

*The Teutonic Order and the Origins of its State as an Example of a Crusading Landscape in Fourteenth-Century Prussia*

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**Introduction:**

*“I entreat you, people of Christendom, to hear and see of my pain and desolation, remember what has befallen me, recall and look back upon my shame. Take up your arms and your shield, and come to my aid! Throw your spear, and finish the struggle against the enemies who have overtaken me. Avenge my desolation and rescue me from the hands of the sinners who now occupy me, lest I be made poor.”<sup>1</sup>*

Peter of Dusburg, whose *Chronicle of Prussia* is the authoritative text for the history of the Teutonic Order’s conquests in Prussia, related the above passage to motivate Christendom to recover the Holy Land. He wrote his text in 1326, nearly 40 years after the fall of Acre to the Mamluke Sultan, Qalawun, in May of 1291. The quotation reflects how crusading remained in the memory of medieval authors, and this applies well to the theme of the present volume of re-organization.<sup>2</sup>

Christendom drafted plans to recover the Holy Land, but active crusading survived on the frontier regions of Europe, particularly in the Baltic. Knights and noblemen undertook armed ‘pilgrimages’ to fight the Lithuanians, called *Reisen*, a German word meaning ‘journeys.’ These were chivalric-themed campaigns against the Lithuanian peoples waged and patronised by the Order.<sup>3</sup> With the *Reisen* we see the popularity of the Baltic as a place to express martial prowess and personal piety, and while scholarship has continued to debate these aspects of crusading there, the campaigns reflect the crusading spirit in the fourteenth century and the efficiency of the ‘re-organization’ of the region by the Teutonic Order.<sup>4</sup> The

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<sup>1</sup> Peter of Dusburg (1861), p. 208: “Audite obsecro universi populi Cristiani et videte dolorem desolacionis mee, recordamini, quid acciderit mihi, intuemini et respicite opprobrium meum, apprehendite arma et scutum et exurgite in adiutorium mihi, effundite drameam et concludite adversus eos, qui me persequuntur, eripite me pauperem et desolatam et de peccatorum manibus liberate.”

<sup>2</sup> Barber (2006); Riley-Smith (2012), pp. 216-217; Housley (2006), pp. 123-143.

<sup>3</sup> Paravicini (1995), p. 13. The word could also mean “expedition.”

<sup>4</sup> Ibid (1989), pp. 26-29; Ibid (1995), pp. 110-111.

present paper explores the Teutonic Order's fourteenth-century crusades in Prussia, how they reflect a re-organization of the crusade ideal, and the spiritual origins of the Order's Prussian state: a spiritual landscape in the Baltic as a product of the crusade movement.

The continuity of crusading principles, in combination with historical events in the region that contradicted them, offers a window into this volume's theme of re-organization. The Teutonic Order managed to overcome the criticisms levied by its detractors, and between 1300 and 1350 it was functioning at a zenith in terms of how it understood itself as a religious institution. It had re-organized its spirituality, propagating a positive image of itself to Christendom as representative of the new style of crusading that emerged in the fourteenth century. A distinct form of literature, under the guidance of a series of Grand Masters from 1331 – 1341, accompanied intense spiritual revival or, one might say, spiritual re-organization.<sup>5</sup> The Order's Grand Masters gave increased attention to devotional practices and religious duties, and a distinctive architectural programme grew which served to visually propagate this revitalisation in the Order's spiritual life. By means of leading penitential wars against the peoples in Lithuania, the last pagans in Europe, the Teutonic Knights and their mission managed to survive in the world of crusading after the loss of the Holy Land.

The present article begins with a brief Order's history in Prussia, discussing the crusading landscape that emerged there. Given that the Order served as one of the prime agents in the creation of this landscape, the outline frames the broader re-organization that took place in the fourteenth century. The article then comments on the perception of the Order after the loss of the Holy Land in 1291, and how the Order revitalised itself in light of these circumstances. The final segment will consider the Teutonic Order's attack on Danzig

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<sup>5</sup> Helm and Ziesemer (1951), pp. 16-20; Mentzel-Reuters (2003), pp. 17-26.

(1308), one of the most significant events in the Order's history in Prussia, analysing to what degree the Order acted in contradiction to the image it sought to propagate. It concludes that the event was significant in shaping the Order's re-organization, in addition to serving as the impetus behind the spiritual nature of the Teutonic Order's Prussian state.

### **Establishing a Crusade Landscape in Prussia**

The Teutonic Order was originally founded as a crusading institution in the Holy Land,<sup>6</sup> and served in its defence until the fall of Acre.<sup>7</sup> Its headquarters remained at Montfort (also known as Starkenburg), and it continued fighting in the Holy Land until the fall of Acre in 1291. The Order's first encounter with pagans occurred in Transylvania, when it was fighting the Cumans from 1211-1225. However, this resulted in the Order's expulsion from the Kingdom of Hungary by Andrew II due to a variety of factors. Activities it was barred from were, among other things, building stone castles and occupying lands belonging to the Hungarian crown.<sup>8</sup> The Order's conquest of Prussia began with the invitation of Konrad, Duke of Masovia, in 1226, to fight the pagan peoples on his borders in the Kulmerland (Zeimia Chelmińska). In Prussia, the Order made sure that it would not be subject to the same issues it encountered in Transylvania, namely in that it gained the rights to all the lands it conquered, according to the Golden Bull of Rimini of 1226.<sup>9</sup> The Order received control of the sites that it conquered, and had privileges to taxes and tolls (*ad commodum domus passagia et thelonia ordinare*). It could also mint its own coins (*monetam cudere*).<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Strehlke (1890), p. 159.

