ORDINES MILITARES

COLLOQUIA TORUNENSIA HISTORICA

Yearbook for the Study of the Military Orders

vol. XVIII (2013)

Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika
Towarzystwo Naukowe w Toruniu
Toruń 2013

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Printed in Poland

Toruń 2013

ISSN 0867–2008

NICOLAUS COPERNICUS UNIVERSITY PRESS
Editorial Office: ul. Gagarina 5, 87–100 Toruń
tel. (0) 56 611 42 95, fax (0) 56 611 47 05
e-mail: wydawnictwo@umk.pl
Distribution: ul. Reja 25, 87–100 Toruń
tel./fax (0) 56 611 42 38
e-mail: books@umk.pl
www.wydawnictwoumk.pl

First edition
Print: Nicolaus Copernicus University Press
ul. Gagarina 5, 87–100 Toruń

CONTENTS

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XVIII
2013

Alan V. Murray (Leeds)

THE SWORD BROTHERS AT WAR: OBSERVATIONS ON THE MILITARY ACTIVITY OF THE KNIGHTHOOD OF CHRIST IN THE CONQUEST OF LIVONIA AND ESTONIA (1203–1227)

The Knighthood of Christ of Livonia (*Militia Christi de Livonia*) was the first of the medieval military religious orders to be founded for service outside the Holy Land and Iberia, and thus the first one to be actively involved in warfare anywhere in northern Europe. It was established on the model of the Templars, and indeed the order's members are referred to as Templars in the earliest correspondence between the church of Livonia and the papacy around the time of its foundation. The vernacular name "Sword Brothers", by which they later became known, derives from the insignia of the cross and sword that they were given to distinguish them outwardly from their model.[1]

[1] *Liber Registrorum sive epistolarum*, in: *Patrologia Cursus Completus: Series Latina*, ed. J. P. Migne, 221 vols, Paris 1844–1864, here vol. 216, pp. 325–326; F. Benninghoven, *Der Orden der Schwertbrüder: Fratres Milicie Christi de Livonia*, Köln 1965, pp. 62–63. It is unclear precisely when the name Sword Brothers was adopted. The *Livonian Rhymed Chronicle* (*Livländische Reimchronik*, hrsg. v. L. Meyer, Paderborn 1876), written around 1290, gives the Middle High German (MHG) term *swertbrûdere* (lines 721, 2033), but this is outnumbered by the formulation *gotes ritter* ("God's knights"), which is applied to the Sword Brothers and the Teutonic Knights alike; for references, see A. V. Murray, *The Structure, Genre and Intended Audience of the Livonian Rhymed Chronicle*, in: *Crusade and Conversion on the Baltic Frontier, 1150–1500*, ed. A. V. Murray, Aldershot 2001, pp. 235–251, here 247. The varying names applied to the order in both Latin and German, which are only briefly addressed by Benninghoven, indicate a certain instability of nomenclature during the order's existence, but it is likely that "Sword Brothers" was a vernacular designation used during the order's lifetime, in the same way that the members of the Order of Preachers were popularly known as Blackfriars.

The monumental character of Friedrich Benninghoven's monograph *Der Orden der Schwertbrüder*, which superseded Friedrich von Bunge's earlier work of the same name, is to a large extent responsible for the relatively small number of studies devoted to the order.[2] However, it should be noted that Benninghoven dealt primarily with the foundation and organisation of the order and its relations with the papacy and the other ecclesiastical and secular powers in Livonia; in his monograph he announced a separate future study on warfare in the eastern Baltic region, although to my knowledge no such publication ever appeared.[3] While scholarship on the military activity of the much better documented Teutonic Order has flourished, several issues concerning warfare in the time of the Sword Brothers still warrant closer investigation, and in this essay I would like to discuss some of the practical aspects of this topic in the period between the order's foundation and the conquest of Estonia in the mid-1220s.

