THE NORTHERN CRUSADES

NEW EDITION

'The verve and vigour of Eric Christiansen's study illuminates developments vital in the early history of Eastern Europe and brings to life a story that had epic dimensions' – Maurice Keen

ERIC CHRISTIANSEN

on east-Baltic heathendom involved not only Germans and Danes, but also members of the surviving Slav dynasties – the princes of Rügen in 1219 and 1279, the prince of Mecklenburg in 1218. The crusade had become an integral part of the Christian culture they had been forced to accept.

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THE ARMED MONKS: IDEOLOGY AND EFFICIENCY

The story so far has been of the conquest of the west-Baltic heathen by Saxons and Danes. With the thirteenth century, the warships and field-altars set out for the eastern Baltic, and the picture becomes more complicated. In this chapter and the two following, parallel events and themes will have to be dealt with successively. New forces and people from outside the North make their appearance in this region, and the first thing that must be dealt with is an element that came to shape the whole history of Prussia, Livonia and Estonia: the religious military order.

VARIETIES OF MONASTIC KNIGHTHOOD, 1128–1237

These associations of monkish knights were not originally intended to colonize, domineer, convert the heathen or make profits. The first aims of the Templars, for example, were to live lives of poverty and chastity while defending or recovering the Temple and Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem. The German Order of St Mary began in the same way. However, the accidents and adjustments which led them to become conquerors and rulers involved their committing the worst excesses of the world they had renounced. The atrocities of the Teutonic Knights fill books, if not this one.

Violence and religion had long been friends before this particular merger was arranged, even if only metaphorically. 'Thou art God's soldier' wrote St Paul (2 Timothy 2.3); but 'the weapons we fight with are not human weapons; they are divinely powerful. Yes, we can pull down the conceits of men . . .' (2 Corinthians 10.4): by prayer, not by the sword. But later, the term God's or Christ's army was applied to conventional fighters engaged in a meritorious cause, such as a crusade. This perpetuated a very old tradition from the days when, in Gibbon's

words, 'the attachment of the Roman troops to their standards was inspired by the united influence of religion and of honour'.

These, like other, pagan traditions, had been refined and transformed when the Christian emperors took over the old imperial army and civil service in the fourth century. The army had been united in its dedication to the divine emperor; now it was dedicated to Christ through the emperor. Military service was resanctified; by serving Rome with the sword, the legionary served the Church and saved his own soul. A priest was not allowed to become a soldier, because a mediator between God and man had to be free of the taint of blood; but, as late as the twelfth century, the Romans of the Byzantine Empire accepted that a professed monk could continue to serve in the imperial army.

This set of beliefs was extremely durable. It was good enough for Justinian and his successors at Constantinople, and it was good enough for Charlemagne, and the Ottonian and Salian emperors of the west. But here, in the eleventh century, it broke down. By this time the Western emperor was only one among hundreds of military paymasters; anyone who could afford a warhorse, armour and weapons was liable to exercise the military art without respect for the old conventions of what was called 'public war' – that is, war on behalf of the emperor. There had always been such men, but Roman lawyers had dismissed them as brigands, and the Church had condemned them. Now they were so numerous that, if the clergy were to continue moulding society to a Christian model, they would have to come to terms with them. Bishops and abbots could only maintain their rights and property by waging private war, which meant employing whatever warriors they could get, and sometimes leading them in person; it was no longer realistic to bless imperial troops and curse all the rest.

Therefore the clergy had to try and harness the amenable, and suppress or correct the noxious. Monastic knighthood emerged as one of three ways in which this was done.

The first was by encouraging discipline and taboo – to begin with, by restrictive agreements among the princes and prelates who employed the warriors. The Truce of God, the Peace of God, and some aspects of the *Bann* or King's Peace of individual rulers were examples of this. Oaths and treaties also limited the occasions of warfare to certain stated grievances, and the sanction of excommunication was applied to those who broke the rules. The second way was by promoting Holy War,

which meant the recruitment and organization of warriors and clerks to serve what they considered to be the common cause of Christianity, whether in Spain or in Palestine.

However, these two devices did not succeed in turning military service into a Christian calling. Most clerics agreed that it was better not to fight at all than to fight with restraint and honour. By the early twelfth century it was clear that spiritual propaganda had not transformed the knights of Western Europe; only that the rising cost of equipment had made them a more exclusive class, with occasional crusades providing an outlet for the more adventurous, guilty or desperate. And most of the persistent fighting could not be fitted into the two acceptable categories of Just War and Holy War.

The third way came into being thanks to the encouragement and publicity of St Bernard of Clairvaux. He believed both in limiting home warfare and in crusades, but he wanted more; and in the 1120s he believed he had found it, in the shape of a small force of knights who had bound themselves to serve in the crusading kingdom of Jerusalem for life. In effect, they had taken to religious life without ceasing to be warriors. He was so impressed that he wrote his treatise *De laude novae militae*[41] to inspire these knights and publicize what he took to be their ethos.