<sup>7</sup> Militzer (2005), pp. 28-9; Morton (2009).

<sup>8</sup> József Laszlovszky and Zoltán Soós (2001), p. 324; Zimmermann (2011), pp. 131-137.

<sup>9</sup> Philippi (1881), no. 56, pp. 41-43, here p. 42.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

The establishment of new centres in the landscape was at the highest level of importance to the Order's early wars. The Teutonic Order managed, in the course of the thirteenth century, to conquer and colonize a region of some 38,500 square kilometres and over 170,000 inhabitants.<sup>11</sup> These conquests and the establishment of the Order's Prussian lands (commonly known as the *Ordensstaat*, but also referred to as *Ordensland* or *Ordensgebiet*) represent one of the unique characteristics of the Order in modern scholarship.<sup>12</sup> Unlike the other military orders, the Teutonic Order managed a theocratic state in Prussia, with one possible exception being the Hospitaller's rule on Rhodes.<sup>13</sup> It is important to caveat that the *Ordensstaat* does not refer to the modern term. Being a theocracy, a society ruled by a religious corporation, makes fourteenth-century Prussia different from our modern understanding of the word 'state'.<sup>14</sup> Throughout this period about 200 structures in the forms of castles, cathedrals, parishes churches, and monasteries were built in the Order's land. Most of them belonged to the Teutonic Knights.<sup>15</sup> They became important administrative, economic, and spiritual centres for the Order's territory. The Order understood its place as a spiritual agent in a formerly pagan landscape, and it reflected this in how it commemorated its early history and the foundation of cities. I will now briefly discuss the initial phase of this, namely the early conquests in Prussia, to lay the groundwork for how the Order remembered itself in a significant period of its re-organization. Through memory and commemoration, the Order's chroniclers thus framed how they wished their organization to be seen by contemporaries.

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<sup>11</sup> Czaja (2011), p. 164.

<sup>12</sup> Kwiatkowski (2007), p. 132; Pluskowski (2013), pp. 1-42.

<sup>13</sup> Kutzner (2000), p. 263; p. 266.

<sup>14</sup> Czaja (2011), p. 165.

<sup>15</sup> Pluskowski (2013), p. 149.

During the thirteenth century, the Order constructed centres as its conquests progressed in Prussia. The first castles constructed were Thorn (Toruń) in 1231, followed by Kulm (Chełmno) in 1232, Marienwerder (Kwidzyn) and Rheden (Radzyń Chełmiński) in 1234, Elbing (Elbląg) in 1237, and Balga (Veseloe) in 1239.<sup>16</sup> These castles were built of military necessity, first and foremost, and became important centres of the Order as the conquest progressed and extended the frontier with the Prussians. However, in the long-term they were also important religious places. For example, Peter of Dusburg records that as early as the 1240s the brothers in Balga were living a monastic lifestyle. He noted that the castle had the spatial layout to perform monastic hours, and stated that the brothers there “lived an angelic life in the castle” (*habitantes in eo angelicam ducunt vitam*).<sup>17</sup> He also described miracles, the discovery of relics, and apparitions of the Virgin at these places. Such insertions and their place in the chronicle are valuable for understanding of the crusade in Prussia as a spiritual mission, in addition to the efforts of the Order to propagate a positive image of itself. Scholars have debated about the likelihood that the early castles of the conquest period were conventual (i.e. monastic) structures. Peter’s description here is more pertinent to the present segment for other reasons.<sup>18</sup>

Most important is the value of memory to the re-establishing and redirecting of the crusading spirit to Prussia. In this light, Peter’s account of the religious lifestyle and early sufferings of the brothers has more relevance. The Order’s early conquests had a long-lasting effect on the physical and ideological landscape of Prussia. Churches, castles, and monasteries dotted this landscape, representing the Order’s goals and directives. By the fourteenth century, when the Order experienced its spiritual re-organization, the memory of

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<sup>16</sup> Peter of Dusburg (1861), pp. 48-50; pp. 56-61; pp. 62-63.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 63.

<sup>18</sup> For example, see Pospieszny (2000), pp. 101-115; Pluskowski (2013), pp. 149-154.

the Order’s conquests became fundamental to its history and reputation in Prussia. The Order’s centres under its patronage, like Elbing (Elbląg), its first commandery castle (*Komtureien*) in Prussia, was a main spiritual centre that held, since 1233, a piece of the True Cross. This became an important tool for legitimizing the Order’s crusades in the fourteenth century, as we see below.<sup>19</sup> Königsberg (Kaliningrad) was the main destination for participants on the *Reisen*. Fallen knights would be buried in the cathedral there, indicating that they understood it as an important spiritual place with respect to the sacrality of their mission, namely the fighting of the heathens.<sup>20</sup> The Order’s new headquarters at Marienburg (Malbork), though, was its finest reflection of its re-organisation. It solidified the Order as the agency responsible for the creation of a crusading landscape in Prussia.<sup>21</sup>

‘Crusading landscape’ refers to the combination of factors that the Teutonic Order propagated to portray its fight in Prussia as divinely sanctioned, specifically focused on the land of Prussia itself. Recent trends in scholarship have paid increasing attention to memory and crusading, examining the ‘landscapes of memory’ that the crusade movement created. Chroniclers commemorated the success of the First Crusade repeatedly, and re-applied its divine nature to later events.<sup>22</sup> Peter of Dusburg and the other chroniclers in the Order employed the same thing in their chronicles, framing their efforts in a sacred form of history.<sup>23</sup> They also created a new landscape in Prussia as the theatre in which these events were recreated. The landscape of Prussia was defined by them in the early days by its association with paganism. For example, Peter notes the worship of natural elements in the

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<sup>19</sup> *PrUB* (1881), no. 103, pp. 76-77; Peter of Dusburg (1861), pp. 31-32; Zacharias (2001), p. 51.