The foundation of the Sword Brothers occurred on the initiative of Albert of Buxhövden, the third bishop of Livonia, and his associate, the Cistercian Theoderic of Treiden, in 1202–1203, in order to provide a permanent professional military force for the missionary church of Livonia, which up to that time had been solely dependent on the seasonal service of crusaders from northern Germany and the small number of immigrants in the newly founded city of Riga. The Knighthood

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[2] F. G. von Bunge, *Der Orden der Schwertbrüder, dessen Stiftung, Verfassung und Auflösung*, Leipzig 1875; W. Kuhn, *Ritterorden als Grenzhüter des Abendlandes gegen das östliche Heidentum*, Ostdeutsche Wissenschaft 6 (1959), pp. 7–70, here 12–16 (reprinted in idem, *Vergleichende Untersuchungen zur mittelalterlichen Ostsiedlung*, Köln 1973, pp. 305–68, here 310––314); S. Ekdahl, *Die Rolle der Ritterorden bei der Christianisierung der Liven und Letten*, in: *Gli Inizi del Christianesimo in Livonia-Lettonia*, ed. M. Maccarrone, Città del Vaticano 1989, pp. 203–243; B. Jähnig, *Zisterzienser und Ritterorden zwischen geistlicher und weltlicher Macht in Livland und Preussen zu Beginn der Missionszeit*, in: *Die Ritterorden zwischen geistlicher und weltlicher Macht im Mittelalter*, hrsg. v. Z. H. Nowak (Ordines militares. Colloquia Torunensia Historica V), Toruń 1990, pp. 70–86; E. Mugurēvičs, *Die militärische Tätigkeit des Schwertbrüderordens (1201–1236)*, in: *Das Kriegswesen der Ritterorden im Mittelalter*, hrsg. v. Z. H. Nowak (Ordines militares. Colloquia Torunensia Historica VI), Toruń 1991, pp. 125––132; F. Benninghoven, *Zur Rolle des Schwertbrüderordens und des Deutschen Ordens im Gefüge Alt-Livlands*, Zeitschrift für Ostforschung 41 (1992), 2, pp. 161–185; J. H. Lind, *The Order of the Sword-Brothers and Finland: Sources and Traditions*, in: *Vergangenheit und Gegenwart der Ritterorden: Die Rezeption der Idee und die Wirklichkeit*, hrsg. v. Z. H. Nowak, R. Czaja (Ordines militares. Colloquia Torunensia Historica XI), Toruń 2001, pp. 159–164; B. Bombi, *Innocent III and the Origins of the Order of Sword Brothers*, in: *The Military Orders*, vol. 3: *History and Heritage*, ed. V. Mallia-Milanes, Aldershot 2008, pp. 147–153.

[3] Benninghoven, *Der Orden der Schwertbrüder* (as n. 1), p. xvj: "Eine umfassende Behandlung des mittelalterlichen ostbaltischen Kriegswesens wird einer späteren Veröffentlichung vorbehalten"; p. 408, n. 72: "Auf die Gründe für eine so begrenzte Ordensmacht beabsichtige ich ausführlicher in der vorbereiteten Arbeit über das livländische Kriegswesen einzugehen".