For he believed that they had reconciled spiritual and earthly warfare. The 'new knighthood' fought two manifestations at once: the Satan in themselves, represented by the imperfections in their bodies and minds, which were repressed by vows of chastity, poverty and obedience; and the outward Satan, manifested in the troops of Islam, whom they encountered in battle. Both were sacred duties; each was assumed to support the other. For St Bernard's concern was both with the 'cause of Christendom' and with the soul of the individual warrior. He was a firm believer in the ruling class, but he wanted its members to be aware of their responsibility to God for the position of power in which he had placed them; since this position involved fighting, fighting had to be justified. Too often, a knight lost his soul in a meaningless private war, or even a tournament; but such dangers could be avoided if the battle was against both self and enemy at the same time. The Cistercians had made labour, as well as prayer, a path to God. Why not war?

It was a subtle view, but rested on clumsy and conventional assumptions. One was that the end justified the means. Another was that war

for the defence of the Holy Places was, or could be, a spiritually meritorious occupation. Another was that Muslims were merely robot agents of Satan's foreign policy. Such beliefs were both popular and respectable at the time, particularly among crusaders. The author of the *Chanson de Roland* summed it up by making Charlemagne's archbishop bless the Christian host before battle with the Saracens, and, 'as their penance, he ordered them to strike'. 'If you die, you will be holy martyrs. You will have seats in Paradise the Great.'[42]

This attitude had no clear theological foundation. From the time of Gregory the Great, a long line of churchmen had argued in favour of a kindly, rational and accommodating approach to the unbeliever, and Bernard himself was later to claim that, since the Church was destined to bring the whole world to Christ through conversion, it was better to argue with the heathen than to fight them. To justify the New Knighthood he assumed that the Templars would only be fighting defensive wars, but on the whole he preferred to avoid the problem. He sanctioned the current detestation of Saracens, and let the prevailing obsession with Jerusalem carry the armed monks on its back.

Thus even in the title-deeds of military monasticism – Bernard's *De laude*, and the Rule composed for the Templars (1129–36) – there were ideas which set the new Orders at an angle from some Christian traditions; but this was no disadvantage. By 1200 the Templars, Hospitallers and Spanish Orders were rich, famous and effective, for in addition to St Bernard's theoretical advocacy they enjoyed three further advantages.

The first was the continuing support of the Cistercian Order and its friends, which assured them of patronage and encouragement from a whole international complex of abbots, bishops and scholars – the dominant spiritual force of that century. They were ivy on the oak that sprang from Citeaux. But equally important was the second advantage, their military efficiency, particularly noticeable in a precarious military situation. Their Rules gave them the discipline, dedication and morale which other crusaders lacked. They were able to recruit selectively, train systematically, replace casualties automatically, and demand lifelong service as a matter of course. It so happened that the Rule of the Templars was a marked advance in military organization, although this was not its main purpose. And, thirdly, the Orders were given lands and money for which they were not accountable to anyone except the pope. Since they were fighting a war, they invested much of this wealth in castles,

and castles brought *dominium* – political power over the surrounding territory.

With these assets the Templars and Hospitallers became the backbone of the Latin cause in Palestine, and therefore an essential component of what was thought to be the right order of things. Which is not to say that they were above criticism. They were complained about almost from the beginning, and their success attracted increasing hostility, but the substance of these criticisms was that the Orders were not living up to the high ideals that they professed – not that there was anything wrong with those ideals. It did them little harm, because at least they could be seen to be shedding their own and Saracen blood in Palestine. They may not have succeeded either in keeping or in recovering Jerusalem, but without their help Outremer would fall.

Therefore, when the emperors Henry VI and Frederick II planned crusades of recovery, it was natural that they should invest in the military Orders, and that they should favour a small group of German knights and priests that had come together at Acre during the Third Crusade. It was accepted that crusading kings should be responsible for recruiting national contingents for crusading armies, and these Hohenstaufen rulers seem to have hoped that a German brotherhood would help them in their task of focusing and maintaining German interest in the Holy Land.

So the Teutonic Order of St Mary's Hospital in Jerusalem was singled out for development by a group of influential princes, and by the popes, at a time when its late arrival and puny growth would seem to have earmarked it for amalgamation with one of the two big Orders. It began about 1190 as a makeshift field-hospital at Acre, apparently using the title of St Mary's, Jerusalem, as an allusion to the German hospital in the Holy City, which had been lost to Saladin three years earlier. These hospitallers were later given property in the city of Acre and round about, and recruited a small police force of knight-brothers; there were probably no more than a dozen to twenty until after 1210. Henry VI got them a charter of incorporation from the pope, and permission to use the Rule of the Templars without having to obey the Master of the temple, but his sudden death in 1197 stopped his crusade, and the Order was left idle.

His son, Frederick II, took the cross in 1215, got the Order's privileges confirmed and extended, and promoted its master, a Thuringian knight

called Hermann of Salza, to the rank of a prince of the Empire – presumably so that he could work with born princes on a footing of social equality. Both emperors and their friends, but particularly Frederick, made donations of land in Italy, Greece, Germany and Palestine. From 1190 to 1210 the Order received eighteen recorded donations; from 1211 to 1230 sixty-one, of which seventeen came from Frederick and his son.[43] At the end of this period the Teutonic Order was a thriving institution, a sturdy miniature version of the other two Orders, with only one important difference: its knight-brothers and priests were all, or nearly all, German. However, since its estates lay all over the Mediterranean, as well as north of the Alps, it could still be described as an international Order.