<sup>20</sup> Paravicini (1995), pp. 116-26.

<sup>21</sup> Trupinda (2008), pp. 513-529.

<sup>22</sup> Megan Cassidy-Welch (2017), p. 4; Bird (2017), p. 16.

<sup>23</sup> Kutzner (2000), p. 288; Kwiatkowsky (2007), p. 137; Kwiatkowski (2014), pp. 120-127.

landscape, and the destruction of sacred places to rebuild Christian ones.<sup>24</sup> Prussia became Mary's land, thus reflecting that it was not only the territory of the Order but also of its patron saint. This was indeed a political tool, particularly in the later period of the Order's history, but it had a very real effect on contemporaries who went to fight there.<sup>25</sup>

The main spiritual centres like Marienburg and Königsberg were not just sites of earlier (i.e. pagan) habitation. Since they were previously pagan sites, they were sacred places to the Prussians, and needed sacralisation in the form of constructing Christian spaces on them. Marienburg, for instance, was formerly a place known as *Alyem*. Rainer Zacharias identifies it as an important place for trade, but also as a sacred (i.e. pre-Christian) centre in the landscape.<sup>26</sup> Königsberg has a tradition going back to a place called *Tuwangste*, taking its name from a grove (*a nomine silve*) that predated the castle's construction.<sup>27</sup> The Order's wars transformed the landscape of Prussia on a physical and spiritual level, namely the crusades encouraged by the popes and preaching orders, in conjunction with the Order's own propaganda as warriors of the Church's enemies. This propaganda played a key role in the re-organization of crusading society and its reflection in Prussia.

### **Crusading, and the Order's Image after 1291**

As this landscape in Prussia was emerging, Christendom's control in the Holy Land was faltering.<sup>28</sup> The various efforts to retain control in the East ultimately resulted in the loss of Acre in 1291. With this event, the necessity for the existence of the military orders came into question.<sup>29</sup> Contemporaries accused the military orders of acting on greed, trading and fraternizing with the infidel, and even cowardice, as a means of understanding and explaining

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<sup>24</sup> Pluskowski (2013), pp. 90-91.

<sup>25</sup> Dygo (1989), p. 67.

<sup>26</sup> Zacharias (1995), pp. 68-70, outlines the early history of Alyem. Also see Töppen (1858), p. 12.

<sup>27</sup> Peter of Dusburg (1861), p. 92.

<sup>28</sup> Forey (1992), p. 122.

<sup>29</sup> Helen Nicholson (1993), pp. 125-128.

the loss of the Holy Land to Christendom.<sup>30</sup> While this prompted a broader re-organization of society, for the present contribution it is relevant to consider its effect on the land of Prussia. For example, the Teutonic Order likewise received criticism over its activities in Livonia and Prussia, and one of the main accusations was trading with the pagan Lithuanians. In fact, both the Church and the Order engaged in trade with the Lithuanians, showing the complexity of relationships in the Baltic between Christians and pagans.<sup>31</sup> In 1311 the Order was placed under excommunication after an investigation of the accusations brought against it by the Church of Riga.<sup>32</sup> This indeed played a significant role in re-organization.

After the loss of the Holy Land to Christendom, the Order had a brief stay in Venice. In 1309, the Grand Master of the Teutonic Order, Siegfried von Feuchtwangen, moved his seat (*Hochmeistersitz*) to the castle at Marienburg.<sup>33</sup> This occurred only a year after the annexation of Pomerania (Danzig), discussed below. The Order was now solely focused on its lands in Prussia and its wars against the pagans, and needed to adjust itself and its image to compensate for this.<sup>34</sup> The chivalric crusades of the Order, the *Reisen*, also began around this time, in 1304, when “German pilgrims, inspired by God, sought once again to visit the land of Prussia.”<sup>35</sup> Not only was the Teutonic Order redirecting its focus internally with reforming its spiritual life, it also was re-organizing its status as a crusading institution in fighting the pagan Lithuanians. This applied the crusading landscape that it had created in the thirteenth century, too, for the wars against Lithuania were not in Prussia but in *terra Lithwanorum*. In this sense, the land of Prussia had to become a landscape of pilgrimage, where participants in

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<sup>30</sup> Jonathan Riley-Smith (2012), pp. 216-217.

<sup>31</sup> Selart (2015), pp. 260-262.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 286-287.

<sup>33</sup> Militzer (2005), pp. 95-104; Czaja (2011), p. 165.

<sup>34</sup> Sarnowsky (2007), pp. 22-23; Pluskowski (2013), pp. 142-143.

<sup>35</sup> Paravicini (1989), p. 21; Peter of Dusburg (1861), p. 170: “peregrini de Alemania inspirante domino inceperunt terram Prussie iterum visitare.”



the wars against Lithuania could express their piety by visiting religious centres under the Order’s patronage before departing to the forests in Lithuania to fight the heathens.

