

THE DEPICTION OF WOMEN IN THE HISTORICAL NARRATIVE OF THE GERMAN ORDER

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This paper will focus on the portrayal of women in the *Livländische Reimchronik* and Nikolaus von Jeroschin's *Kronike von Pruzinlant*, the two earliest German language chronicles written by members of the German Order to describe the conquest of Livonia and Prussia.¹ The portrayal of women in these crusade narratives has to date received remarkably little attention. At the beginning of the twentieth century WALTHER ZIESEMER touched on Jeroschin's depiction of women in his comparison of Jeroschin's chronicle with its Latin source.² He established that women feature more prominently in Jeroschin's version of the chronicle and speculated that some of the women in question may have been the wives and daughters of colonists. This group is mentioned in Dusburg's version but is discussed sympathetically and at much greater length by Jeroschin. The only recent article which focuses wholly on the portrayal of women in the chronicles of the German Order is RASA MASEIKA's 1998 account of the role of women warriors in the Baltic crusade.³ Her article describes the depiction of women's role in warfare but does not touch on the broader issue of the portrayal of women's contribution to and experience of the crusades in the Baltic. Two recent authoritative surveys of the production and reception of literature and chronicles in the Baltic likewise fail to address this gap, in spite of a broad coverage of new research in the area.⁴

The relative lack of research into the depiction of women in the Baltic chronicles was mirrored until recently in the research into accounts to the Latin East. However, MEGAN MCLAUGHLIN's 1990 call for an exploration of gender roles in the crusades has led to an increasing interest in the portrayal of women in crusade

¹ Nicolaus von Jeroschin, *Die Kronike von Pruzinlant*, *Scriptores Rerum Prussicarum* 1, ed. by ERNST STREHLKE, Leipzig 1861, pp. 291-624; *Die Livländische Reimchronik*, ed. by LEO MEYER, Paderborn, 1876, reproduced Hildesheim 1963. Lines references in the text are from these editions.

² WALTHER ZIESEMER, *Nicolaus von Jeroschin und seine Quelle*, Berlin 1907, here pp. 90-2.

³ RASA MASEIKA, "Nowhere was the fragility of their sex apparent" *Women Warriors in the Baltic Crusade Chronicles*, in: *From Clermont to Jerusalem: the Crusades and Crusader Societies*, ed. by ALAN V MURRAY, Tournhout 1998, pp. 229-48.

⁴ *Mittelalterliche Kultur und Literatur im Deutschordensstaat in Preussen: Leben und Nachleben*, ed. by JAROSŁAW WENTA, SIEGLINDE HARTMANN and GISELA VOLLMANN-PROFE, Toruń, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Mikołaya Kopernika, 2008; *Crusading and Chronicle on the Medieval Baltic Frontier. A Companion to the Chronicle of Henry of Livonia*, ed. by MAREK TAMM, LINDA KALJUNDI and KARSTEN SELCH JENSEN, Farnham 2011.

narrative.⁵ The bulk of this research has originated in Anglo-Saxon academic circles, and focuses primarily on the crusades to the Holy Land.⁶ Recent German contributions to this field include CHRISTINE DERNBECHER's dissertation and SABINE GELDSETZER's overview of women's contribution to the crusades to the Middle East.⁷ GELDSETZER's overview of the visibility of women in her sources suggests that they are described "vorrangig als Opfer von Kriegshandlungen und Naturkatastrophen, im Umfeld großer Männer, sowie als potentielle Objekte männlicher Begierde."⁸

The fact that interest in women in the crusades has only emerged relatively recently is unsurprising. As DEBORA GERISH points out, women have largely been invisible because histories of crusades and analyses of crusade narrative have focused on the call to holy war, the justification of the crusade, and campaigning and military prowess: these were the priorities and prerogatives of the men and clerics who wrote the accounts.⁹ The chronicles of the German Order fulfil these conditions twice over, having been written by men who were also knight or priest members of a military order. It might therefore be expected that women would have relatively little prominence in the accounts. MEGAN MCLAUGHLIN, however, also argues that in the Middle Ages women had a greater opportunity to participate in warfare, 'because military organization in that period was essentially domestic in character.'¹⁰ While women may not have taken part in person in the crusades of the military orders, their presence and influence may be felt in the lives of recruits and lay crusaders. The crusades in the Baltic also led to the establishment of towns and permanent German

⁵ MEGAN MCLAUGHLIN, *The woman warrior: gender, warfare and society in medieval Europe*, in: *Women's Studies* 17 (1990), pp. 193-209. DEBORAH GERISH also envisages the application of gender theory to crusading history as a source of new insights: *Gender Theory*, in: *Palgrave Advances in the Crusades*, ed. by HELEN NICHOLSON, Basingstoke 2005, pp. 130-147.

⁶ See HELEN NICHOLSON, *Women on the Third Crusade*, in: *Journal of Medieval History* 23, 4 (1997), pp. 335-349; *Gendering the Crusades*, ed. by SUSAN B. EDGINGTON and SARAH LAMBERT, Cardiff 2001; CATHERINE HANLEY, *War and Combat, 1150-1270: the evidence from Old French literature*, Cambridge 2003, on women pp. 86-90; CHRISTOPH T. MAIER, *The roles of women in the crusade movement: a survey*, in: *Journal of Medieval History* 30 (2004), pp. 61-82; ALAN FOREY, *Women in the Military Orders in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries*, in: *Hospitaller Women in the Middle Ages*, ed. by ANTHONY LUTTRELL and HELEN NICHOLSON, Aldershot 2006, pp. 43-69; NATASHA HODGSON, *Women, Crusading and the Holy Land in Historical Narrative*, Woodbridge 2007.