of Christ was not an exempt order, but was placed by Pope Innocent III under the obedience of the bishop of Livonia.[4] This status highlights one important difference between the Sword Brothers and the military religious orders previously established in Syria and Palestine. The Templars, Hospitallers, Lazarites and other orders were supranational organisations exempt from any secular or ecclesiastical authority except for the pope, although as far as military activities were concerned, they were subject to the tactical command and direction of the rulers of the principalities of Outremer. By contrast, while the Sword Brothers were intended to be subject to the authority of the bishop of Livonia, circumstances meant that they exercised considerable responsibility in military matters. While the first bishop of Livonia, Meinhard, had taken a largely peaceful attitude to conversion, his successor Berthold of Loccum had died at the head of his army of crusaders in 1199. The German episcopate had a long tradition of leading troops to war, and there is no reason why Albert of Buxhövden, the nephew of an archbishop of Hamburg-Bremen, should not have taken an active role in the direction of the Christian conquest.[5] However, Albert preferred diplomatic activity, which especially involved numerous journeys to Germany and Rome to recruit crusaders, and he and the other bishops and their priestly advisors rarely took the field in person. The few episcopal vassals and the burgesses of Riga lacked the social standing necessary to exercise command, while the German crusaders, even though some of them had comital and even ducal rank, did not have the requisite knowledge of the terrain and the characteristics of the enemy. Thus in the years after 1202 we find the military command of Christian forces in Livonia being exercised by the masters of the Order, Winno (1203–1209) and Volkwin (1209–1236), and also by other officers such as Berthold, commander of Wenden (mod. Cēsis, Latvia), and Rudolf von Kassel, commander of Segewold (mod. Sigula, Latvia).[6] As well as commanding forces, knight brethren also formed the advance guard (MHG *vorrîter*) of crusader armies in a similar way to the Templars and Hospitallers in the Holy Land.[7]

According to the chronicler Henry of Livonia, the largest Christian armies assembled before the final subjugation of Estonia amounted to some 4,000 men, drawn from crusaders, the order and other Germans, although it is likely that the forces of

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4 Bombi (as n. 2).

5 On the military service of German bishops, see T. Reuter, *"Episcopi cum sua militia": The Prelate as Warrior in the Early Staufer Era*, in: *Warriors and Churchmen in the High Middle Ages: Essays Presented to Karl Leyser*, ed. T. Reuter, London 1992, pp. 79–94; J.-P. Stöckel, *Reichsbischöfe und Reichsheerfahrt unter Friedrich I. Barbarossa*, in: *Kaiser Friedrich Barbarossa: Landesausbau – Aspekte seiner Politik – Wirkungen*, hrsg. v. E. Engel, B. Töpfer, Weimar 1994, pp. 63–79.

6 Benninghoven, *Der Orden der Schwertbrüder* (as n. 1), pp. 420–430.

7 *Livländische Reimchronik* (as n. 1), lines 1030–1036.

the Sword Brothers provided only a minority of this number.[8] Benninghoven calculated that before its final defeat by the Lithuanians in the battle of Saule (1236), the order included some 110–120 knight brethren. He also believed that the order contained a fairly large proportion of serving brothers who fought alongside the knights, but this is an assumption based on the Rule of the Templars. The rule may have served as the model for the constitution of the Sword Brothers, but its information on categories of membership relates to conditions in Outremer and is not necessarily applicable to Livonia.[9] In the first two decades of the order's existence the number of knight brethren must have been considerably lower than in 1236, since its landed revenues were more restricted than after the conquest of much of Estonia. The division of territory agreed with Bishop Albert and confirmed by Pope Innocent III in 1211 provided the order with its first independent landed resources and revenues, which enabled it to build its first castles in addition to its stronghold at Riga, which were constructed at Ascheraden (mod. Aizkraukle, Latvia), Segewold, and Wenden. In 1218 the commander at Ascheraden had 12 knight brethren under his command; if this was a roughly average number for one of the order's castles it would suggest that the total of knight brethren at this time was approximately half of the number in 1236.[10] Some of the order's lands, like those belonging to the bishopric, must have been enfeoffed to secular vassals, but it is difficult to find evidence of secular lords with landed fiefs up to around 1218, other than a handful named by Henry of Livonia, who seem to have been vassals of the church of Riga rather than of the order: Conrad von Meiendorf at Üxküll (mod. Ikšķile, Latvia), the *dominus* Daniel at Lennewarden (mod. Lielvārde, Latvia), and Rudolf von Jerichow and later Theoderic at Kokenhusen (mod. Koknese, Latvia).[11]

The revenues from the fiefs of the order and the bishopric could have been employed to pay for military forces, but would not necessarily be used to support fully armoured knights and sergeants fighting on heavy warhorses. It was probably more effective to recruit and pay for professional soldiers serving as infantrymen, since the sources repeatedly emphasise the key role played by footsoldiers in diverse combat situations. In the earliest years the Christians were frequently on

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8 Henry of Livonia, *Heinrichs Livländische Chronik*, bearb. v. L. Arbusow, A. Bauer, Hannover [2]1955, p. 97, gives the figure of 4,000 Germans and the same number of Livs and Letts in 1212. The army which fought at the battle of Fellin in 1217 amounted to around 3,000 men in total, but Henry's formulation *tria milia virorum electorum* (p. 142) suggests that this offensive force was smaller than the total number available.