Both the Hospitallers and the Templars were still inclined to regard it as a potential candidate for incorporation. In the 1240s its master, Gerhard Malberg, went over to the Templars, and the Hospitallers were urging the popes to assign them the Teutonic Order as a dependent brotherhood. And throughout the first century of their existence, to 1291, the knight-brothers of the Teutonic Order remained a copy of the Templars and were dedicated primarily to the defence and advancement of the Latin colonies of the Near East. Their headquarters was the hospital at Acre, their chief citadel the castle of Montfort or Starkenberg thirty miles inland, which was built to dominate the territory gained in 1229 by Frederick's crusade. When they assembled in general-chapters, the venue was always Palestine. The *Magister generalis*, whom the Germans called *Hochmeister*, and we 'grand-master', spent much of his time at the papal and imperial courts, where crusading policy was formulated, but his deputy, the grand-commander, *Grosskomtur*, remained at Acre administrating the order through four local officers: the marshal, the hospitaller, the treasurer, and the *Trapier*, literally 'master-draper' or quartermaster. The names of these officers, and the whole administrative structure, were borrowed from the Templars; and when, in about 1220, the Teutonic Order was authorized to make its own statutes, the result was a virtual transcription of the Rule of the Temple.[44] The Order assisted crusaders of all nationalities, and attracted donations from all over Europe: from the kings of Castile, Sicily, Armenia, England, Sweden and France, as well as from German princes. When in 1258 it at last got the Templars and Hospitallers to acknowledge it an independent equal, it was because it was at one with the other Orders in their commitment

to the Palestine crusade, and rich enough to hold its own in this field. The fact that it had already begun developing in a rather different fashion in other arenas, on the Vistula and Dvina, was irrelevant: it was essentially the same as the other big two, and would perhaps have remained the same, if the fall of Acre in 1291 had not deprived it of its original Palestinian base.

Nor was this the Teutonic Knights' only front against the Muslims. They were also given land near Tarsus in Armenia, a result of the alliance between King Leo II and the Emperor Henry VI, and in 1236 accepted from King Hethum I the huge fief of Haronia, a white elephant that involved them in the defence of his eastern frontier for the time being, and might have drawn them in further, but for his overthrow by the Sultan Baibars in 1266. The bailiwick of Armenia remained their senior territorial grouping outside Palestine until well into the fourteenth century.

Similarly, the patronage of King Ferdinand III of Castile (married to a Hohenstaufen princess in 1219), brought them three castles in Spain and considerable estates north-east of Toledo, and elsewhere in the south, which could only be enjoyed at the cost of assisting in the Spanish *reconquista*.

The price of international recognition and prestige was thus an expensive commitment to the general policies pursued by the other major Orders, and conformity with the ideals which had sustained the whole crusading adventure in Palestine. At the same time, the Teutonic Knights were becoming linked with a different sort of policy, and a variant ideal, which had been fostered by two much smaller and less successful Orders.

These were the Brothers of the Knighthood of Christ in Livonia, *Fratres Militie Christi de Livonia*, commonly known as the Sword-Brothers, and the Knights of the Bishop of Prussia, called Knights of Dobrzyn, or in the German form, Dobrin.

They were different because they were primarily associated not with crusades, but with missions. The Sword-Brothers began at Riga, about 1202, in the household of a German bishop, Albert of Buxtehude (Bekeshovede), who was trying to persuade the Livs to accept Christianity. The mission had already been going for about twenty years by then, but its progress had been continually hampered by two obstructions: the Livs refused to take baptism very seriously or heed what their bishop told

them, and the area at the mouth of the Dvina was continually raided and disorganized by the surrounding peoples. Preaching was not enough; the bishop needed an army. Crusades were tried, and found wanting: the crusaders went home and their work was undone. Albert therefore persuaded a small group of knights to prolong their crusading vow into a religious profession, and take service under him as a permanent garrison. They were to hold the fort at Riga while he went back to Christendom to recruit more crusaders, and while his priests carried on the work of catechism and church-building in the security which their presence would give. If further crusades secured him wider control of the Dvina valley, they were to garrison what had been won. They wore white mantles, like the Templars, with emblems on their left shoulders: a red sword and a small cross.

Some five years later, another missionary bishop, probably a Pomeranian of noble birth, who was attempting to convert and pacify the Prussians, who lived on the lower Vistula, started a similar group. This prelate was Bishop Christian, a Cistercian who had begun his mission in 1206 and was finding the going even harder than Albert of Riga, even when he had the Danish king and the local Polish dukes to protect him. He never managed to get very far into Prussian territory, and he and his dukes were continually harassed by raids from the pagan interior. He needed an efficient body of cavalry to enable him to hold his ground; and the Duke of Cujavia agreed. They recruited some fourteen north-German knights, swore them to the same service as the Sword-Brothers, and gave them a fort at Dobrzyn on the Vistula to defend. By 1222 they were calling themselves *Fratres Militie Christi de Livonia contra Prutenos* and wearing a similar emblem to that of the Sword-Brothers – only, instead of a cross, their sword was surmounted by a star: perhaps the star of Bethlehem that originally led the Gentiles to the truth.