⁷ CHRISTINE DERNBECHER, "Deum et virum suum diligens": zur Rolle und Bedeutung der Frau im Umfeld der Kreuzzüge, St Ingbert 2003; SABINE GELDSETZER, *Frauen auf Kreuzzügen*, Darmstadt 2003.

⁸ GELDSETZER [note 7], p. 11.

⁹ GERISH [note 5], p. 135.

¹⁰ MCLAUGHLIN [note 5], p. 201.

settlements in the area. The women settlers would have experienced the dangers and challenges of life on an unsettled frontier and been confronted by the reality of raids on their settlements and threats to their lives and livelihoods. This paper aims to contribute to our understanding of these issues by showing how women were seen by the men who chronicled the conquest of Livonia and Prussia, investigating who these women were and their role in the chronicles, and finally tentatively exploring what the portrayal of women in the narratives may tell us about the purpose and expected reception of the chronicles.

The first of the two chronicles, the *Livländische Reimchronik*, is thought to have been finished by around 1290 and is the oldest surviving example of a chronicle written within the German Order to record its wars. It is generally assumed to have been written by a knight member of the order. The author's identity is unknown, but the consensus appears to be that he was a knight, possibly one of the knights sent as reinforcements from Germany after the Order's defeat in 1278.¹¹ This judgement appears to be borne out by the overall tone and content of the chronicle: scholars are generally agreed that it demonstrates the "eindeutliches Primat der kriegerischen Aktion."¹² This being the case, it might be expected that women do not feature prominently in the *Livländische Reimchronik*.

A survey of the references to women in the text appears to confirm this expectation. In general they have a peripheral role. The chronicle has been criticised for its "Formelhaftigkeit", and the depiction of women by and large conforms to this judgement.¹³ They are portrayed as a largely anonymous group with specific, stereotypical, roles in the accounts of the conquest in which they are generally helpless bystanders. Their depiction is framed by *topoi* typical in crusading narrative. Women's fragility and unsuitability for war is a commonplace with its roots in

¹¹ UDO ARNOLD, in: *2VL* 5 (1985) col. 855-62; ALAN V. MURRAY, The Structure, Genre and Intended Audience of the Livonian Rhymed Chronicle, in: *Crusade and Conversion on the Baltic Frontier 1150-1500*, ed. by ALAN V. MURRAY, Aldershot 2001, pp. 235-52; LUTZ MACKENSEN, Zur deutschen Literaturgeschichte Alt-Livland, in: *Baltische Lande 1 Ostbaltische Frühzeit*, ed. by CARL ENGEL, Leipzig 1939, cited in *The Livonian Rhymed Chronicle*, ed. by JERRY C SMITH and WILLIAM L URBAN, Bloomington 1977, p. xxii. An overview of the debate on the chronicle's authorship is given in EDITH FEISTNER, MICHAEL NEECKE and GISELA VOLLMANN-PROFE, *Krieg im Visier. Biblepik und Chronistik im Deutschen Orden als Modell korporativer Identitätsbildung*, Tübingen 2007, pp. 89-93.

¹² EDITH FEISTNER et al, [note 11], pp.79-105, here p. 87. See also ALAN V. MURRAY [note 11] pp. 235-52.

¹³ See NEECKE [note 11], pp. 91-94.

classical antiquity.¹⁴ In the chronicle it is obliquely referred to in a mention of men being cut down like women, *sam die wîp*, (line 1933) because they have lost their armour. Women's traditional role is not to fight, but to remain on the sidelines and mourn the dead, which they are reported as doing here for both the Christian and heathen casualties (see lines 582; 1146-7; 8517). Beyond these peripheral roles, women feature in the action mainly as ciphers in a patriarchal, warrior based society, whether as part of men's households or as economically valuable plunder. They appear, for example, among the inventory of their men's chattels when heathen leaders choose to convert to Christianity. Tusche and his men go to the Master with:

*die wîp und ouch die kinder,
ochsen unde rinder
und allez daz sie hâten. (2897-2899).*

(See also 298; 2789-91; 2819-20; 5779-82). By far the most frequent references are formulaic descriptions of their fate after battles. They are indiscriminately and anonymously killed by both Christians (1454-5; 1665-7; 3320-3; 7048) and heathens (3760 and 4715-8). They are listed among the spoils of war, often as part of a catalogue of other useful plunder:

*man wîp unde megede
rinder unde pferde
vûrten sie vil werde
gebunden und gevangen.
Wol was ez in ergangen. (7290-9)*

The majority of the accounts of women prisoners refer to Christians capturing heathen women (678-9; 1215-6; 1721-3; 4255-8; 7381-2; 8042-3; 9165-7), but the capture of Christian women by the heathen is reported equally matter-of-factly (1489-90; 1755). These accounts are undoubtedly historically accurate, but YVONNE FRIEDMAN suggests that the formulaic way in which they are described may also be a

¹⁴ See Sarah Lambert, *Crusading or Spinning*, in: EDINGTON and LAMBERT [note 6], pp. 1-15; here p. 3.

literary *topos* taken from biblical texts.¹⁵ The formulaic language certainly emphasises the sense that the women here are presented simply as booty, with no sense of their individual plight. This may stem from a lack of interest, or possibly the unwillingness FRIEDMAN suggests Christian chroniclers may have felt about dwelling on the fate of women captives.¹⁶ However, the plight of prisoners, including women, could be evoked in general terms in order to motivate the warriors.¹⁷ Before setting off to recapture a number of Christian prisoners, Brother Marquart addresses his men with an appeal to their feelings of solidarity with the prisoners:

*... 'gedenket, helde gût,
daz ûwer vleisch und ûwer blût
hie vor ûch stat gebunden.
zû disen selben stunden
sul wir lâzen hie den lîp,
wir enlôsen man und wîp.'* (1757-60)

They later release the children, women and men 'lovingly' '*lieblîche*' (1794). Here, as in the other examples, however, the mention of the women serves the interests and activities of the warriors, and gives no sense of the women as individuals.