This is supported by the fact that the Order gained little land in the region of its wars, known as the Great Wilderness (*Große Wildnis*), saving a few settlements and frontier castles like Ragnit (Neman).<sup>36</sup> As Roman Czaja puts it: “The *Reisen* nevertheless had an important ideological significance, namely in that the Teutonic Order was able to legitimise its presence in the Baltic through the wars against the heathen.” He noted this after remarking that the *Reisen* brought no territorial gains to the Order, which inspires the question to what degree ideology shaped these wars and appealed to its participants.<sup>37</sup> One answer is considering how the Order revised and re-organized its spirituality. The main example of this was the Order’s propagation of its Marian heritage and ideology.<sup>38</sup> The brothers increased their devotion to the Virgin Mary during the period when it focussed itself on Prussia and the wars with Lithuania, particularly under the leadership of Luder von Braunschweig (1331-1335) and Dietrich von Altenburg (1335-1341). These two Grand Masters revitalized the Order’s Rule, in addition to commissioning the major narrative histories of Prussia.<sup>39</sup> For example, Luder added to the Order’s Rule that lay brethren were to say the *Ave Maria* in addition to the *Salve Regina*.<sup>40</sup>

Marian ideology became essential to the Order’s continuation of the crusade against the Lithuanians in the fourteenth century.<sup>41</sup> Expeditions were launched on the Virgin’s feast

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<sup>36</sup> Pluskowski (2013), p. 97; p. 162; Hermann (2004), pp. 98-103

<sup>37</sup> Czaja (2011), p. 168: “Die veranstalteten Züge, sog. „Reisen“, hatten jedoch eine wichtige ideologische Bedeutung, da der Deutsche Orden durch die Kämpfe gegen die Heiden seine Anwesenheit an der Ostsee legitimieren konnte.”

<sup>38</sup> Marian Dygo (1989), pp. 63-81; Pluskowski (2013), pp. 158-161.

<sup>39</sup> Helm and Ziesemer (1951), p. 16.

<sup>40</sup> Pehrlbach (1890), p. 148; Helm and Ziesemer (1951), p. 92.

<sup>41</sup> Dygo (1989), p. 67.

days of the Purification (2 February), Assumption (15 August) and the Annunciation (8 September).<sup>42</sup> However, this was brought up against the Order at the Council of Constance (1414-18) as grounds for heresy, namely because it was viewed as sinful to take part in combat on the feast days. Moreover, the legality of forced conversion was challenged, and thus the Order’s reason for existence (combatting the pagans in the region).<sup>43</sup> Nonetheless, the power of the spiritual landscape of Prussia continued, since Prussia was known as Mary’s land. One example is the story in Peter of Dusburg’s *Supplementa*, where he describes a revelation of the Virgin to a knight in the army of Władysław I, the Elbow-High (Łokietek), who after the annexation of Pomerelia in 1308 became the enemy of the Order. As the army is advancing to raid the Kulmerland, he the count saw a vision of Mary telling asking him “why do you wish to destroy my land, planted with the blood of so many Christians?”<sup>44</sup> Peter also records a story of a ‘certain squire’ (*quidam armiger*), who had fallen from his horse while on a raid and was knocked unconscious. When he came to himself, and realized he was alone, he called on the Virgin for aid, and was shown his way to Ragnit castle (Neman, Kaliningrad Oblast).<sup>45</sup> Stories like this showed the divine nature of its crusades against pagans, in addition to serving as a didactic tool to reflect the success of and favour given to the Order as defenders of the faith in Prussia. It likewise reflects the reorganization and transplanting of a crusading landscape in that region, namely in that it is the patron of the land, Mary, who guides the soldier.

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid; Pluskowski (2013), p. 161.

<sup>43</sup> For example, see Weise (1963), p. 457-72; Weise (1964), pp. 401-20; Paravicini (1995), p. 55; Kwiatkowski (1998), pp. 68-70.

<sup>44</sup> Peter of Dusburg (1861), p. 218: “Quidam comes...capitaneus Ungarorum, cui beata virgo apparuit in vision, noctis tempore, cum jaceret in strato suo, et duris verbis eum increpans ait: Quare destruis terram meam multorum Cristianorum sanguine plantatam.”

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 184. *Armigeri* refers to professional soldiers used in the Order’s armies. See Paravicini (1995), pp. 47-48.

This reform and the propagation of the Order reached outside of Prussia and the audience of the Order’s crusade chronicles. Texts produced outside of the Order demonstrate the spread of the Order’s image outside of Prussia. The Austrian herald, Peter Suchenwirt, recorded that the knights on the *Reise* of Louis of Hungary in 1345 travelled to Prussia “in honour of the Virgin Mary” (*ze dînest unser vrauen*).<sup>46</sup> Writing later in the fourteenth century, Wigand of Marburg noted the effectiveness of this imagery, stating that the Christian faith in Livonia and Prussia “was increased, particularly for the Virgin Mary” (*exaltata, signanter virginis Marie*), and that the number of chants, masses, and processions in her honour were increased throughout Prussia.<sup>47</sup>

The Order’s reshaping of its image was quite successful, namely in the attraction of English and French knights to Prussia in large numbers to participate in the wars against the Lithuanians. Two famous examples are Chaucer’s knight and the famous French marshal, Boucicaut.<sup>48</sup> Henry IV of England, too, participated on the *Reisen* two times in the late fourteenth century.<sup>49</sup> The Order’s propaganda and projection of its image was so successful that it lasted after the conversion of Lithuania in 1386 up until the early fifteenth century.<sup>50</sup> It reorganized itself along an increased devotion to its patron saint, the Virgin Mary, but also went about establishing centres of pilgrimage and creating pilgrimage traditions in the land of Prussia. A good example is the veneration of St Barbara, whose cult the Order propagated around the region of Althaus (Starogród Chełmiński). Peter of Dusburg narrated the discovery of the saint’s relics there in the winter of 1242, and a little less than a century later,

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<sup>46</sup> Peter Suchenwirt (1863), p. 159.