These new Orders differed from the others, and from the Teutonic, in three main respects. First, they were not autonomous: they were servants of their bishops sworn to obey and protect them. Secondly, they had very little land other than what they could conquer for themselves; they had no influential patrons outside their own impoverished and underpopulated marcher lands. Thirdly, their function was to assist the conversion of the heathen, rather than to recapture the Holy Places.

Popes Innocent III and Honorius III took both of them under their protection, and sent letters of encouragement and approval; for a while,

they were *personae gratae* with papalist ecclesiastical opinion. It was questionable whether this new function was compatible with the ideology of military knighthood as it had developed hitherto, but the popes were prepared to stretch the concept of the crusading vow to cover military action in defence of missions, as well as warfare in Palestine. Hence *Non parum animus noster*; hence the appointment of the first bishops to the Estonians and Finns; hence the crusading forces which set sail from Sweden and Lübeck in the 1190s to aid the new mission on the Dvina. Like the 1147 venture, these expeditions were not very efficient either at conquering or at aiding the conversion of the heathen. If they were run by kings, they were little different from the coastal raids that had been carried on by Viking leaders of all beliefs for centuries past. For example, the 1195 'crusade' of Earl Birger of Sweden was destined for the Dvina, but the wind carried it to Estonia, and, when the Estonians offered tribute after three days' harrying, the earl forgot that he had promised to baptize them, and sailed off well pleased with what he had got. Expeditions organized by local bishops did no better. Neither the crusade to Livonia in 1198 nor those from Poland to Prussia in 1222 and 1223 achieved anything durable for the missions they were intended to support. But the Sword-Brothers did.

What was needed was not periodic visitation by forces of undisciplined military amateurs, but a permanent garrison of professionals which would sit out the winter year after year. The rewards of campaigning in the eastern Baltic were not tempting enough to attract secular warriors to such a life, but for military monks the prospect was not nearly as daunting, because they had chosen to live in hardship and labour. Thus, for purely military reasons, new forms of monastic knighthood were instituted on the Vistula and the Dvina, and St Bernard's ideal had to be developed to meet a new situation.

The armed monk of the Baltic had to deal with two classes of people that presented him with problems not solved by the Rule of the Templars: the heathen, or non-Muslim infidel, and the convert, or neophyte. The heathen was not in possession of land or shrines that could be viewed as rightfully Christian, like Palestine and the Holy Places, and he was not necessarily at war with Christendom; could he be left in peace, or must he always be attacked? Ought a Christian warrior to make truces or alliances with him? Was it sinful to accept conditional surrender, or to grant peace on terms? Was the convert to be made use of, and

governed, or given complete freedom? Was he the responsibility of the monks who had conquered him, or of the priests who had baptized him? Could their claims be reconciled? These questions were not merely academic, because both priests and monks were agents of ecclesiastical authority, and for the thirteenth-century clerics authority came from doctrine, and doctrine had to be orthodox. The solutions adopted by the Knights of Dobrzyn and the Sword-Brothers were not altogether orthodox, and, when the Teutonic Order took over what they had conquered and continued their work, it inherited a number of theological problems as well. The part it was called on to play in the North was very different from that required in Palestine.

THE MONASTIC WAR MACHINE, 1225–1309

Between 1225 and 1229 the Teutonic Order was pulled in two directions. The emperor wanted to use it for the crusade to Palestine, and a Polish duke, Conrad of Mazovia, wanted it to defend his duchy against the heathens of Prussia. Duke Conrad had taken part in the unsuccessful crusade against the Prussians of 1222–3, but his main aim was to subjugate other Polish dukes with a view to becoming possessor of Cracow and senior prince of the Polish realm. By intimidating his Northern neighbours, the Order would leave him free to pursue this aim. By entrusting the task to a military Order, he merely followed the example of other East European rulers: the Templars and Hospitallers were already established east of the Oder, and even the Spanish Order of Calatrava held lands near Danzig by this date. However, these Orders were reluctant to fight outside Palestine or Spain; Hermann of Salza's knights may have appeared more biddable, since they had already done notable service for the king of Hungary.

But the Hungarian episode had made Hermann wary. From 1211 to 1225 his men had defended the eastern frontier of Transylvania against the Cumans on the invitation of King Andrew; they had built five forts, and pacified the region known as the Burzenland. But, as soon as they had served their turn, the king accused them of disobeying both him and his bishops, and turned them out. Honorius III had protested, but to no avail. Therefore Hermann decided not to commit the Order to fighting the Prussians until he was guaranteed autonomy; while Conrad waited, he led his men to Palestine with the emperor, and only sent a

detachment to the Vistula in 1229, after he had received full authorizations from Frederick and Conrad to hold the province of Chelmno and future conquests as lordships of the Order. He made no decision to abandon one type of crusade for another; the Prussian venture was training for further Jerusalem crusades as cubbing is for fox-hunting.