9 Benninghoven, *Der Orden der Schwertbrüder* (as n. 1), pp. 54–57, 406–408.

10 *Livländische Reimchronik* (as n. 1), lines 1491–1495.

11 Conrad of Meyendorf: Henry of Livonia (as n. 8), pp. 16, 26, 29–31, 35; Daniel: ibid., pp. 56, 105; Rudolf: ibid., pp. 66, 75, 78, 80; Theoderic: ibid., pp. 150, 183.

the defensive against attacks by pagan or apostate Livs and Letts as well as more distant but dangerous enemies such as the Curonians and Lithuanians. In the defence of Riga and the other strongholds the most effective fighters were the crossbowmen (*balistarii*), who later proved equally fearsome when the Christian forces besieged pagan hillforts.[12] The crossbow was unknown to the peoples of the region or the Russians, who only had short bows which had nothing like the effective range or destructive power of the crossbow. The crossbow was also employed in offensive contexts. When Yaroslav Vladimirovich, prince of Novgorod, besieged the hillfort of the Wends in 1218, the order's own crossbowmen advanced out of the protection of their own castle, and killed and wounded large numbers of the besieging Russians. Many of the Russian nobles were carried off half dead (*semivivi*) on improvised litters. One should remember that the nobles were undoubtedly those with the best quality armour, but the losses of his best warriors forced Yaroslav to recognise that he could not take Wenden, "even though it was the smallest castle in Livonia" (*cum sit tamen minus castellum, quod habet Lyvonia*). He then tried to negotiate, but the garrison advanced out again, and drove the Russians back with crossbow fire.[13]

While some of these footsoldiers may have been recruited from the burgesses of Riga or the retinues of crusaders, the specialist nature of their weapons would suggest that most of them were actually professional soldiers serving the order or the bishop as mercenaries.

The knight brethren, like many of the German crusaders, were mounted on heavy warhorses and equipped with mail armour, helmets, sword, lance and shield.[14] The charge of such a force was a standard and highly effective tactic of all Western armies of this time, but conditions in Livonia were less conducive to its employment. Often the terrain was unfavourable, and in marshy or broken country the knights found it difficult to manoeuvre and even to stay in formation.[15] Such problems seem to have been the cause of the major defeat of the Sword Brothers during the Semgallian campaign of 1236, when their attempt to protect a fighting retreat of the entire Christian army turned into a rout at Saule, leading to the

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[12] S. Turnbull, *Crossbows or Catapults? The Identification of Siege Weaponry and Techniques in the Chronicle of Henry of Livonia*, in: *The Clash of Cultures on the Medieval Baltic Frontier*, ed. A. V. Murray, Farnham 2009, pp. 307–319; A. Mäesalu, *Mechanical Artillery and Warfare in the Chronicle of Henry of Livonia*, in: *Crusading and Chronicle Writing on the Medieval Baltic Frontier: A Companion to the Chronicle of Henry of Livonia*, ed. M. Tamm, L. Kaljundi, C. S. Jensen, Farnham 2011, pp. 265–290, here 270–275.

[13] Henry of Livonia (as n. 8), pp. 151–152.

[14] Mugurēvičs (as n. 2).