<sup>47</sup> Wigand of Marburg (1863), p. 453: “Tandem tamen in Pruszia et in Lyvoniam fides catholica exaltata est et divine laudes multiplicatae, signanter virginis Marie, quas optat a Deo perpetuari.” Also see Wigand of Marburg (1863), p. 616.

<sup>48</sup> Elst (2009), p. 385; Polejowski (2011), p. 235; Chollet (2015), pp. 1-24.

<sup>49</sup> ‘Geschichte der Preussenfahrt des Grafen Heinrich von Derby’ (1863), p. 792.

<sup>50</sup> Paravicini (1989), p. 11.

Luder of Braunschweig produced a *vita* of the saint.<sup>51</sup> Maria Starnawska has most recently assessed the development of the cult, noting that it was the most popular pilgrimage destination in Prussia until the fifteenth century.<sup>52</sup> Barbara's cult was so successful in the lands of the Order that it attracted pilgrims from outside of the Order's territory, one example being the French diplomat Guillebert de Lannoy, who visited the saint's shrine in 1413 and presumably made an offering to the relics.<sup>53</sup>

While the Order successfully promoted the imagery of the Virgin to gain supporters, it also developed local saints' cults that reflect its role in the crusading society of its lands in Prussia. These were direct products of re-organizing its focus as an institution to adapt to the changes in contemporary perceptions of holy war. Crusading shifted from a collective movement striving for the liberation of the holy places to a more individual, knightly focus.<sup>54</sup> The Order adjusted accordingly, while continuing more traditional elements of piety and pilgrimage. For example, campaigns against the Lithuanians included pilgrimage, in addition to armed conflicts against the enemies of the Christian faith.<sup>55</sup> The sources refer to participants as *peregrini*, just as sources referred to participants in the 'traditional' crusades to the Holy Land.<sup>56</sup> However, participants did engage in pilgrimage acts and visited pilgrimage shrines. These included Marienburg, Danzig, Königsberg, and a variety of smaller shrines dedicated to St Katherine and the Virgin Mary.<sup>57</sup> In 1344, William IV of Holland made offerings at Königsberg Cathedral, in addition to the Chapel of St George, where there was a

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<sup>51</sup> Peter of Dusburg (1861), pp. 69-70. For Luder's work, see Nicolaus of Jeroschin (1861), p. 377.

<sup>52</sup> Starnawska (2017), pp. 203-212.

<sup>53</sup> 'Aus den Voyages' (1866), p. 449, recounts Guillebert's visit to Kulm.

<sup>54</sup> Housley (2006), p. 131.

<sup>55</sup> Paravicini (1989), pp. 305-309.

<sup>56</sup> See Ní Chléirig (2008), p. 69. Also see Jaspert (2011), pp. 67-96.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid. Also see Zacharias (2002), pp. 16-18.

relic and image.<sup>58</sup> William of Guelders, in 1389, likely visited the relic of the True Cross at Elbing, and then visited the shrines of the Virgin Mary at Juditten (Mendeleyevo, Kalinigrad Oblast), and St Katherine at Brandenburg (Ushakovo).<sup>59</sup>

It has been proposed that the Order could preach these crusades on its own, and likely could offer indulgences.<sup>60</sup> Wigand of Marburg’s record *Siege of Kaunas* (1362) states that after the successful siege of the castle “the indulgences of the Order” (*Indulgentie quoque ordinis*) were given out to the army of pilgrims.<sup>61</sup> In addition to sites like Kulm, pilgrimage shrines developed around the city of Königsberg like Juditten () and Arnau (Rodniki), which pilgrims on the *Reisen* visited well into the 1390s.<sup>62</sup> Both cases show the effects of this reform and the adaptability of the Order in the fourteenth century, namely in that it promoted its Prussian lands as a destination for pilgrimage and crusading.<sup>63</sup> It had changed with the times and was functioning successfully as a crusading institution in Prussia, receiving patronage and legitimising itself to ‘post-crusading’ society, complete with fighting the enemies of the church but also participating in acts of devotion associated with pilgrimage.

### **Historical Realities of the Fourteenth Century in Prussia**

However, the Order also committed acts contradictory to the image it propagated to Christendom. This segment will examine what else caused the need for the reform of the crusading ideal and of crusading society in fourteenth-century Prussia, taking the example of the annexation of Pomerelia, the region at the centre of which is modern-day Gdańsk (former Danzig). In 1308, the Order acquired the city of Danzig, from the Margrave of Brandenburg,

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<sup>58</sup> Johannes von Niederheim (1863), p. 744; *Urkundenbuch des Bistums Samland* (1891), pp. 220-21 (no. 295). The altar was founded in 1336.

<sup>59</sup> *Ältere Hochmeisterchronik* (1866), pp. 613-14.

<sup>60</sup> Ehlers (2001), pp. 26-29.

<sup>61</sup> Kwiatkowski (2013), p. 116. Wigand of Marburg (1863), p. 531, records the parties in the Order’s army.

<sup>62</sup> Paravicini (1989), pp. 305-309; Pluskowski (2013), p. 162.