Thus the Teutonic Knights had several advantages which their precursors had lacked. First, they entered Prussia with a free hand. The Bull issued at Rimini by Frederick II, the charter sealed on the bridge at Kruszwica by the duke of Mazovia, and the Bulls of Gregory IX were agreed that the Order's main field of activity, fighting the heathen, was to lie outside the scope of any other authority, although the mission was to remain under Bishop Christian. But in 1233 the bishop was captured by Prussian raiders, and he was not released until 1239; he was not there to interfere with the first conquests, and it was not until 1243 that the Order had to share what it had won with other mission-bishops.

Secondly, they were allotted a bigger share of crusading recruitment. This was vital, because without secular crusaders they could attempt no big offensives. Gregory IX put official crusade-preaching for Prussia in the hands of the Dominicans, an Order expanding rapidly throughout Germany in the 1230s, and in 1245 Innocent IV granted full indulgences to all who went to Prussia, whether in response to a papal appeal or the Order's; this was extended to all who stayed at home and merely contributed money in the 1260s. In addition, the whole clergy of Northern and Central Europe was repeatedly instructed to preach for the Prussian war, and the Order was allowed to remit sins on its own account. Whereas Bishop Albert of Riga had been obliged to search out reinforcements for Livonia, the Teutonic Order was overwhelmed with assistance. The first contingent, in 1232, included seven Polish dukes, and in 1233 Margrave Henry of Meissen arrived with 500 knights. The margraves of Brandenburg, the dukes of Austria, and King Ottokar of Bohemia came later. They came because they were already connected with the Order as donors and allies, and because they were Easterners[45] – Prussia was much nearer than Palestine, and full redemption of the crusading vow could be earned in a few weeks. On at least five occasions the opportune arrival of such princes saved the Order from disaster, but the master and marshal of Prussia always had a papal warrant to use the reinforcements as he wished. The moment they ceased to be of use, after the submission of the central Prussians in 1273, they were no longer sent for. There were

to be no Bohemunds coming out as crusaders and setting up states of their own.

Moreover, the Order's liaison with the papacy was much better than that of the Sword-Brothers. While the master was fighting in Prussia, the grand-master kept a close watch on the Curia. When the Prussian Brothers deviated from papal policy, there was usually someone at Rome to deny awkward rumours, correct misunderstandings, and put in a word at the right moment. In the course of the thirteenth century, only Alexander IV and the eccentric Celestine V publicly reproved the Order for its misdeeds; exposure such as the Knights in Livonia had faced in 1235–6 was deferred until the early fourteenth century. Papal legates were not so easy to appease (see chapter 5), but even they could not be in two places at once, and the Order was.

And, finally, the Teutonic Knights were to acquire a vast network of estates outside the Baltic region. Loss of territory and manpower at the front had no serious economic consequences. By 1250 there were already twelve bailiwicks or complexes of lands, revenues and rights within Germany, and the total of commanders who assembled at the general-chapter was over a hundred. There were also bailiwicks all over the Mediterranean, but it was from Germany that the knight- and priest-brothers were recruited, particularly from Westphalia, the Middle Rhineland, Franconia and Thuringia, and, although the Holy Land acted as a counter-attraction to Prussia, it was a diminishing one. Where the knight-brothers held land, they reaped recruits; between 1210 and 1230 the total of recorded donations trebled, and the total of 1230 had doubled by 1290. There were no overall totals of manpower for the medieval period, but it seems likely that in the fourteenth century there were some 2000 knight-brothers and 3000 priests, nuns and sergeants at any given time.[46]

Such were the Order's assets. It remains to ask who joined it, and why.

In 1216 Honorius III had insisted that entrants should be 'military persons' – that is, anyone capable of exercising the profession of arms; but that was a vague category. At the time, it embraced both the rich and the poor, both the territorial prince and the landless mercenary. Of the first fifteen grand-masters, four appear to have been the sons of *minsteriales*, men whose status came from their administrative office in the service of a ruler; five were the sons of knightly landowners, whose

rank came from inherited fiefs; one was the son of a burgher; one was a territorial prince; and four have origins that cannot be traced. Roughly the same proportions seem to have prevailed during the thirteenth century, but, since German society was far from homogeneous at this period, it is difficult to draw general conclusions about the class, status and rank of recruits as a whole. Most were from 'ministerial' (service) families; but, as time went on, and the line between noble and non-noble was drawn more firmly, recruits came from above, if not far above, that line. However, it was not until the 1340s that the grand-master insisted that all postulants must be *wolgeboren*, unless specially exempted. At all times, geography and family tradition were the chief determinants of who became a knight-brother. Thus, between 1250 and 1450, fifteen of the senior officers serving in Prussia came from five noble families owning land in the proximity of Wurzburg, and throughout the period 1200 to 1525 enlistment in the Wurzburg–Nuremberg region was heavy. Hessians and Rhinelanders only rose to prominence in Prussia from 1300 onwards, and Bavarians after 1400; Westphalians and Lower-Rhinelanders always tended to make for Livonia. When factions developed within the Order, they went by 'tongue' or dialect rather than by social origin. When it came to class, the thirteenth-century Brothers were a mixed bag, although none could have been peasants by birth; but they were nearly all Germans.