There are nonetheless some references to women in their own right in the chronicle. A nun is recorded falling to her death when the order abandons a castle (8718-28). The date of this event, which, if we accept MACKENSEN's argumentation, happened immediately after the author's arrival, and the fact that it alone is recorded among the many similar events which must have happened during the conquests, suggests that the author or his contemporary sources may have witnessed it personally.

¹⁵ Yvonne Friedman, *Captivity and Ransom: The Experience of Women*, in: EDINGTON and LAMBERT [note 6], pp. 121-139, here p. 121. She suggests Numbers 31: 9; Deuteronomy 21: 10-17 and Samuel 30: 3 as possible models.

¹⁶ FRIEDMAN [note 15], p. 130.

¹⁷ See also HODGSON [note 6], p.49.

Paradoxically, however, most of the references to specific women relate to the heathen. The chronicler, or his source, was evidently aware of the heathen women as a group:

Ir wîb sint wunderlîch gestalt

und haben selzêne cleit. (346-7)

There are also two separate references to their habit of riding astride, like their men, evidently a source of some fascination for the Christians (347 and 9230-1), and a means of reinforcing the 'otherness' of the opponent. The two specific references to heathen women are both examples of female archetypes, as well as being individuals known to contemporaries. One woman, *ein heidensch vrowe gût* (781) named as Emma, who is later said to have converted to Christianity, saves two German prisoners from starving to death by smuggling food past their gaolers (777-802). The passage concludes by wishing her well because: *sie hât mîn dicke wol gepflegen* (799). As MAZEIKA points out, this is an interesting insight into the reality of the situation in the Baltic, where knights' lives might well depend on the attitude of the local people.¹⁸ This incident certainly predates the arrival of the chronicler in Livonia and must have been recorded by his sources. It is probably representative of a number of incidents of this type which have not been recorded but form part of the tacit context of the conquest. The second example illustrates the fate of women who oppose Christianity: a pregnant woman helps her husband deceive and kill a German and her child is born with the wounds she inflicted on her victim (1279-1332).

The only female who features as an actor in the chronicle is Mindaugas' wife Martha. She is first mentioned briefly when she and her husband are crowned by Bishop Heidenreich of Kulm (3543-62), and again when local nobles try to persuade Mindaugas to apostasize (6363-6). When Mindaugas does abandon his allegiance to Christianity she intervenes to save a member of the order with whom she had become friendly, reminding the king that this is what his *êre* demands (6427-6456; 6451). Finally, she attempts unsuccessfully to persuade Mindaugas to return to

¹⁸ MAZEIKA [note 3], p. 241-2. The naming of Emma contradicts GELDSETZER's findings that non-noble women were not named [note 7, p. 12], and emphasises the importance of women like her to the crusaders.

Christianity (6517-86). Little can be established about the historical Martha. On the basis of the evidence from the chronicle she evidently patronised the clerics who inhabited her modernising husband's court and she is regarded as the first in a series of female Lithuanian nobility who supported and promoted the church (6517-86).¹⁹ Her depiction in the chronicle is aligned with the *topos* of idealised *vrowe* of courtly romance, the loyal but helpless female supporter of male exploits.²⁰ When her husband returns from attacking the Christians she takes him aside and asks him what is wrong:

*'do ich mit ougen dich gesach
komen von der herevart,
do sach ich, daz dîn lîp vil zart
was betrûbet harte;
Nû weste ich gerne, arme Marthe,
wie diz heren were ergân:
daz lâz mich herzelieb verstân.'* (6520-6)

Attempts to offer advice elicit appreciation of her constancy, *stêtekeit* (6566), but ultimately an abrupt command not to involve herself in men's affairs, and by implication to stop nagging:

*'Vrowe, diz hân ich getân.
Dise rede lâz bestân.'* (6567-8)

The role of the courtly woman and the relationship between her and the knight was a central concept in the creation of medieval, chivalric masculinity and the figure of Martha is constructed here as conforming to this type. Further reflections of the civilising role attributed to women are evident in two references to widows and orphans, an oblique reference to knights' vows of chivalry in which knights vowed to

¹⁹ See S. C. ROWELL, *Lithuania Ascending. A Pagan Empire within East Central Europe, 1295-1345*, Cambridge 1994, pp. 29, 298.

²⁰ See HODGSON [note 6], p. 23-4 for an overview of the influence of *amour courtois* on the perception of women in later courtly crusade narratives.

protect the weak and helpless. However, in both of these instances in the chronicle the original meaning is subverted and only the vocabulary remains: before one campaign against the Sambians the brothers announce:

daz sie wolden reisen,

wittewen unde weisen

machen mit der gotes craft. (3929-31)

The other reference is equally uncompromising, evoking the grief of newly widowed Russian women and their orphan children (660-65). These references relativise the courtly themes found elsewhere, suggesting they are rhetoric taken from other sources, rather than central to the author's concept of the chronicle.

