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Pro Fide Catholica: Fighting men in the service of the Sword Brothers in Livonia

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Pro Fide Catholica: Fighting men in the service of the Sword Brothers in Livonia

CARSTEN SELCH JENSEN

It is a well-known fact that the Order of the Sword Brothers in Livonia relied heavily on the support of Western crusaders who came to Livonia on an annual basis to fight the ‘Lord’s Wars’ against the pagan enemies of the Church. However, we know less about the use of other types of enlisted fighting men serving the Order. Therefore, this article will discuss the use of two main groups of armed men associated with the Sword Brothers: the recruitment of enlisted troops who served the Order primarily in return for money, and the acceptance of individual, secular knights who, for a shorter or longer period, chose to join a military order to fight in its wars. They did so with the promise of spiritual rewards in the afterlife. In some sources, these secular knights were referred to as ‘milites ad terminum’. The article will also briefly touch upon the Sword Brothers’ use of local warriors as an integral part of the Livonian army commanded by the Order’s own Master when on campaign. The article also takes a brief look at the relationship between the Sword Brothers and the (mostly German) merchants, whose ships linked the new mission fields in the East with the Christian heartlands in the West, thus forming an important military resource for the Order.

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The Order of the Sword Brothers (*Militia Christi de Livonia*) was founded in the early thirteenth century in what was then known as Livonia (mod. Latvia and the southern part of Estonia). The Order immediately became part of the ongoing processes of mission and conquest that took place in the areas that today are primarily covered by the modern states of Latvia and Estonia. The aim of the article is to determine what forms of military support the Order had at its disposal apart from the knightly brothers themselves, the lighter armed sergeants of the Order and the annual influx of crusaders.

The dependence of the Livonian Church and the Sword Brothers on the Western crusaders is well known. The primary sources consistently refer to these crusaders as ‘pilgrims’. Similarly, the contemporary sources refer to a ‘magistrate and advisor of the pilgrims’ (*dux et advocatus peregrinorum*). It was his primary task to command the crusaders during military campaigns.¹ We do however know less about the use of other types of enlisted fighting men serving the Order. The article will therefore discuss two main groups of armed men associated with the Sword Brothers: the recruitment of enlisted, and often specialized, troops who served primarily in return for money,

¹ Carsten Selch Jensen, *Holy War in the Baltic and the Battle of Lyndanise 1219*, Arc Humanities: Leeds 2024a, 83–90, especially 86 and 88. In the process of translating parts of the article into English I have made use of DeepL.

and the acceptance of individual, secular knights who, for a shorter or longer period, chose to join a military order and to fight for the spreading of the Christian faith (*pro fide catholica*). They did so with the promise of spiritual rewards in the afterlife. In some sources, these secular knights with their time-limited service were referred to as *milites ad terminum*. As we shall see in the article, this type of service was also known in the Baltic Sea Region during the relatively short existence of the Order of the Sword Brothers.² We will also briefly touch upon the Sword Brothers' use of local warriors as an integral part of the Livonian army. This army was commanded by the Sword Brothers' own Master while campaigning.³ The article will also take a brief look at the relationship between the Sword Brothers and the (mostly German) merchants, whose ships linked the new mission fields in the East with the Christian heartlands in the West. In addition to the logistical support when transporting supplies and men to and from Livonia, the merchants from time to time also took a more active part in the military campaigns when they for example patrolled the local waterways against enemy attacks.

Livonia and Estonia around 1200 were inhabited by a conglomeration of different peoples and tribes, each with their own languages and cultural traditions. Most of them were not Christians at the time, although many of them frequently interacted with Christian (either Catholic or Orthodox) merchants from both West and East. Some of them were even formally subjugated to some of the lesser Orthodox Christian Rus'ian principalities in the region.⁴ During the same period, an increasing number of Western missionaries came to the region with the ambition to baptize and Christianize all these local pagan peoples and ultimately subjugate them to the supremacy of the Roman Church.⁵ In this process, the Sword Brothers were given a special role as an important local and permanent military force, whose primary task was to support the ongoing missionary work through military means.