<sup>63</sup> Wigand of Marburg (1863), p. 537; Also see Kwiatkowski (2013), p. 119.

following the Polish Crown's refusal to pay for their services in driving the former Margrave's forces out of the city.<sup>64</sup> The Order ousted his forces, but when Poland refused to pay for the services rendered, it turned and attacked the Christian city. It afterwards acquired the rights to the city from Margrave Waldemar of Brandenburg, which were established through the Treaty of Soldin.<sup>65</sup> The event sparked tension with the Kingdom of Poland that would not end until the fifteenth century. Accounts of the attack on the city show a stark contrast to the ideology that the Order applied in its chronicles, described above. They also can relate to the need for reform in the Order after this event.

Polish historian Roman Czaja described the annexation of Pomerelia as typical of medieval powers wishing to exploit their weaker neighbours, on the one hand, and on the other hand difficult to accept given the Teutonic Order's status as a religious organization.<sup>66</sup> Primary source accounts for the incident include *Chronicle of Oliwa*, produced sometime in the mid-14<sup>th</sup> century as an account justifying the ancestral claims of the Cistercian abbey of Oliwa to Pomerania.<sup>67</sup> It is a record for key events related to the Polish-Teutonic War. The testimonies of eyewitnesses of the events of the Polish-Teutonic Wars survive in the first volume of the *Lites ac res gestae inter Polonos Ordinemque Cruciferorum* (Dispute accounts between the Poles and the Teutonic Knights). Curiously, Peter of Dusburg and Nicolaus of Jeroschin do not have anything to say about the attack on Danzig. Nicolaus translated Peter's chronicle into Middle High German in 1341, and his text emphasises the chivalric nature of crusading in the 1340s.<sup>68</sup> Wigand of Marburg only makes a note of it, saying that the Order

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<sup>64</sup> Pluskowski (2013), p. 18; p. 140. Also see Selart (2015), pp. 286-288.

<sup>65</sup> Pluskowski (2013), pp. 220-221.

<sup>66</sup> Czaja (2011), p. 165.

<sup>67</sup> *Die ältere Chronik von Oliwa* (1861), pp. 649-726; Also see *Die Chroniken von Oliwa und Burchstücke älterer Chroniken* (1874), pp. 591-623.

<sup>68</sup> Fischer (2011), pp. 11-15.

was wrongly accused by the Poles and that, through God’s grace, “was vindicated” (*ordo fuerit justificatus*).<sup>69</sup> How does this event relate to the Order’s reform and re-organization, and the emergence of its land in Prussia as a crusading landscape in the fourteenth century?

First we should begin with a brief overview of what happened in the attack. The Teutonic Order’s sack of the city, which Jürgen Sarnowsky refers to as a bloodbath (*Blutbad*), remains with the Order to this day as a tarnishing image.<sup>70</sup> The Order laid waste to the city and burned its churches, and, in a flagrant violation on the part of the brothers as a religious institution, killed its inhabitants (which were Christian). The *Chronicle of Oliwa* records how it was after the citizens of Gdansk, who were shut up within the castle, decided to surrender “so that they might still redeem themselves to the knights (*domini cruciferorum*)”. When the knights came into the city, “they decreed that all the Pomeranians should be cut down.”<sup>71</sup> The exact number of how many fell continues to be a matter of debate, but in any case, it was bloody. The testimonies in the *Lites* state figures upwards of 10,000. Scholars tend to view this as a medieval exaggeration, but it has continued to be a hotly debated issue.<sup>72</sup> The point remains that there was considerable slaughter in this event and it was at the hands of the Teutonic Knights.

At this initial call for help, the *Chronicle of Oliwa* records that the master sent brother Gunther von Schwarzburg with a group of Prussians (*cum Pruthenis*) to the city, where “the army was harassed to such a degree by those shut up in the city, yelling insults at them from

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<sup>69</sup> Wigand of Marburg, p. 458.

<sup>70</sup> Sarnowsky (2007), p. 45.

<sup>71</sup> *Chronik von Oliva* (1861), p. 606: “quam domini cum suo exercitu intrantes omnes milites Pomeranie, quos in ea reppererunt, iusserunt trucidari.”

<sup>72</sup> See Wigand of Marburg (1863), p. 458 (note 29); Milliman (2012), pp. 123-128; Pluskowski (2013), p. 221.

the walls, that they attacked powerfully with ferocity.”<sup>73</sup> The inhabitants eventually surrendered. Following this, the knights and their company burnt down the interior of the city, and slaughtered the men hiding inside the castle, who realized that that they could no longer provide resistance to the army of the Order. This event ignited a tense period marked by the attack on one of Prussia's most significant Christian centres by an institution who prided itself as its defenders. Given that Peter or Nicolaus do not mention it, it appears that the Order knew that this event did not reflect its mission. Rather, it showed an abandonment of its pledge to a fellow Christian ruler, and the Christians living in Prussia.

A series of trials were brought against the Order from 1320 and 1423, and the Order's attack on Danzig was one of the central issues of these trials.<sup>74</sup> Testimonials from the trials brought against the Order refer often to the brothers burning churches, violating women and other innocent parties, and stealing church treasures.<sup>75</sup> These testimonies paint the Order more along the lines of its pagan enemies. The imagery is quite similar to the language used on various occasions in the Order's chronicles. It should be taken in context, though, namely that these are efforts to frame the Order negatively. Similar tactics were used in the Order's conflicts in Livonia with the Church of Riga in the fourteenth century.<sup>76</sup> The Order was accused of trading with pagans, inviting them into Livonia to kill Christians, refusing to build churches for new converts, and being crueller than pagans in their killing of Christians.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> *Chronik von Oliva* (1861), p. 606: “Quidam vero ex civibus presumptuosi dominos terra Prusie ludibrijs et subsannacionibus incompositis prouocabant in tantum, quod domini exacerbatum cum exercitu valido ciuitatem obsederunt et eam ferocibus animis oppugnauerunt.”