The portrayal of women in the *Livländische Reimchronik* is therefore sketchy and schematic. It conforms to the *topoi* found elsewhere in crusading narrative and chivalric epic, but nowhere does the reader or listener have any real sense of the lives of the women who demonstrably lived alongside the men during the conquest of Livonia. The purpose of their depiction in the chronicle is to throw into relief the exploits of the men in the foreground. They exist at worst as the inevitable spoils of war and at best as vehicles for pointing a moral or as a reflection of popular stereotypes.

The second chronicle, Jeroschin's *Kronike von Pruzinlant*, was written approximately forty years after the Rhymed Chronicle. It is a translation of the Peter von Dusburg's *Chronicon Terrae Prussiae*, which was almost certainly conceived as an official history of the German Order.²¹ It was written between about 1330 and 1340 at a time when the conquest of Prussia and Livonia was largely complete and the order was coming to terms with its peacetime role as territorial overlord, as well as carrying on the wars against the Lithuanians and other opponents. In contrast to the situation with the Livonian Rhymed Chronicle, the author of the *Kronike von Pruzinlant* can be identified from his own comments in the text (205-220). He was chaplain to the grand master, a role characterised by ARNO MENTZEL-REUTERS as

²¹ Peter von Dusburg, *Chronicon Terrae Prussiae*, ed. by MAX TOEPPEN, *Scriptores Rerum Prussicarum* 1, pp. 3-269; *Chronik des Preussenlandes*, trans. and ed. KLAUS SCHOLZ and DIETER WOJTECKI, Darmstadt 1984.

being “intellektuell und wohl auch politisch im Zentrum der Ordensmacht”.²² Given WALTHER ZIESEMER’s comments, noted above, about the greater emphasis on women in Jeroschin than in Dusburg’s chronicle, and Jeroschin’s central role in the order, it will be interesting to identify what, if anything, this can tell us about the purpose of the vernacular version of the chronicle. First, however, it is necessary to examine the portrayal of women in Jeroschin’s narrative.

The depiction of women in Jeroschin appears to be far more nuanced than in either the earlier chronicle or in Dusburg’s. It is instructive to compare the accounts of the treatment of captive Christian women during the first Prussian revolt in the two versions of the chronicle. Dusburg simply states tersely: *mulieres et parvulos in captivitate perpetuam deducerunt* (III, 34), in a manner reminiscent of the formulaic account of the Livonian Rhymed Chronicle.²³ Jeroschin’s account is much longer and much more sympathetic:

*Da mochte man jamir schouwin
an den edlin vrouwen,
dî da erzogen warin zart,
daz di mustin nu so hart
lidin manchis smachtis pîn
und dabî betwungen sîn
zu pflegelichir arbeit
in vil strengir hertikeit .(6,213-20)*

His greater empathy and awareness of women may suggest a greater awareness of women’s experiences in the wars. However, any sympathy the author may have felt is secondary to his primary aim of promoting the order and the Prussian crusade. This becomes clear in his account of the battle of Woplauken, in which a large number of Christian captives are rescued by the order’s forces. He

²² ARNO MENTZEL-REUTERS, *Arma Spiritualia. Bibliotheken, Bücher und Bildung im Deutschen Orden*, Wiesbaden 2003, p. 31.

²³ The women and children were taken off into perpetual captivity.

uses his powers of empathy in the description of the plight of the women captives to heighten the impression of the wickedness of the heathen and by extension the virtue of the Christians who rescue them. Dusburg refers only to *ultra mille et ducentos captos Cristianos homines* (III, 310).²⁴ In Jeroschin's version these become *juncvrouwin, kinder, wîbe* (23576). Fourteen lines of text with no equivalent in Dusburg (23580-93) describe their fate in graphic detail, concluding:

Ô der nôt sô swinde
dô dî mutir mûste sên
dî tochtir lestirlîchin smên,
dî tochtir ouch dî mûtir. (23587-90)

It may be that the references to rape of mothers and daughters is intended not only to evoke compassion, but also to denigrate to enemy, since this would have been considered by Christian contemporaries as incest. HODGSON cites similar passages in Guibert of Nogent.²⁵ It is undoubtedly also intended instrumentally as a means of motivating the men.²⁶ The order's forces duly defeat the heathen. In Dusburg's matter-of-fact version of the end of this encounter, counter to type, the women kill their captors: *mulieres etiam Cristiane ...immemores fragilitatis sexus sui irruentes repente in Lethowinos, qui eas custodiebant, modo quo poterant occiderunt* (III, 310).²⁷ Jeroschin's version omits this and simply has the captives thank their rescuers, moving the focus of the text from the actions of women to the actions of the men and having the women endorse the men in terms which implicitly confirm their status as God's warriors:

Wir wâren jêmirlich vorlorn:
nu sîn wir andirweit geboren
und von tôde gar irlôst. (23840-2)

²⁴ Twelve hundred captive Christian people (literally: men).

²⁵ HODGSON [note 6], pp. 95-102. Guibert of Nogent, *Dei Gesta per Francos et cinq autre texts*, ed. by ROBERT B.C HUYGENS, Turnhout, 1996, cited in HODGSON, p. 97.

²⁶ Another explicit example of an atrocity against a woman being causally linked to motivating a warrior is in the account of the sister of Martin of Golin. She is taken captive and killed along with her unborn child when she is unable to keep up with the pace of the enemy army (7141-68).