The foundation of the Order of the Sword Brothers

That the Sword Brothers needed extra military resources is largely due to the Order's own relatively modest size for most of its history from its founding in 1202 to its dissolution and incorporation into the larger Teutonic Order in 1237. In his groundbreaking study of the early history of the Order, *Der Orden der Schwertbrüder* (1965), Friedrich Benninghoven estimated that immediately before the decisive (and for the Order, fatal) battle of Saule in 1236, there were probably only around 110–120 knightly brothers. In addition to that, there were presumably also a larger number of 'serving brothers'.⁶ Based on these figures and the information found in other sources on the

² Alan Forey, 'Milites ad terminum in the Military Orders during the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries', in Judi Upton-Ward ed., *The Military Orders 4: On Land and by Sea*, Routledge: London 2008, 5–11, here especially 5–6.

³ Jensen 2024a, 90–1.

⁴ For more recent introductions to the medieval history of the Baltic Region and the Crusades, see Burnam W. Reynolds, *The Prehistory of the Crusades. Missionary War and the Baltic Crusades*, Bloomsbury: London 2016; Andris Šnē & Heiki Valk, 'Vor- und Frühgeschichte', in Karsten Brüggemann, Detlef Henning, Konrad Maier & Ralph Tuchtenhagen eds, *Das Baltikum: Geschichte eine europäischen Region*, Anton Hiersemann: Stuttgart 2018, 77–143 and Anti Selart, 'Die Eroberung Livlands (12. und 13. Jahrhundert)', in Brüggemann et al. eds 2018, 159–209; Jensen 2024a.

⁵ Jensen 2024a, 61–7.

⁶ Friedrich Benninghoven, *Der Orden der Schwertbrüder. Fratres Milicie Christi De Livonia*, Böhlau: Köln 1965, 406–8.

number of the Order's castles in Livonia and Estonia and the presumed size of an average castle garrison, another expert on the history of the Order, Alan V. Murray, has estimated that in the early history of the Order there were hardly more than half as many knights, or around 50–60 in total.⁷ Against this background, it was simply crucial for the Order to be able to supplement its core military resources with volunteers or enlisted fighting men to fulfil its role as the primary, permanent military force in the region. There were relatively few secular vassals in the region, and the bishop of Livonia himself only had a relatively modest military force at his disposal. This force was probably mainly defensive in nature, although we occasionally hear in the sources that the bishop's men (*servi episcopi*) participated in various offensive military campaigns as part of the overall Livonian army.⁸ In addition, there was a relatively large number of crusaders who came to the area every year, especially due to Bishop Albert of Riga's (r. 1198–1229) many preaching campaigns in Saxony.⁹ The crusaders usually stayed in the region for one season, a so-called pilgrimage year (*annus peregrinationis*).¹⁰

The early missionary endeavours developed relatively quickly into actual crusades from the sides of the Germans and the Scandinavians, with the first formal crusade in Livonia taking place shortly before 1200. The need for war-trained people therefore grew rapidly. Particularly involved in this part of the process was Bishop Albert, who in 1198 followed in the footsteps of his predecessors, Meinhard (r. 1186–1196) and Bertold (r. 1196–1198). The latter had been killed in the first known battle between (German) crusaders and local Livonian warriors after only one year in office.¹¹

Following the unexpected and violent death of Bertold, Bishop Albert quickly recognized the need for more direct and stable support for the ongoing missionary work. He therefore made a number of crucial decisions for the future of the entire region. Before Albert had even set foot in his new diocese, he had already recruited a large number of crusaders to follow him to Livonia. After his arrival, he also decided that his predecessor's residence in the Livonian village of Üxküll (mod. Ikšķile, Latvia) was not suitable as the administrative (and spiritual) centre of an expanding missionary church. It was simply too difficult – even impossible – for the larger ships of the German merchants and other traders to reach the bishopric so far up the Daugava River and thus support the ongoing missionary work with the necessary and crucial quantities of supplies and people.¹²

⁷ Alan V. Murray, 'The Sword Brothers at War: Observations on the Military Activity of the Knighthood of Christ in the Conquest of Livonia and Estonia (1203–1227)', *Ordines Militares* 18 (2013), 27–37, here 30.