<sup>74</sup> Darius von Güttner-Sporzyński (2012), p. 60.

<sup>75</sup> *Lites* (1855), vol. 1, p. 246. Also see p. 312, p. 321, p. 322, p. 342, p. 370 for some other examples of this testimony.

<sup>76</sup> Selart (2015), pp. 286-291.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 288-289.



Likewise, it should also be remembered that Peter of Dusburg’s *Supplementa* refers to the King of Poland as a traitor to the Church and neglectful of his royal duties. Peter writes that it was the Pope who had appointed him king, and Wladislaw abandoned his kingly duties as “both diligent and loyal to the Church, as well as a strong fighter on her behalf” and instead “cruelly attacked those who defended Christianity.”<sup>78</sup> Peter was describing the attacks on the Kulmerland by Wladislaw in the 1320s, years after the Order’s attack on Danzig had taken place. The attacks on Pomerania by Wladislaw would likewise have involved Christian on Christian violence, according to the Order’s chroniclers and the *Chronicle of Oliwa*. It is important to note that this information comes primarily from the Order’s ‘side’ of things, and that when it comes to disputes between the Teutonic Order and other figures in the fourteenth century, accusations of extreme violence and un-Christian behaviour were commonplace on both sides.

Although the wars were bloody and contradictory to the Order’s image and purpose as a religious institution, the Teutonic Knights nonetheless survived in post-1291 crusading society. One way it did this was by highlighting the alliance of the Kingdom of Poland with Lithuania, its main enemy in the north. This indeed legitimised, to its chroniclers and to their audience, their war with a Christian power. Peter of Dusburg and the *Chronicle of Oliwa* make it clear that the Wladislaw the Elbow-High allied with Gediminas of Lithuania in 1324, who was still pagan, in his wars against the Order.<sup>79</sup> Wladislaw’s attack on Pomerania occurred at the time when the knights and pilgrims were fighting against the Lithuanians.<sup>80</sup> It

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<sup>78</sup> Peter von Dusburg (1861), pp. 215-216: “ut esset sancta ecclesie, fidei et fidelium eo diligencier et fidelior et magis strenuous pugnator. Nunc autem non solum non defendit cetum fidelium, sed eos, qui defendunt, crudeliter impugnat.”

<sup>79</sup> *Chronik von Oliwa* (1874), p. 609: ‘Et extunc rex polonies predictus contracta amicitia cum rege Litwinorum Viten nomine, cuius filiam filius regis Polonie duxit in uxorem, incepit terram Pomeranie et terram Culmense et terram Michi[I]ouiensem primo iudicio spirituali’. Also see Peter of Dusburg (1861), pp. 214-216, which describes Wladislaw’s invasion of the Kulmerland.

<sup>80</sup> Peter of Dusburg (1861), pp. 193-194.

thus appears that a complex web of alliances with pagans, acting like pagans, and knightly desires for battle, resulted in a very bloody event at Gniezno in 1331. From the Order’s point of view, it had little choice but to retaliate, since it felt that its livelihood, namely the crusades against pagans in Lithuania, was under attack.

Recent work has begun to look at the degree to which the Order actively *sought* to destroy Christian sanctuaries and sacred spaces. The style of the testimonies should be placed under scrutiny. Testimonials describing the destruction of churches and holy places were made according to oral testimony, or rumour (*vox publica et fama*), and were, according to some, framed in the mentality of late medieval warfare: one that focussed on brutality, particularly severe violence, and sacrilege (destroying temples, robbing churches, etc.). However, the uniqueness of the *Lites* testimonies lay in the fact that they are *not* chronicles or treatises, which have been described as serving “a specific ‘only just’ cause”.<sup>81</sup> Chronicles of the Teutonic Order, indeed even the *Chronicle of Oliwa*, served to represent their message in a ‘just’ framework for those who read them. The Order wished to present an image of piety and holy warfare, the monks at Oliwa to justify its claims to Pomerania and those who patronised it. Particularly in the case of *Ordensliteratur*, the message provides legitimisation and propagate a positive image of the Order to its audience. For example, Wigand states that, before taking the city, knights were sent ahead of the forces to take the holy relics of St Adalbert, though they did not find them once they had entered the church, implying a sense of Christian duty before taking Prussia’s holiest city.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 86.

<sup>82</sup> Wigand of Marburg (1863), p. 480: ‘festinant [the Order and their *Kriegsgäste*] ad Gnesnam, ubi requiescit sanctus Adalbertus. *Quo maschalkus etc. misit copiam hominum, ut occulte possent reliquias sanctas deportare; fratres quoque summum intrantes.*’ The company did not find the relics there, for they had already been hidden.