The national exclusiveness was not insisted on from the beginning. The Sword-Brothers, Knights of Dobzryn and Teutonic Knights just happened to be three among many small bands of superfluous German warriors looking for employment outside Germany, like the Saxons who served the kings of Denmark, Hungary and Bohemia, and the Polish and Pomeranian dukes. The patrons of the Teutonic Order hoped to use it as a means of attracting such warriors further afield, to Palestine, Italy and Armenia; they were more interested in stimulating than in restricting recruitment. As a result, some Poles, Swedes and Franks were admitted.

No similar groups developed in Scandinavia, because in fighting the Northern pagans Scandinavian warriors were enlisted by their kings, and could not embark on independent state-building. Those who were attracted to military monasticism were provided with an outlet by the Hospitallers, who were already established in Denmark and Sweden before the Teutonic Order went to the North.

The Spanish and Portuguese military Orders which developed out of earlier fraternities of knights, priests and townsmen in the period 1150–1220, were similar to the Teutonic Order in being committed to a local crusade against the infidel, and in their nationally biased recruitment, but very different in other ways. They were founded because Spanish kingdoms and churches were already irretrievably committed to a Holy War; the Teutonic Order was developed because most German princes were not. Thus the Spanish Orders served their kings and bishops; the Teutonic Knights attempted to make rulers and prelates serve the crusade. Their original purpose was to use Germans to extend Christendom, not to expand Germany.

The Rule laid down that candidates for admission as knight-brothers should be able to give satisfactory answers to the same five questions that were asked of postulant Templars. Do you belong to any other Order? Are you married? Have you any hidden physical infirmity? Are you in debt? Are you a serf? Five noes, and then the candidate had to give five yeses. Are you prepared to fight in Palestine? Or elsewhere? To care for the sick? To practise any craft you know as ordered? To obey the Rule? Then he made his profession:

> I, Cuno von Hattenstein, do profess and promise chastity, renunciation of property, and obedience, to God and to the Blessed Virgin Mary, and to you, Brother Anno, Master of the Teutonic Order, and to your successors, according to the Rules and Institutions of the Order, and I will be obedient to you, and to your successors, even unto death.[47]

He was then admitted, and subjected to a regime that was intended to ensure that at all times he played two roles, that of monk and that of knight, with equal efficiency. His life was governed by the Rule (approved by the legate, Cardinal William of Sabina, before 1245), by the Institutions, and by the *Consuetudines maiores*, sets of regulations inspired by the Rules of the Templars, Hospitallers, the Order of the Holy Spirit and the Dominicans. Further ordinances were added by the grand-masters, so that the whole collection formed a sizeable law-book; copies had to be kept in every commandery, read out in full three times a year, and sections expounded every Sunday.

These texts insisted on a full routine of religious observances. The knight-brother was expected to recite the offices throughout the day, both inside the convent and on active service, using the somewhat

streamlined form of liturgy which the Dominicans had adopted, to give them more time for their ministry. It seems that this practice was rigidly enforced. In 1344, Grand-Master König got the pope's permission to begin the first mass just before dawn, while on campaign, because the days were so short in winter that the knight-brothers had to be ready to move while it was still dark. Nevertheless, the hallowing of the sacrament had to be timed so as to coincide with the first rays of the rising sun.[48] In camp, the master's or the marshal's tent became the church of the army, and the full cycle of hours had to be performed within hearing of the guards, at a portable field-altar. Whereas the Templars had been made to receive the sacrament only three times a year, the Teutonic Knights had to communicate seven times, and the incidence of their fasts was painfully heavy. There was Lent, and a further meatless season lasting for most of November and December; nor could meat be eaten on any Monday, Wednesday, Friday or Saturday, or any one of twenty other stated fast-days. Eggs, milk, porridge and water formed their staple diet.

Military and monastic discipline went together. They were expected to perform all the duties of knighthood, and allowed few of the privileges. Their equipment and armour were uniform, each man being issued with a pair of shirts, a pair of breeches, two pairs of boots (neither loose nor tight), one surcoat, one sleeping-bag, one blanket, one breviary and one knife. He could have two or four mounts as ordered, but they were not his own; they belonged to the convent. He was not allowed to consort with laymen, and his fur-coat had to be cheap: goatskin or sheepskin. He had to sleep in his shirt, breeches and boots, and was not allowed to put a lock or fastening on his box. He had to remain silent at meals and in dormitory, on the march and in the latrine; his only lawful amusement was the solitary one of wood-carving. All the courtesy and conviviality of secular knighthood was forbidden. He could not display his own coat of arms, if he had one: argent, a cross sable, was good enough for all. He was not allowed to joust, or to hunt most forms of game; he could kill only wolves and bears, but without the assistance of hounds. He could let his beard grow, but his hair had to be short and neat.

The only objective was efficiency, to get the squadron of knight-brothers acting as one man under the absolute authority of the marshal. Therefore the marshal could use his club on the Brothers in battle, and his rod in camp. Mobilization, parades, route-marches, pitching camp,

guard-duty, and conduct in the field were all regulated by an undeviating routine, and carried out in silence. As there could be no individual shares of booty, no individual cuts of ransom money, and, as a knight-brother could own neither his horse nor his sword, he was not like his secular counterpart. Although he had no property, he was allowed and encouraged to trade for the profit of his house, at a time when this was not considered a proper occupation for worldly warriors.