⁸ See for example the Chronicle of Henry of Livonia (HCL) X,8. The translated text is from James Brundage ed., *The Chronicle of Henry of Livonia*, Columbia University Press: New York 1961, reprinted 2003. For the latin text, see Leonid Arbusow & Albert Bauer eds, *Heinrichi Chronicon Livoniae* (Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptorum rerum germanicarum 31), Hahn: Hannover 1955. With regards to the vassal, the sources often refer to merchants as vassal, see for example *Diplomatarium Danicum* (DD) 1:6, 199 §11: 'Item super eo quod ducentos mercatores in Gotlandia ad occupandum terras commissas contra ecclesiam Romanam et ipsum episcopum uicelegationis sue tempore uocauerunt in Reualiam eosdem in Gerua. infeodantes in preiudicium ecclesie Romane' (Also because, against the Roman Church, this bishop in his time as vice legate, called 200 merchants from Gotland to Reval to take possession of the surrendered lands and installed them as vassals (or rather bailiffs) in Gervia to the detriment of the Roman Church).

⁹ Jensen 2024a, 86–7; Carsten Selch Jensen, *Through Words, not Wounds. History and Theology in the Chronicle of Henry of Livonia*, Brepols: Turnhout 2024b, 36.

¹⁰ See for example HCL VII,3.

¹¹ HCL II,6.

¹² Kersti Markus, *Visual Culture and Politics in the Baltic Sea Region 1100–1250*, Brill: Leiden 2020, 276–84.

Bishop Albert therefore decided to establish a new ecclesiastical and mercantile centre further down the river. That became the starting point for the founding of the city of Riga in 1201 and the establishment of a new cathedral church dedicated to the Virgin Mary as the new patron saint and protector of the entire region. At the same time, Albert also reformed the cathedral chapter and decided to establish the region's first proper monastery close to the mouth of the Daugava River where it reached the Gulf of Riga. The monastery was consequently named 'Dünamünde' or more formally 'the Mount Saint Nicholas Monastery'.¹³ The new monastery belonged to the Cistercian Order and its first abbot, appointed by Bishop Albert, was a monk by the name Theodoric, who had been a central figure in the missionary work in Livonia already during the reign of Bishop Meinhard. Interestingly, Theodoric is also mentioned in the Chronicle of Henry of Livonia as the main actor behind the founding of the Order of the Sword Brothers in 1202, just one year after the formal founding of Riga. This was the first time a military order was founded outside the traditional crusading territories of the Holy Land or Spain and thus it had its primary (and only) area of operation in the Baltic Sea Region from the very beginning.¹⁴

The fact that it was the Cistercian monk Theodoric, and not Bishop Albert himself, who was behind the establishment of such an important institution may seem surprising and is probably not the whole truth about the founding of the Order. As mentioned, it is Henry who mentions that it was Theodoric was the primary initiator of the founding of the Order:

Brother Theodoric foreseeing the treachery of the Livonians and fearing he would be unable to resist the multitude of pagans, and, moreover, to multiply the number of the faithful and to preserve the church among the pagans, founded certain Brothers of the Militia of Christ (*Eodem tempore providens idem frater Theodericus perfidiam Lyvonum et multitudini paganorum non posse resistere metuens, et ideo ad multiplicandum numerum fidelium et ad conservandam in gentibus ecclesiam fratres quosdam milicie Christi instituit*).¹⁵

It cannot be ruled out that Theodoric actually played an important role in the establishment of the Order. Many have stressed the Cistercian Order's generally close connections to another of the military orders, the Knights Templars.¹⁶ This is particularly relevant when one considers that the Sword Brothers were actually given the rule of the Knights Templars by Pope Innocent III as their own, new rule. The Sword Brothers also resembled the Knights Templars in appearance, as both orders wore a white mantle. The difference was however that while the Knights Templars' formal symbol was a red cross sewn onto the white habit, the Sword Brothers' symbol was a sword (and perhaps a cross) in red on their mantle.¹⁷ There is even evidence to suggest that in their early days, the Sword Brothers were referred to as 'Templars' in official writings, even though their formal and

¹³ Markus 2020, 341–3.

¹⁴ Murray 2013, 27.

¹⁵ HCL VI,4.

¹⁶ See for example the introduction in J. M. Upton-Ward, *The Rule of the Templars*, Boydell: Woodbridge 1992, 1–17, here especially 4–5.