[15] K. V. Jensen, *Bigger and Better: Arms Race and Change in War Technology in the Baltic in the Early Thirteenth Century*, in: *Crusading and Chronicle Writing* (as n. 12), pp. 245–264.

death of the master and about half of the knight brethren.[16] It is noticeable that in the campaigns launched from Prussia against the pagan Lithuanians the Teutonic Knights and their crusader allies often preferred to campaign during the winter when the frozen ground was more favourable for warhorses.[17] In fact pitched battles in the open, where the charge of the mounted knight brethren could have been most readily employed, were relatively rare and occurred because of unusual or compelling circumstances. The great Christian victory at the battle of Fellin (mod. Viljandi, Estonia) in 1217 came about because the Christians took the offensive in order to prevent Estonian invaders joining up with their Russian allies from Novgorod,[18] while, as we have seen, the battle of Saule developed out of a fighting retreat. It may also have proved difficult to concentrate sufficient troops for the order to utilise the mounted charge to the maximum capability. A large proportion of the knights and serving brothren of the order were distributed among their garrisons at Riga, Ascheraden, Segewold, and Wenden, and – after the conquest of Estonia – Fellin and Reval, while others served as administrators elsewhere. Difficulties in assembling sufficient numbers of knights in addition to the difficulties posed by the terrain may also have led the Christian commanders to keep back their heavy cavalry as a reserve, rather than committing it too early. In 1211 a German force was sent from Riga to relieve their Livish Christian allies who were under siege by the Estonians at Treiden. The knights and infantry marched through the night in separate columns, with the infantry marching in 'cautious and orderly fashion', as the chronicler Henry puts it. In the morning they saw the besieging Estonians, and immediately advanced towards, playing drums and other instruments. They were able to reform after crossing a stream and maintained their formation even when they were charged by enemy footsoldiers as well as horsemen. All this time the German knights had been held back, and only joined the battle once fighting had been going on for some time.[19]

The use of music on this occasion is also significant. Henry of Livonia mentions several other occasions where the German infantry were accompanied by musicians playing fifes and drums, described in Latin as *tympani* and *fistulae*. This particular combination of instruments later came to be an important element in the Swiss and Burgundian armies and the German landsknechts; the music they provided could be used to regulate the pace of march and communicate orders, as well as contributing to morale. However, their use in Livonia at the beginning of the thirteenth centu-

16 Benninghoven, *Der Orden der Schwertbrüder* (as n. 1), pp. 327–347.

17 S. Ekdahl, *Das Pferd und seine Rolle im Kriegswesen des Deutschen Ordens* in: *Das Kriegswesen der Ritterorden im Mittelalter* (as n. 2), pp. 25–47.

18 Henry of Livonia (as n. 8), pp. 140–144.

19 Ibid., pp. 133–135.

ry is remarkably early, at a time when the mounted knight was supposed to be dominant on the battlefield and footsoldiers generally played a subordinate role.[20] The use of military music, together with the courage and discipline shown by the infantry described by Henry on several occasions, suggests that a large proportion of these forces was made up of mercenaries hired by the Sword Brothers and the church of Riga, rather than serving brothren of the order or the retinues of secular vassals.

The Christianisation of Livonia was essentially a long, hard-fought war of attrition in which the pagan tribes were coerced into accepting the Christian religion and the government of the new German rulers, through the progressive destruction of their military and economic resources. It was often necessary to lay siege to hillforts, and specialists were required to construct and operate the siege towers, trebuchets and other projectile equipment that proved decisive against pagan-held fortifications.[21] However, the most frequent form of military activity was probably the extended raid, carried out with the aim of plundering and destroying enemy resources. It would have been extremely difficult to carry out such operations without the regular assistance of troops of native origin, who vastly increased the number of effectives at the disposal of the Christian leadership. This institutionalisation of native military service was a cumulative process. In the earliest stages of the mission, native peoples sought alliances with the Christians because they hoped for protection or military advantage against their numerically stronger neighbours. Bishop Meinhard met with little success in his efforts at conversion until he had stone fortifications constructed which offered the Livs protection against the hostile Lithuanians and Curonians. At first such alliances seem to have functioned on an ad hoc basis, but as the native peoples formally accepted German rule, their military assistance came came to be institutionalised as militia service, known even in Latin by the Livish word *malewa*.[22] The converted Livs were used as military allies to impose Christianity on the pagan Livs and Letts, and eventually both Livs and Letts were deployed against Estonia. According to Henry of Livonia, in the years before 1220 the allied Livs and Letts provided troops roughly equal to the number of the combined German Livonian and crusader forces, that is around 4,000 soldiers.[23] The number of