Nevertheless, he was expected to kill, intimidate and govern. Since he believed that he was advancing Christianity thereby, he could reconcile these activities with his religious vocation; whether they could be reconciled with religious conduct is another matter. As for chastity, the knight-brother was exposed to strong temptations, because war and power continually put women at his mercy. They were booty, and the expectation of raping them was what kept his native auxiliaries up to the mark. Some Brothers must have joined in, as witness the partisan but not unbelievable evidence of Polish deponents describing incidents in the war of 1329–32. A knight testified that the Brothers of the Order had raped more women than had their Old Prussian underlings, and a burgher had watched the women being dragged to their tents.[49] The temptations of active service must often have proved irresistible, but it does not follow that the vow of chastity was ignored or taken lightly. It may well have been taken all the more seriously. The chronicler Peter of Dusburg quoted with approval the example of the commander of Königsberg, Berchtold Bruhave (1289–1302), who went through the reverse of a trial marriage before joining the Order. He chose the prettiest girl he could find, and slept with her for a year without touching her. 'Ecce, mira res et stupenda', wrote Dusburg.[50] Those who lacked Bruhave's strength of mind had to use pain as an antidote, wearing their mail-shirts next to the skin until the raw flesh rusted the metal. Some were said to have been helped by miracles. The terrible Johann von Gilberstedt of Halle had been so vigorous in secular life that even after receiving the last rites he had been moved to rape his nurse. However, devils had then picked him up and thrown him into a distant marsh, from which he had crawled into the Order as a humbled penitent. It seems that in the minds of most Brothers sexual passion and the cult of chastity fought a continual war, which neither could win; but it is worth noting that Commander Albert of Meissen composed a special prayer to avert incontinence: 'O highest joy, give us a true love of thee,

and a pure life, give us a clean conscience, and protect us from lust.'[51]

The spiritual motive of the Teutonic Knights, and of all crusaders, was the desire for atonement through service. The method chosen may seem bizarre, especially when contrasted with the ministry of love carried on by the Franciscans for the same purpose, but the Teutonic Knights and the friars worked together, and had this in common: they were both trying to achieve redemption and holiness without cutting themselves off from the practical world. Their Orders expanded most vigorously at the same time, between 1220 and 1250, and were seen as complementary; they shared a monastic dedication to an unmonastic way of life. And, as long as most Latin Christians accepted the fight against the heathen as a laudable and holy enterprise, it made as much sense to become a knight-brother as to become a Friar.

While the knight-brothers were the dominant caste within the Order, they were not the only members. The task of running their parishes and hospitals was left to Priest-Brothers, Half-Brothers, and sisters, so that the ministries of charity, education and preaching were affiliated to the war machine. By 1400 the order ran one hospital at Elbing, where the duty of attending – but not treating – the indigent sick was performed in accordance with the regulations established by the Order of St John, which required hospitallers to treat the inmates as 'our lords, the poor'. This meant providing alms, asylum and masses, rather than medicine, and in towns, hospitals were run by burghers, not Brothers. The success of this ministry may be judged by the fact that in 1229 the Order's Rule was adopted by the English hospital of St Thomas of Canterbury at Acre, at the request of the bishop of Winchester.

Just as the Teutonic Order was able to exploit and adapt various strains of religious feeling, so its Northern crusade was greatly assisted by Germans who were drawn to the same region for purely secular reasons. The Gotland association of German merchants engaged in the Russia trade had led the way in the later twelfth century, and Bishop Albert of Livonia had made use of German emigrants to reinforce his see at Riga with a new borough, and to help hold down the country by accepting rural fiefs. This pattern of town-building and enfeoffment was followed by the Teutonic Knights from the beginning; each newly gained Prussian district was given a settlement of burghers and a sprinkling of knightly vassals, to act as a source of income and military service for the Order.

As early as 1233, in the charter issued for the settlements at Chelmno (Kulm) and Torun (Thorn) – the *Kulmischer Handfest*[52] – Hermann of Salza laid down what he considered the right political conditions for his burghers. This charter granted a measure of independence to the townsmen, but reserved for the Order a share of the profits of justice, an annual rent, the right of coining money, military service, and ownership of the territory round the town. This 'law' – derived from the town-law of Magdeburg, and conceded by all colonizing princes – was less favourable to the townsmen than the *Lübisches Recht* granted to the coastal cities of Riga, Reval, and Elbing, which allowed them control of their own districts and an independent militia, and it was not until 1255 that the Order was strong enough to insist on Kulm Law for all future incorporations; but thereafter it provided an acceptable arrangement for co-operation between the Order and its towns, and encouraged further immigration. The alliance was crucial, because it linked the conquests of the Order to the most powerful social catalyst in the east Baltic region: the German borough. The wealth, industry and ingenuity of these new settlements made them the *taches d'huile* of Prussia and Livonia, from which trade, culture and technology seeped out into the forest and marsh and transformed the tribal societies round them more effectively than conquest and baptism.