²⁷ The Christian women, forgetting the weakness of their sex, rushed on the Lithuanians who had held them captive and killed them in whatever way they could.

On this occasion Jeroschin omits the probably historically accurate detail of the murderous women, in order to keep the focus on the male warriors. His sympathetic descriptions of women prisoners therefore have to be seen in the context of creating effective crusading propaganda aimed at male warriors as much as expressing sympathy for women for its own sake: these references perform the same function as those in the Livonian Rhymed Chronicle, but more effectively.

Other groups of women are equally vividly described, but also fit largely into the conventional *topoi* of crusading narrative. The female archetype of temptress is the most conventional and one which is present in many accounts of the crusade.²⁸ The threat of women to knights' vows of chastity, already evident in the Rule, is one of the most obvious manifestations of women in the chronicle: the struggle of the lay knight brothers to maintain their vows is attested to in additions to the Rule at the end of the twelfth century²⁹ and anecdotes of men resisting female allure abound in the text (for example 18833-81; 25988-26041). The most extreme of these concerns the woman who shares Bertolt of Brûhaven's bed for a year while he tests the strength of his vocation. The experiment is described in some detail: for a year they lie together *vil nâch alle nacht/nakt in eime bette* (19061-2). At the end of this time the woman takes an oath provides proof that he had not touched her:

daz er sî nî intblûmete,

joch nî unkûschlîch angewant,

sunder lîz, als er sî vant. (19071-3)

Here woman is Eve, the temptress who defeated Samson, David and Solomon, but in this case cannot deflect the crusader from his calling (19018-103).

A further *topos* in crusading narrative, that of the wife who is reluctant to allow her husband to go on crusade, or in this case join the order, is also referred to in the chronicle. Until the beginning of the thirteenth century men needed the permission of their wives to go on crusade. This veto was evidently used in practice, since it had to

²⁸ See MAIER [note 6], p.71; HODGSON [note 6], pp. 135-9 and GELDSETZER [note 7], p. 13.

²⁹ Die Statuten des Deutschen Ordens nach den ältesten Handschriften, ed by MAX PERLBACH, Halle 1890, reproduced 1975, Gesetze Burchards von Schwanden (1289), 2, 3, 5 and 11, pp. 139-40; Gesetze Conrads von Feuchtwangen (1292) 1 and 12, pp. 140-1.

be removed by Innocent III at the beginning of the twelfth century.³⁰ However, memories of such cases evidently still had some resonance in the early fourteenth century. In the case described in the chronicle, Heinrich Kunze's wife's reluctance to do without her husband provides an element of comic relief, while also confirming the Prussian crusades and the order as divinely ordained (22514-623). She is described as *minnenclîch/jung, eddil unde schone* (22529-30). She repeatedly exercises her veto until her resistance is worn down when both are kept awake night after night by hammering on the wall and a voice calling Heinrich to prayer with his brothers:

daz klopfen und der stimmen dôz

bôt irschrecknisse sô grôz

und sô dicke dem wîbe

und unrû irme lîbe

unz sî zu jungist wart sô mat

daz alle wollust von ir trat

und an ir wart sô toube

daz sî im vrîe loube

gab mit irre holde

daz er sich munchen solde

swâ daz in truge dî lust. (22608-19)

The device of the disembodied voice appears to be a motif which occurs in other crusading narratives in this context.³¹ This passage represents a variation on the theme of women as temptress, and the nagging wife identified in the person of Martha in the Livonian Rhymed Chronicle, but the addition of humour and wry

³⁰ See J. A. BRUNDAGE, The crusader's wife: a canonistic quandary, in: *Studia Gratiana* 12 (1967), pp. 427-41, here pp. 428-36, cited in MAIER [note 6], pp. 71-2.

³¹ See HODGSON [note 6], p.109. She notes that Gerald of Wales records an almost identical event: Gerald of Wales, *Itinerarium Kambriae*, in *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera*, 6.1-152, ed. by JOHN S. BREWER, JAMES F. DIMOCK and GEORGE F. WARNER, 1861-91, here 6.15.

domestic detail lifts it above a mere stereotype and gives a sense of a real marital dispute by acknowledging the woman's power.

All of these examples demonstrate that the danger posed to the knights' motivation and chastity by the proximity of women was certainly real and of concern to the order's hierarchy, but the depiction of women as temptresses is also part of a pattern that, as RASA MAZEIKA has pointed out, generally sees women not as individuals in their own right, but as tools for good or evil, the *topos* of the weak woman, in spite, or because of whom, God's power is made manifest. For many of the incidents concerning women, MAZEIKA suggests, 'her sex is of interest only anecdotally, it makes the story livelier and may add titillation, but the main point is the struggle of supernatural forces which transcend human categories such as nationality, profession or sex.'³² A telling example of such instrumental use of women is in the incident concerning the *vil starc Sudouwe* (line 14,753) who chases a Christian woman into a bog with the intention of murdering her. However:

[...] *dô er sî begreif*

von gotis hulfe ir entsleif

ir wîbliche brôde

und angeborne blôde

und begonde sich zu wern (lines 14,7589-63)

After a bout of mud wrestling, and by dint of stuffing his mouth, ears and nose with mud, the woman suffocates the heathen and the text points the moral of the story: *sus wart der starke heidin blas / und das kranke wib genas* (lines 14,783-4). A similar anecdote with the opposite outcome concerns a nun who tricks her captor into killing her to preserve her virginity (lines 26,510-80). This vivid but conventional anecdote appears to be a stock story which appears in several texts.³³

Nonetheless, as MAZEIKA also points out, real women were involved in the fighting in Prussia, whether as combatants or as booty, and these more realistic depictions are also present in the chronicle. It was Jeroschin's particular concern

³² MAZEIKA [note 3], p. 233.