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20 A. V. Murray, *Music and Cultural Conflict in the Christianization of Livonia, 1190–1290*, in: *The Clash of Cultures on the Medieval Baltic Frontier* (as n. 12), pp. 293–305; idem, *Musica e guerra*, in: *Atlante storico della musica medievale*, ed. V. Minizzi and C. Ruini, Milano 2011, pp. 174–177.

21 S. Ekdahl, *The Siege Machines during the Baltic Crusades*, Fasciculi Archaeologiae Historicae (20) 2007 (*Les Envahisseurs des temps médiévaux et leurs armes*, ed. T. Poklewski-Koziełł), pp. 29–50; Mäesalu (as n. 12); Jensen (as n. 15).

22 Henry of Livonia (as n. 8), pp. 79, 134, 136, 161.

23 Ibid., p. 97.

native troops must have increased significantly as the various Estonian tribes were incorporated into the new polity of Christian Livonia.

The native auxiliaries served predominantly on foot, using spears, swords and shields, or mounted on native horses which were smaller and lighter than the heavy warhorses of the German knights. The more lightly armed native troops could thus move more easily through the forested or marshy terrain which made up much of the eastern Baltic region, and their local knowledge made them ideal for reconnaissance activities, figuring as scouts (MHG *wartliute*).[24] If operations involved sieges of pagan-held fortifications, then Christian forces had to be concentrated. While the better armoured Germans were used in assaults, native auxiliaries could be used as a labour force to construct siege machinery, and also to guard against relieving attacks. However, the frequency of raids meant that more often the Christian forces had to disperse, spreading out over a large area to destroy crops and beehives, and seize farm animals, valuables and captives to serve as hostages or slaves. Livestock and captives had to be rounded up over large areas and brought for security to a central base or camp. The technical term used by Henry for this is *maia*, deriving from the Livish and Estonian words for "house" or "home", but in a military context it was used for a forward base and assembly place inside enemy territory, possibly with some rudimentary defences, such as barricades of wood and scrub.[25] The use of a Finno-Ugrian linguistic term in Christian written sources is a clear reflection of the important role played by native troops in these frequent operations.

While we know too little about the actual conduct of warfare during the time of the Sword Brothers, we can gain some glimpses of how the German leaders attempted to improve the effectiveness of the native troops. In 1205, fearing an attack by the Lithuanians, one of the leaders of the Semgallians made an appeal to the Germans of Riga, asking "to be given at least a few men who knew how to organise an army and drill it for battle".[26] After the Semgallians gave hostages, a few Sword Brothers and episcopal vassals under Conrad von Meiendorf were sent to provide the necessary expertise. In a later episode Henry described how a force of around 90 Christians, of whom only 15 were Germans, attacked an invading Lithuanian force: "the Germans went first into the battle and all the Letts followed, shouting as they had been taught in the German language to seize, ravage and kill". The immediate effect of this was that the Lithuanians believed the Christian forces were much larger and

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[24] *Livländische Reimchronik* (as n. 1), lines 950–955, 1089.

[25] Henry of Livonia (as n. 8), p. 94: *maia, id est collectio eorum*; ibid., p. 160: *Lyvones et Letti suam mayam elegerunt in Avispe*; ibid., p. 167; F. J. Wiedemann, *Ehstnisch-deutsches Wörterbuch*, St. Petersburg 1893, col. 566.