It is important to make a brief mention of the significance of the city of Gnesen, since it has a prominent place in the religious history of the Kingdom of Poland, in addition to the Christianisation of Prussia. Prussia had a history of Christianisation attempts that the Teutonic Knights came into. With respect to the Order's attack on this city, we see that the Order participated in creating (and destroying/recreating) a crusading landscape. Pomerania had been a goal of missionary work since the tenth century. St Adalbert of Prague, the first to attempt to convert Prussia, had his shrine in Gnesen since the early eleventh century.<sup>83</sup> His martyrdom occurred in 997 (23 April), traditionally in the area surrounding Fischhausen, thus making it close to the Order's castle at Königsberg. Various other suggestions have been made, one is the city of Kaldus on the historical borderland with Poland and Lithuania.<sup>84</sup>

Adalbert's work was continued in the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> century, notably by St Bruno of Querfurt, and St Otto of Bamberg.<sup>85</sup> With this previous it shows the presence of a Christianised landscape in the area that stretches to the 10<sup>th</sup> and continually developed through to the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Indeed, these early missions focused strongly on landscape and eradicating the pagan sites.<sup>86</sup> Adalbert's martyrdom, for example, occurred because he entered a sacred grove of the Prussians.<sup>87</sup> St Otto of Bamberg erected crosses on his missions in the twelfth century to the north of Poland, representing a Christianisation of that landscape.<sup>88</sup>

It is curious that the Order laid siege to such an important city, given the increased spiritual revival it experienced around this time. However, in terms of its Prussian lands as a

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<sup>83</sup> John Canaparius (1841), pp. 581-595; Bruno of Querfurt (1841), pp. 596-612; Wood (2001), pp. 207-244.

<sup>84</sup> Pluskowski (2013), p. 89.

<sup>85</sup> Herbord (1886), pp. 746-822; Kurt Villads Jensen (2013), pp. 87-100.

<sup>86</sup> Jensen (2009), pp. 144-146; Torben Kjersgaard Nielsen (2011), pp. 172-173.

<sup>87</sup> John Canaparius (1841), p. 594.

<sup>88</sup> Herbord (1886), p. 787, for example.

crusading landscape, it appears that Gnesen as a centre for the Kingdom of Poland's religious history represented that of a pagan enemy. Scholarship on the Order's misdeeds at this time is of particular interest when looking at the spirituality of this re-organized form of crusading after 1291, and the society in which it took place. The Teutonic Knights were still conducting their *Reisen* against pagan Lithuania at the time when the Order was at war with Poland. The group was a group of pilgrims who had come from England and other soldiers. Wigand of Marburg's account of the event implies that the attack on Gnesen, the centre of Christianity in Poland due to the 997 martyrdom of St Adalbert of Prague, came about from an impatient group of knights eager to get the combat experience that they so desired.<sup>89</sup> The new style of crusading that it came to associate itself with was party to the sack of Gniezno.

The annexation of Pomerelia, the attack on Gnesen, and the resulting trials show that the need to reform within the Order was very much a real thing. The transfer of the seat of the Grand Masters to Prussia in 1309, in the aftermath of the attack, points to the role that this event played in the Order's attention to its Prussian territories. The wars against the heathen and the necessity for the Order to propagate itself (and the land of Prussia) in spiritual terms finds a very solid foundation when we consider the events that took place at this time.<sup>90</sup> That the Order's chroniclers are relatively silent, but clearly reflect the effects of this spiritual revival of the fourteenth century in their portrayal of the Order and its mission, is curious.

### **Conclusions:**

The above analysis shows, in particular, the complexity of crusading in the Teutonic Order's Prussian lands in the fourteenth century. After the loss of the Holy Land in 1291, in the case

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<sup>89</sup> Wigand of Marburg (1863), pp. 479-480: "Nam eodem tempore multi peregrini de Anglia advenerant, Thomas de Offart, comes etc.; tandem fratres cum copia trans Wislam transeunt et multa mortalitate, incendio et vastacione terram consumunt."

<sup>90</sup> Paravicini (1989), p. 24.

of the crusades to Prussia, the fighting for the faith had indeed not stopped in the slightest. The theme of re-organization is particularly important in the case of the Teutonic Order in Prussia, since it shows that these efforts were instrumental in its survival and in the survival of crusading as holy war. The first segment, providing a background to the Order and the foundation of its crusade landscape in Prussia, demonstrated the effects of its spiritual reforms with respect to Prussia as a place of holy war and armed pilgrimage. Memory of the early conquests was essential to legitimising those later reforms and re-organizations in the Order. This established the importance of Prussia as a place for crusading, in addition to laying the groundwork for looking at the Order's image and the effectiveness of its re-organization after the loss of Acre.

Segment two looked at this image of the Order, focussing on how the Order propagated itself and this landscape in the fourteenth century to Christendom. These crusades, and the landscape in which they took place, were quite popular. They show the popularity of the Order's descriptions of Prussia as a Marian landscape for crusading. While this has been an extensive topic of research, with various interpretations, in the context of this paper and the broader theme of the volume, it was also a powerful tool that grew from the Order's spiritual revival and had a positive effect on the continuation of crusading.

These merged to highlight the extent to which this ideology emerged from the events that tarnished the Order's image in the fourteenth century. The annexation of Pomerelia, the attack on Gnesen, and other external factors like conflicts with the Church of Riga, can be traced to the emergence of this need for a re-orientation of the Order's priorities. The effects of these events were monumental in continuing the crusading ideals and the development of Prussia as a crusading landscape in the fourteenth century. While the memory of the loss of the Holy Land was fresh in the mind of the chroniclers, evinced in the introductory quote, it's

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essence and miraculous qualities were also applied to other regions of crusading. Peter's call to rescue the Holy Land could thus be understood as a call to continue the wars against Christendom's enemies in general, to re-focus their objectives as crusaders by supporting the Order, and to support the Order's Prussian state as a new form of Jerusalem.