During the conquest, both the Sword-Brothers and the Teutonic Knights had the advantage of innovations made available to them largely as a result of their close contact with the merchants, colonists and craftsmen of Germany. These men had been entering the Baltic world in increasing numbers since the chartering of Lübeck in 1158, and the destruction of Wendish sea-power by the Danes gave them free and profitable access to the Novgorod trade route in their own ships. The most important of these innovations was the bigger ship, whether the enlarged Scandinavian *byrthing*, quadrupled in capacity and fitted with inboard rudder and decks, or the well-rounded high-sided *kogge*. 'Cog' had originally been the name given to any ship with a straight stem and stern, set at an angle to the keel, but towards the end of the twelfth century the Germans appear to have discovered a way of using this shape for a pre-eminently capacious vessel, steered by a true rudder rather than a starboard oar. A cog could carry 500 passengers, or a town's supplies for a whole winter; it could be used as a fighting ship, and outmatch the raiding-craft of the Balts (see page 101) and, in time,

compete with the long-ship. It was the perfect transport for carrying reinforcements through pirate-infested waters, and the essential economic link between new merchant communities and well-established markets. In combination with the river-boat – the *bolskip* and other forms of lighter – it gave the knights a great logistical advantage, even if they had no cogs of their own until later.

Another innovation was the stone tower. The Teutonic Knights were experienced castle-builders in Palestine, but in the North they had to begin without labour, without local skills and with few deposits of workable stone; they had to make do with wooden blockhouses ringed by pallisades. Valdemar I had proved how effective brick towers could be as coastal defences, but the art of brickmaking was not yet widely known in the North outside Denmark, and, in any case, it needed manpower and settled conditions not available in the east Baltic. The alternative was masonry, a skill well established among the Saxons since counts began putting up stone castles in the early twelfth century; and it appears to have been emigrant masons from Germany who enabled the Knights to replace their first blockhouses with towers, and thus escape their enemies' most dangerous weapon, fire. There were probably no more than five such towers in Prussia by the 1250s, and perhaps ten in Livonia, but their importance was crucial: they kept small garrisons alive when they would otherwise have been overwhelmed. In the fourteenth century brick would succeed stone as a cheaper and more readily available material.

And, finally, there was artillery – especially the crossbow, which had become a favourite weapon of the German merchant-venturer by 1200, and an indispensable arm of city militias. It was not a knightly instrument, and it was not the Sword-Brothers or Teutonic Knights who brought it to the North, but without it they would not have won their early struggle for survival; its accuracy and penetrating power shortened the odds considerably in the battle between many and few. Magnified into the ballista, or giant catapult, and mounted on a tower or wall, it became a weapon that could fell groups of men in close-packed assault, and deter attackers from otherwise flimsy defences.

These three examples are chosen for their immediate usefulness in the waging of war, but there were other innovations, in the fields of building, tool-making, ironwork, pottery, husbandry, fishery and carpentry, which gave material substance to the claim of the armed

knights that they were making new societies out of barbarian lands. These changes did not come out of mass-books, or from Rules that bound their observers to lives of material austerity; they came from a necessary partnership with secular Germans obsessive in the pursuit of profit, land and lordship, and infectiously ingenious at getting what they wanted. North-East Europe was about to succumb to a combination of religious and economic forces which its home-grown civilizations had few means of resisting, but to which they adapted with variable success. By 1300, Low German, the language of Lübeck but not of the Prussian Knights, had become the common language of business throughout the region, from the North Sea to Novgorod, and all the peoples round the Baltic were competing for shares in the increasing wealth of the North. In this scramble, Teutonic Knights, crusaders, colonists and natives were competitors, unequally matched.

4

THE CONQUEST OF THE EAST BALTIC 1200–1292

During the thirteenth century, the east Baltic world described in chapter 1 was transformed by military conquest. First, the Livs, Letts and Estonians, then the Prussians and the Finns, underwent defeat, baptism, military occupation and sometimes dispossession or extermination by groups of Germans, Danes and Swedes. Four new countries were born: the 'dominions' of Livonia and Prussia, and the 'duchies' of Estonia and Finland, all firmly anchored to Latin Christendom and open, to a greater extent than ever before, to the influx of people, ideas, trade and technical innovations from the West. In 1200 the limit of Latin Christendom could be taken as a line running 700 miles north from Danzig, by way of Gotland and the Åland islands to the mouth of the Umea river on the Swedish coast. By 1292 it ran between 150 and 300 miles east of that line, including a land-mass equal in area to the whole of Britain and supporting a population probably less than a quarter of the supposed 5 millions then inhabiting Britain. All this conquering was in some sense a fulfilment of the programme first put forward by Alexander III in *Non parum animus noster*. A new archbishopric and eight new bishoprics shared responsibility for these souls, many of them new converts or still unbaptized, and garrisons of knights and armed monks were posted along the new frontier to keep them from the world of heathendom and Greek Orthodoxy that lay to the east. For knights and armed monks had carved these lordships and bishoprics on the backs of indigenous populations for whose benefit all holy writ had been simplified into the catch-phrase 'Compel them to come in.'

LIVONIA

The best-documented conquests were those undertaken by the military Orders, and the first of these was the subjugation of the peoples who were brought together under the authorities of Livonia by the bishop