[26] Henry of Livonia (as n. 8), p. 26.

contained a greater number of Germans than was actually the case, the implication being that the Lithuanians feared the German fighters more than their native allies.[27] However, it also suggests that the German military leadership had been in the habit of drilling the native auxiliaries in Western methods of fighting, and familiarising them with commands in German. This would explain why the Livs and Letts gained greater confidence and discipline when confronted by superior Estonian or Lithuanian forces. At the battle of Fellin, fought against the Estonians in 1217, the Christian forces were drawn up with the Sword Brothers, episcopal troops and crusaders in the centre, the Livs on the right and the Letts on the left. This deployment may have been instituted at a time when the native allies were not also fully trusted to stand their ground, and it was important for Christian armies to have a strong centre. However, on this occasion, both Letts and Livs performed bravely; the Livish troops in particular maintained their order and successfully mounted a counter-attack despite being forced to retreat after the first Estonian onslaught.[28]

The division of territory between the Sword Brothers and the church of Riga meant that the bishop's native troops were mostly Livs, who were sometimes allowed to serve under their own leaders, while the Sword Brothers made greater use of the Lettish tribes, who served under the order's officers. Thus in the combined Christian force which was assembled to meet an Estonian invasion in 1211, the Livs served under their tribal leader Caupo, a trusted convert, while the Letts were led by the commander of Wenden, Berthold.[29] The territorial division and regional alliances also help to explain the earliest distribution of the order's castles. The Sword Brothers were originally based in Riga in their convent of St George, but soon constructed castles at Segewold, Ascheraden and Wenden.[30] Benninghoven pointed out that the castle at Wenden was situated in a advanced position which was relatively distanced and isolated from the rest of the order's territory, suggesting that this site opened up possibilities for communications with the northern Lettish territories and fortifications.[31] This perspective is undeniable, but there was probably another reason.

The toponym Wenden derived from the name of its inhabitants, known in Latin as *Wendi* and in Middle High German as *Wenden*. This "humble and poor people", as Henry of Livonia characterises them, had been driven away from their original home on the coast of Curonia and later took refuge among the Letts at the site

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27 Ibid., pp. 183–184.

28 Ibid., pp. 143–144.

29 Ibid., p. 94.

30 It is uncertain whether the castles at Wolmar and Adsel were built by the Sword Brothers or the Teutonic Order; see Mugurēvičs (as n. 2), p. 127.

31 Benninghoven, *Der Orden der Schwertbrüder* (as n. 1), pp. 91–93.

known as the Nußberg.[32] They were converted during the winter of 1206–1207 and their lands assigned to the control of the Sword Brothers, who soon constructed a castle near the Wends' fortified settlement.[33] From this time they figured as dependable allies and military auxiliaries of the Christian powers. The Wends were a distinctive but small ethnic group in a region inhabited predominantly by Livs and Letts.[34] Having been expelled from their original home, they probably welcomed the protection offered by the order. They served on several campaigns under the commander of Wenden.[35] In 1210 they opened their hillfort to shelter a Christian force under Rudolf of Jerichow when it was attacked by heathen Estonians, and in 1218 they resisted the Russians of Novgorod until they were relieved by troops of the Sword Brothers sent from the order's castle.[36] The Wends seem to have been largely assimilated into the surrounding Lettish population by the end of the thirteenth century, but a description given in the *Livonian Rhymed Chronicle* of the militia (*lantwer*) of Wenden serving with the Teutonic Order under a distinctive red-and-white banner "according to the Wendish custom" (*nâch wendischen siten*), suggests that it preserved a distinct identity and esprit de corps dating from the early days of the crusader conquest.[37]

This numerically small population was heavily dependent on the support of the Sword Brothers and unlikely to revolt; unlike the Livs and Letts, their loyalty never seems to have been in question during the entire existence of the Knighthood of Christ. The regular use of troops of Livish, Wendish, Lettish and later

[32] Henry of Livonia (as n. 8), pp. 45–46: *Wendi autem humiles erant eo tempore et pauperes utpote a Winda repulsi, qui est fluvius Curonie, et habitantes in Monte Antiquo, iuxta quem Riga civitas nunc est edificata, et inde iterum a Curonibus effugati pluresque occisi, reliqui fugerunt ad Leththos et ibi habitantes cum eis, gavisi sunt de adventu sacerdotis. Quibus conversis et baptizatis vineam iam plantatam et agrum seminatum Domino committens sacerdos Rigam rediit*.