³³ See STREHLKE [note 1], p. 610 (footnote).

with the second group, the wives and children of colonists, which struck ZIESEMER. Women feature surprisingly prominently as actors in a text which is otherwise largely dedicated to male exploits on the battlefield.

An anecdote which probably has its basis firmly in reality and which is not reported elsewhere is that of the women of Elbing who are forced to take up arms to defend their town while their men are away (7807-50). Indeed, as Jeroschin argues, this happened frequently and:

[...] *dî vestin wêrn vorlorn*
gewesin von der vîende plicht
inhettiz undirstandin nicht
dî kûnheit der wîbe
mit werlîchim lîbe (7,842-50)

Accounts of women being forced to defend their homes are not uncommon elsewhere in accounts of crusades.³⁴ MAZEIKA suggests that here the *topos* of women behaving ‘*in menlîchir wîse*’ (line 7,841) refers to the paradigm of Judith, the only manly heroine of the Bible, and that the women of Elbing are being presented as ‘new Judiths’ in the same way that the knights were characterised as the new Maccabees.³⁵ The German translation of Judith dating from 1254 was the first biblical text to be associated with the order and was widely disseminated in the order.³⁶

The local women were not simply obliged to fight. The precarious situation of women colonists is also obliquely acknowledged in an anecdote in which two well-to-do women in Kulm compete to marry an attractive but socially inferior man. Their husbands have been killed and the bishop has offered absolution from their sins if they marry their servants in order to repopulate the city (lines 7293-362).³⁷ The order

³⁴ See HANLEY [note 6], p. 91-2.

³⁵ MAZEIKA [note 3], pp. 233-4.

³⁶ See HENRIKE LÄHNEMANN, *Hystoria Judith. Deutsche Judithdichtungen vom 12. bis zum 16. Jahrhundert*, Berlin 2006, pp. 187-90.

³⁷ HODGSON [note 6], pp. 197-203 notes that in the Middle Ages women were generally expected to remain celibate after having been widowed, having fulfilled what society required of them. This anecdote reflects the extreme circumstances in a frontier settlement.

was dependant on colonists to settle its new towns and the laws they gave these towns, the *Kulmer Handfeste*, acknowledge the important role of women in its unusually generous terms, which included the possibility of inheritance through both the male and female lines.³⁸ The fact that these women were part and parcel of everyday life, and the chronicler's easy familiarity with them, is apparent at several points in the text. Jeroschin describes a servant girl with her skirts kilted up, as if she was about to go on a journey (lines 6481-4). Another famous passage relates to his desire to be cured of his baldness so that he had a full head of hair when he doffed his hat to the ladies (lines 18918-30). ZIESEMER sees in this gesture a reference to knightly practice in chivalric life, but then concedes that it is just as likely to reflect the fact that Jeroschin is in day-to-day contact with townspeople and women.³⁹

All the passages discussed so far can be related to the *topoi* of crusading propaganda or the circumstances of life on the frontier. However not all the women who are sympathetically portrayed in the chronicle are so easily categorised. A further passage discusses the morality of prostitution and concludes with a verdict which is much more nuanced than might be expected. It is reported that while Conrad of Thuringia, who later becomes grand master of the order, is still a lay nobleman he attends a boisterous party and is tempted by a prostitute: *do kam ein ledic vrouwil gân* (9,380). The encounter is humorous rather than salacious, and the woman in this case, unlike the archetypes discussed above, has a personality in her own right. When Conrad asks her where she has come from, she replies:

[...] *gevirne,*
mit wortin suz vormessin
‘Herre, ich hab gesezzin
in dem gestrûche disin tac
dâ suchinde mînen bejac
dêswar vil vrostic unde naz (9,384-9)

³⁸ See KLAUS MILITZER, *Die Geschichte des Deutschen Ordens*, Stuttgart 2005, p. 74.

³⁹ ZIESEMER [note 2], p. 90.

Conrad makes provision for her so that she is no longer required to prostitute herself. He reflects that while he is contemplating using her services purely for his sinful pleasure, the woman is acting out of economic necessity. This relativises the listener's view of the prostitute and shifts the moral responsibility to her customer. This passage can be read as aimed primarily at male listeners and as a model of the correct attitude to prostitutes. However, it may also reflect the chroniclers' sensitivities to groups of reformed prostitutes who had joined the beguine movement and lived as penitents in religious communities, some of which may well have come under the order's control.⁴⁰

A further group of female participants described in the chronicle are holy women, some of whom may have been members of the women's movement of the thirteenth and early fourteenth century mentioned above. There are three references to unidentified holy women or recluses, reported to be living in German or Prussia, in the text. All of the incidents relate to the period of the second Prussian revolt and are devices by which the chroniclers attempt to establish the legitimacy of the crusade in the face of crushing defeats by the pagans. The first of these relates to the battle of Durben in 1260, when a recluse sees angels transporting the souls of the Christian dead to heaven (10,765-86; 10,787-880). The recluse here is identified as the sister of Conrad of Feuchtwangen, grand master of the order from 1291-96, but nothing further can be established about her identity. The second instance of intervention by a holy woman relates to the battle of Pokarwen in 1261, where a recluse praying in her cell hears devils on the way to the battlefield to collect the souls and learns from them on their return that all the Christians have gone to heaven, except those whose motive for fighting were impure (11,213-50). The final vision relates to the battle at Löbau in 1263, where the Prussian Master Helmerich and 40 brothers were killed. The hermit sees candles on the battlefield, which are interpreted as proof the dead souls were in heaven (lines 2,715-836).

