



Making Livonia: actors and networks in the medieval and early modern Baltic Sea region

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Making Livonia: Actors and Networks in the Medieval and Early Modern Baltic Sea Region, edited by Anu Mänd and Marek Tamm, Routledge, 2020, 344 pp., ISBN 9780367481285

This is a highly interesting collection of articles, edited by two prominent Estonian historians, Senior Researcher Anu Mänd and Professor Marek Tamm. In the introduction, Mänd and Tamm discuss the making of Livonia as an interplay between new and old societal structures. Especially important was the arrival of new institutions, new power arrangements, new social networks, and new elites challenging the already established structures. In this class of structures Livonia became, as they say, a “heterogeneous territorial conglomerate ruled by various rulers” and not “a homogeneous state-like formation” (p. 2). Rather, Livonia became the prototype of a so-called “transmarine colony,” (a term coined by Nils Blomkvist in his 2005 book *The Discovery of the Baltic*) centuries before these types of colonies became the hallmark of a general European oversea expansion.

Looking into actors and networks seems to be the perfect approach for an in-depth study into a region that was multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, multi-lingual, and – one might add – multi-religious. It is also very refreshing that the editors so clearly refrain from laying down a comprehensive theoretical program with regards to actor/networks-studies and instead leave the specific methodological approaches to the individual authors.

The volume is divided into two separate sections with the first section (“Early making of Livonia”) covering the 13th and 14th centuries and the second section (“Late making of Livonia”) covering the 15th to the 17th centuries. The opening article on “Mission and Mobility. The Travels and networking of Bishop Albert of Riga (c. 1165–1229)” by Professor Marek Tamm, has as its first point “that Livonia was made outside its borders as much as inside” (p. 17). In this respect, Bishop Albert makes for an ideal case study with regards to his excessive travel activities and networking skills throughout his reign as bishop in Livonia.

In the article “Political centres or nodal points in trade networks? Estonian hillforts before and after the thirteenth-century conquest,” Senior Researcher Marika Mägi explores the role of the many Estonian hillforts from the pre-conquest period into the period of conquest marked by radical political, religious, and cultural changes. Mägi reevaluates the role of the hillforts as important meeting points in the local, regional, and international trading activities (often on a seasonal basis), but eventually

also as important and permanent places of new military and political power structures during the crusading period.

Professor Kersti Markus discusses in her article “Visual performances of power in the period of Danish Crusades” the apparent change of spiritual mentality in Denmark that evolved alongside a more intensive involvement in the crusading activities in the Baltic Sea Region from the middle of the 12th century until the early 13th century. Very convincingly, Markus shows as an example how a strong spiritual idea of a New Jerusalem took root in Denmark in this period, not only intellectually but very directly in the church architecture.

Associate Professor Linda Kaljundi (“Neophytes as actors in the Livonian crusades”) and Associate Professor Wojtek Jezierski (“Politics of emotions and empathy walls in thirteenth-century Livonia”) both discuss the representation of local neophytes in two of the most important chronicles of the 13th century, the Chronicle of Henry of Livonia and The Livonian Rhymed Chronicle. In both articles the authors discuss how the local neophytes are described in comparison with the ethnic, social, and religious milieus of the chroniclers (a German priest in the 1220s and a member of the Teutonic Order in the 1290s) and point out how the locals are either portrayed as a sort of “quasi-crusaders” or as inferior versions of the new German masters.

Another type of networks is described by Professor Anti Selart in his article on “Donating land to the Church. Topos as legal argument in thirteenth-century Livonia.” Here, Professor Selart demonstrates how donations of land became an important element in the establishment of new power relations between the local people and German or Scandinavian newcomers. Especially donations to the Church became important in these cases. In this way, pre-crusader relationships of legal matters and matters concerning ownership could survive even if new rulers came into play with symbolic or real claims of lordship.

Senior Researcher Juhan Kreem demonstrates in his article on “Mobility of the Livonian Teutonic Knights” how networks were established between the recruiting areas of the Teutonic Order and their operational areas since they were hardly ever the same. Substantial losses due to excessive warfare, especially in the early phase of the order’s involvement in the Baltic Crusades required a high number of new recruits among the lower ranks. At the same time, the order also established a system of relatively speedy rotation among the senior leadership that helped create a unique sense of unity within the order even if most of the lower ranks were recruited from various regions outside the main operational areas.

In a very interesting article on “Manuscript fragments as testimony of intellectual contacts between Tallinn and European learning centres in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries,” Senior Researcher Tiina Kala makes clear just how difficult it is to paint a clear picture of the early intellectual life in Livonia based on surviving manuscript fragments in the archives. Only in glimpses are we allowed to see what might have constituted local philosophical and theological book collections as evidence to various intellectual networks spanning most of Europe.

The opening article in the second part of the book by Research Fellow Tapio Salminen deals with “City scribes and the management of information” from the early 13th century to the mid-16th century. The main idea here is to show how important the professionalization of the civic administration in Tallinn became in the ongoing process of “making of late medieval and early modern Livonia” (p. 190??). A steady increase in the level of competences among the city scribes was essential in the establishment of proper civic identities and the general development of Livonia.

Next follows an article on “Cistercian networks of Memory” by Senior Researcher Gustavs Strenga analyzing the importance of physical and spiritual networks in monastic communities, both in terms of the memorial remembrance of the dead through prayers, and in terms of institutional networks in and out of the Baltic Sea Region. Especially interesting is Strenga’s discussion of re-constructed historical traditions around the Cistercian Abby of Dünamunde/Padise following the (more or less) traumatic disruptions of older networks and communities.

PhD Candidate Iikka Leskelä analyzes the family networks of important shipmasters and burgher families in the article “The hanseatic trade of the Finnish Skalm family in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries.” Senior Researcher Anu Mänd (“Merchants as political, social and cultural actors”) and Senior Researcher Ivar Leimus (“Mintmasters as the nodes of social and monetary network”) have a somewhat similar approach in their articles with a special focus on the Tallinn burgomaster Hans Viant (d. 1524) and the life and career of Paul Gulden (d. 1593). All three articles offer fascinating new insights into the importance of family networks and networks created by social relations in the Baltic Sea Region as important drivers in the general developments of the region. Finally, Professor Krista Kodres’ study on “Self-representation and social aesthetics” among wealthy Tallinn burgers in early modern time with a special focus on the interior decoration of houses documents a strong coherence within certain social networks with regards to identity and representation.

The volume ends with a concluding article by Senior Lecturer Alan V. Murray summarizing the main findings of the many articles under the title “Conclusion: From vineyard of the lord to outpost of Empires.” In the article, Murray emphasizes the very “complex nature of the governmental and social structures of Livonia” (p. 322) and once again points to the importance of studying actors and networks in an attempt to better understand some of the important lines of developments in a region that saw a strong and intense interaction between old and new power structures.

All in all, this is a very exciting and highly valuable collection of articles that hopefully will stimulate additional studies into the question of actors and networks in medieval and early modern Livonia.

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