemy, published in Ulm in 1482, which groups five regions under the name of Livonia and designates Riga as their metropolis. Aware of the evolution of Livonia as a distinct region at the end of the fifteenth century, this article undertook to discuss the very earliest Latin reports of the Eastern Baltics, reports which in my judgement laid the foundations for the emergence of a new Christian region – Livonia – in the consciousness of the learned public of Western Europe. I term this process “the invention of Livonia”, since these early accounts from the first half of the thirteenth century consolidated the name and outline of Livonia on the mental map of Latin Christendom, exercising a significant influence on the concept of Livonia in the minds of the scholars of later generations (the clearest and most decisive doubtlessly being the influence of Bartholomaeus Anglicus). Naturally these early texts created no unified image of the new Christian colony on the medieval Baltic frontier; yet comparative analysis allows us to suggest that as early as the first decades of the thirteenth century, several motifs (such as fertility and paganism) that also

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86 BN MS lat. 16098, fol. 147r: “Hec prouincia tali errore demonum antiquissimo tempore fascinata modo in parte magna cum multis regionibus subditis vel adnexis precedente gratia et cooperante Germanorum potentia iam creditur a predictis esse erroribus liberata.” See also Bartholomaeus’ description of Vironia, fol. 155r (150v): “Nunc vero Danorum regibus pariter et legibus est subjecta. Terra vero tota est a Germanis et Danis pariter habitata.”

continue to occur frequently in later texts, became established in the descriptions of Livonia.

It is noteworthy that even after the Livonian War – which broke out in 1558 and ended in 1583 – had ruptured the centuries-old political organisation of the region, the name of Livonia lived on in the texts and on the maps of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. As Mauno Koski writes pointedly, “[t]he name was still used as of old memory, changes of government had no effect on it, because Livland was no longer an administrative, but a humanistic geographical name of the country”.88 Thus, the medieval invention of Livonia had been so successful that the name “Livonia” remained current into the modern age, even when the reality it once referred to had been significantly transformed.

88 Koski, Liivinmaan nimi (as in footnote 17), p. 544.