[33] Benninghoven, *Der Orden der Schwertbrüder* (as n. 1), p. 134, n. 36; Mugurēvičs (as n. 2), pp. 125–132.

[34] E. Tõnisson, *Die Gauja-Liven und ihre materielle Kultur (11. Jh. – Anfang 13. Jhs.: Ein Beitrag zur ostbaltischen Frühgeschichte*, Tallinn 1974. There has been no agreement on the precise ethnic character of the Wends; see: Heinrich Laakmann, *Estland und Livland in frühgeschichtlicher Zeit*, in: *Baltische Lande, 1: Ostbaltische Frühzeit*, hrsg. v. A. Brackmann, C. Engel, Leipzig 1939, pp. 204–262, here 207; W. Laur, *Die sogenannten Wenden im Baltikum*, Jahrbuch für fränkische Landesforschung 21 (1964), pp. 431–438; V. B. Vilinbakhov, *Slavyanye w Livonii (nyekotorye soobrazhenyya o vyendazh Genrizha Latvijskogo)*, Acta Balto-Slavica 8 (1973), pp. 53–67; A. V. Murray, *Henry of Livonia and the Wends of the Eastern Baltic* (forthcoming).

[35] Henry of Livonia (as n. 8), pp. 71–72, 182, 210.

[36] Ibid., pp. 78, 151–152.

[37] *Livländische Reimchronik* (as n. 1), lines 9219–9229: *Von Wenden was zû Rîge komen / zûr lantwer, als ich hân vernomen, / ein brûder und wol hundert man: / den wart daz mêre kunt getân. / die quâmen hovellîchen dar / mit einer banier rôt gevar, / daz was mit wîze durch gesniten / hûte nâch wendischen siten*.

Estonian origin goes a long way to explain the military success of the Sword Brothers and their German allies, as their military service more than doubled the numbers available to the Christian side and enabled then to carry out a large range of different operations more succesfully than if the Christians had relied solely on troops of German origin. This factor should enable us to see the Christianisation of Livonia and Estonia in a wider historical perspective of other conquests by western European powers. In 1519 the Spanish adventurer Hernán Cortés landed in Mexico with around 500 soldiers, fewer than two dozen horses and the same number of artillery pieces. These figures (which vary to some extent in different historical accounts) are often cited to magnify the achievement of the conquistadors in overthrowing the mighty Aztec empire. In fact in the actual fighting forces employed by Cortés, the Spanish troops were vastly outnumbered by the many thousands of men and women who joined them from the subject peoples, who were ready to fight alongside the Spaniards in order to throw off the domination of the Aztecs.[38] While the conquistadors were undoubtedly courageous in battle, the success of this small band of Europeans against an empire which ruled over millions of subjects derived primarily from their use of intelligence, strategic planning, and deployment of their native allies. On a smaller scale, a similar pattern prevailed during the conquest of Livonia. The forces of the Christian mission used the converted Livs to subdue the pagan Livs and Letts; they used Livs and Letts together to subdue the southern Estonians; and they used Livs, Letts and southern Estonians to subdue the Estonians of the north and the maritime provinces. In their planning and direction of military campaigns and their command of native auxiliaries and German crusaders alike, the leadership and organisational skills exercised by the Sword Brothers gave them an importance in military affairs out of all proportion to their numbers.

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[38] B. Hamnett, *A Concise History of Mexico*, Cambridge 1999, pp. 58–64; B. García Martínez, *La Creación de Nueva España*, in: *Historia general de México*, Mexico City 2000, pp. 235–280; R. Hassig, *The Collision of Two Worlds*, in: *The Oxford History of Mexico*, ed. M. C. Meyer, W. H. Beezley, Oxford 2000, pp. 79–111.