It is notable that the interventions of these 'holy women' date from the period immediately after the re-organisation of Prussia into the four bishoprics of Kulm, Pomesania, Warmia and Sambia during the 1240s in an attempt to put the Christianisation of the territory on a more conventional footing after the successes of

⁴⁰ For a discussion of the women associated with the order see KARL LAMPE, *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Deutschordensschwwestern*, in: *ZfO*, 16 (1967) pp. 45-78.

the early period of conquest. At the same time, the bishopric of Kulm was being established under its bishop the Dominican Heidenreich of Kulm. This priest came to Prussia from Leipzig sometime after 1243 and was bishop until his death in 1263, His reputation as preacher and mystic lived on until at least the fourteenth century, when Bishop Heinrich of Erfurt lists his name alongside those of other mystics.⁴¹ Heidenreich is thought to have been the confessor of Jutta of Sangerhausen, a shadowy figure who came to Prussia to take part in the mission against the heathen and died there, probably in 1264.⁴² Although there is no surviving contemporary documentation for Jutta's life, she was well known during the thirteenth century and is mentioned by Mechthild of Magdeburg in the *Fliessendes Licht der Gottheit* in the same context as St Dominic.⁴³ Tantalisingly, she is not mentioned in the chronicle, but the dates of her stay in Prussia coincide with the dates of the references to the holy recluses. Although probably not a direct reference to her, these sections in all likelihood mirror the growing significance of female mystics as an outlet for women's piety in the thirteenth century. Like the Jeroschin's accounts of the religious processions of laymen and his acknowledgement of the concerns of women settlers, they reflect the increasing importance of the participation of women in all aspects of life in Prussia.

While all of these these anonymous women are mentioned, it is striking that one prominent woman associated with the order and linked to developments in women's piety in the thirteenth century, Elisabeth of Thuringia, later regarded as a patron of the order, along with the Virgin Mary and St George is barely mentioned at all.⁴⁴ Her brother-in-law, Conrad of Thuringia, became grand master of the order in

⁴¹ A. SPAMER, Über die Zersetzung und Vererbung in den deutschen Mystikertexten, Diss. Giessen 1910, p.189, cited in THOMAS KAEPPPELI O.P., Heidenricus, Bischof von Kulm (†1263) Verfasser eines Traktates *de Amore S. Trinitatis*, in: Archivum Fratrum Praedicatorum 30 (1960), pp. 196-205, p. 205.

⁴² For the debate about Jutta's position in the thirteenth century women's movement, see BALÁSZ J. NEMES, Jutta von Sangerhausen (13. Jahrhundert) Eine 'neue Heilige' im Gefolge der heiligen Elisabeth von Thüringen? In: Zeitschrift für Thüringische Geschichte 63 (2009), pp. 39-73, and HANS WESTPFAHL, Untersuchungen über Jutta von Sangerhausen, in: Zeitschrift für die Geschichte und Altertumskunde Ermlands 26 (1938) pp. 515-96. Jutta may have been a member of the family of the Grand Master Anno von Sangerhausen which had been linked to the German Order since the beginning of the thirteenth century. See DIETER WOJTECKI, Beiträge zur Personal- und Sozialgeschichte des Deutschen Ordens im 13. Jahrhundert, Münster 1968, pp. 153-5.

⁴³ GISELA VOLLMANN-PROFE, ed and trans, Mechthild von Magdeburg, Das fließende Licht der Gottheit (Bibliothek deutscher Klassiker 181), Frankfurt am Main 2003, pp.402, 27-404,8, chapter V,34.

⁴⁴ A discussion of the role of the Virgin is beyond the scope of this article. MAZEIKA [note 3], pp. 243-7 notes her role in encouraging warriors. Kurt Gärtner, Marienverehrung und Marienepik im Deutschen Orden, in WENTA et al. [note 4], pp.395-410, addresses this topic in detail.

1239. He was instrumental in securing her canonisation and thereafter her cult and the order were closely linked throughout the thirteenth century, especially in its hospitals in Germany.⁴⁵ In spite of her importance for the order, Elisabeth herself features only marginally in the chronicle, in the section dealing with world events which were contemporary with the events of the chronicle.⁴⁶ There is no discussion of her work or influence. Why this is must remain conjecture, although since most of the women who are mentioned are discussed in the context of warfare or male morality, it may be that her lack of relevance to these issues made her arguably of less interest to the chroniclers in the context of the purpose of the chronicles. This is discussed in greater detail below.

In summary, therefore, the depiction of women in the two chronicles shows a clear shift in terms of content and treatment. The anonymous writer of the Livonian Rhymed Chronicle acknowledges the presence of women, but rarely as more than the necessary backdrop to the exploits of the men. The two versions of the Chronicle of Prussia, however, were sponsored and written by the leaders and leading intellectuals in the order in order to convey a carefully calculated view of the order and its ethos and women figure far more prominently in both versions of the chronicle. Both versions contain references to women in all walks of life. Jeroschin's vernacular version takes this engagement with women a step further still, and conveys a real sense of living and working among the local women. As his changes to the narrative of the battle of Woplauken makes clear, however, this depiction of women is always at the service of his main purpose, which is to glorify the deeds of the order. The holy women, while probably reflecting historical reality, are also cited in the defence of the crusade and not in their own right. The only episodes which deviate from this rule concern the references to the morality of prostitution and the practical concerns of the townswomen, and of these only the second relates solely to women.

⁴⁵ See UDO ARNOLD, 'Elisabeth und Georg als Pfarrpatrone im Deutschordensland Preussen' in UDO ARNOLD and HEINZ LIEBING, eds., *Elisabeth, der Deutsche Orden und ihre Kirche. Quellen und Studien zur Geschichte des Deutschen Ordens* 18, Marburg 1883, pp.169-72.

⁴⁶ Line 1329 announces her birth, in a list of other notable people; lines 1427-31 describes her marriage to Ludwig of Thuringia and lines 1456-66 describe his crusade and death. Lines 3551-5 identify a knight as her former chamberlain. Line 5739-46 states the date of her death, while lines 5801-9 record her canonisation. There is one mention of her feast day to identify the date of a battle (26290) and one to identify the date of the murder of Grand Master Werner von Orseln (27511).

Finally, ZIESEMER's comments about the prominence of women in Jeroschin's chronicle invite questions about the intended purpose of and audience for the chronicles. The traditional belief is that they were intended for reading at mealtimes, and in spite of ALAN MURRAY's reservations about the use of crusade narratives in this context, it seems likely that this was their main use.⁴⁷ As MURRAY suggests, they may also have been used as a tool to inculcate the order's values to visiting crusaders who were entertained in Livonia and at Königsberg in the fourteenth century. In the introduction to his chronicle, Jeroschin is quite specific about his intended audience. He tells us his remit was to translate the chronicle:

ûf daz er sus bedûten

mug allen dûtschin lûten

dî wundir unde zeichin gots

dî nâch gûte sins gebots

in Prûzinlande sîn geschên. (161-5)

The juxtaposition of the gender neutral 'all German people' with the desire to interpret and publicise God's miracles 'in Prussia' suggests that while they may have been the main addressees, both the intended audience and the geographical target area extended well beyond knights in Prussia. Scholars have noted both chronicles' focus on the vocabulary and concerns of lay chivalry.⁴⁸ This tends to confirm suggestions that the chronicles' aim was in part also to attract lay volunteers. If this is the case, the depiction of women appears to be yet another means of constructing an appeal directed primarily to potential and actual male crusaders.

There are, however, also precedents for the notion that women may have been expected as part of the audience: two texts associated with the order explicitly mention women as part of the audience: Hugo von Langenstein's *Leben der heiligen Martina* and Heinrich von Hesler's *Apokalypse*. Both of these date from the late thirteenth or early part of the fourteenth century and are roughly contemporary with

⁴⁷ See MURRAY [note 11], pp. 247-50. MICHAEL NEECKE [note 11], pp. 99-104 makes the case for the Livonian Rhymed chronicle being used primarily, at least initially, as a source of meal-time readings.

⁴⁸ See for example KARL HELM and WALTHER ZIESEMER, *Die Literatur des Deutschen Ritterordens*, Giessen 1951, pp. 149, 158; ZIESEMER [note], pp. 89-92; MURRAY [note 11], pp. 246-248.

the *Kronike von Pruzinlant*. The contemporaneous text *Der Sunden Widerstreit* also refers obliquely to women. Of these, the *Leben der Heiligen Martina* is the most unambiguous. It was written for a community of nuns and is addressed to '*gotis dirnen und knehte*'.⁴⁹ Heinrich von Hesler's *Apokalypse* also refers to women in the audience, requesting that they be asked to leave during readings at points where the material is not suitable for them:

*Des bit ich den lesere,
swen her kumt in diz mere,
daz er mit schonen wizen
-ob dar vrouwen bi sitzen-
entweder her entrumen
oder ober var den lumen,
so daz her in ich durfe sagen;
die man mugen iz baz vortragen.*⁵⁰

ARNO MENTZEL-REUTERS has shown that Hesler's texts were also intended and used for individual study and it seems likely that Jeroschin's chronicle could be used in the same way.⁵¹ If women were intended as part of the audience for this version, it might have been studied at the nunneries associated with the order, or read to or studied by the female sponsors and supporters of the order in Germany, Bohemia and beyond. Manuscript evidence shows it was disseminated in the order's houses in Germany.⁵² However, although they may have been part of the potential audience, a closer examination of Jeroschin's text does not suggest women were specifically targeted, in spite of their relatively greater prominence.

In conclusion, the depiction of women in both chronicles, while palpably rooted in the experience of living on the Christian frontier in the Baltic, and in spite of

⁴⁹ Hugo von Langenstein, *Martina*, ed. ADALBERT VON KELLER, Stuttgart 1856, line 112.

⁵⁰ *Die Apokalypse Heinrichs von Hesler aus der Danziger Handschrift* ed. by KARL HELM, Berlin 1907, lines 3711-20.

⁵¹ MENTZEL-REUTERS [note 24], pp.60-76.

⁵² UDO ARNOLD, in: *2VL* 6 (1987) col. 1081-8, here 1088.

Jeroschin's vivid and sympathetic descriptions, is still nonetheless firmly based on traditional crusading themes; these discuss women in specific, well rehearsed crusading contexts and also serve to illustrate particular gender related *topoi*. Although it is possible that women may have been among the audience for the chronicles, they are primarily aimed at male crusaders and pilgrims. Accordingly, the portrayal of women, however engaging, is almost always subservient to the development of role models for male warriors in the context of the crusade in the Baltic.

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