¹⁷ See Arnold of Lübeck, book V, stating that the knights chose the sword as their specific badge. For the Latin text, see *Arnoldi Chronica Slavorum* (Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptores rerum germanicarum 14), Hahn: Hannover 1868; for a recent translation into English, see Graham A. Loud, *The Chronicle of Arnold of Lübeck* (Crusade texts in Translation), Routledge: Abingdon 2020.

official name was ‘*Fratres militiæ Christi Livoniæ*’. It was only later (and in popular parlance) that they became known as ‘Sword Brothers’ (*Schwertbrüder*).¹⁸

The contemporary sources do not agree on who was the actual primary driving force behind the establishment of the Order of the Sword Brothers. It is therefore not entirely inconceivable that Henry’s emphasis on Theodoric as the primary initiator may have been influenced by his knowledge of the conflictual – even warlike – relationship that gradually developed between the bishop of Riga and the knightly brothers of the Order. The Master of the Order acted as the commander of the combined military forces in Livonia. At the same time, however, his Order also worked hard to achieve maximum autonomy in the territories they gradually gained control of, either through regular conquests or through more or less formal agreements with other actors in the region, primarily the bishop of Riga and the Danish king’s men further north in the Estonian territories. Against this background, it could make sense for Henry to create a certain distance between the bishops of Livonia and the troublesome, but also powerful knightly brothers in his narrative. In this way he would ensure maximum legitimacy for the bishops when the time came to distance themselves from the Order.

In the chronicle of Arnold of Lübeck, on the other hand, we get a slightly different take on the origins of the Sword Brothers, as he says that ‘a powerful force of knights’ (*militum manus copiosa*) followed Bishop Albert to Livonia:

Many men, indeed, vowed themselves to continence, desiring to fight for God alone. Renouncing everything, in the manner of the Templars, they formed themselves into a knighthood of Christ, and they chose to place on their clothing as a sign of their profession a badge showing the sword with which they fought for God (*Multi etiam continentias voventes, et soli Deo militare cupientes, forma quadam Templariorum omnibus renunciantes, Christi militie se reddiderunt, et professionis sue signum in forma gladii, quo pro Deo certabant, in suis vestibus preferebant*).¹⁹

Here we get a slightly different history of the origin of the Order that, firstly, is very close to the founding story of the Knights Templar proper, centered around a dedicated group of pious and devoted laymen who wanted to serve God through their skills as knights. From Arnold’s account, however, it is not immediately possible to determine whether the pious knights in question had been planning to join together in an order for some time (or perhaps simply establish a new branch of the Knights Templars in Livonia), or whether it was actually a more spontaneous decision, as Arnold seems to imply. The latter doesn’t sound very likely, however, as after all, it took quite a lot for a layman of the knightly class to give up all his secular obligations before taking religious binding vows.

An example of this can actually be found in the chronicle of Henry of Livonia, where the experienced and influential Saxon nobleman Bernard zur Lippe decided relatively late in his life to renounce all his secular obligations and possessions in favour of joining a local Cistercian monastery. And not just any monastery, but a monastery that he himself had been founding years before, together with

¹⁸ Murray 2013, 27.

¹⁹ *Arnoldi Chronica Slavorum*, book 5; The English translation is from Loud 2019, 225–6.

some fellow noblemen.²⁰ According to the chronicle, it was a prolonged illness – a paralysis in his legs – that led the aging nobleman to seek atonement for the many sins he had committed during his time as a powerful secular nobleman and warlord.²¹ However, other sources also point to the fact that Bernard had been destined for a clerical career from an early age. Due to the unexpected and early death of his father and older brother, Bernard had to give up this career and instead take upon him the responsibility as head of his family, marry and start a family of his own.

Henry, however, tells us that shortly after entering the local monastery with his wife's permission, Bernard was completely cured of his paralysis. Soon afterwards, he even abandoned the quiet monastic life in favour of going to Livonia. Here he became abbot of the monastery of Dünamünde and later bishop of Semigallia and a close ally of the Order of the Sword Brothers. During his years in Livonia, Bernard also proved himself as a skilful warrior, leading several military engagements despite his clerical status.²² As such his contemporaries did not lack (local) role models when it came to abandoning a secular knightly life in favour of a life devoted to God as a monk and/or knightly brother, and we sense some of the same motions in Arnold's account.

Other historians have suggested that the establishment of the Sword Brothers actually began as early as 1199, when Pope Innocent III (r. 1198–1216) urged all pious laymen and knights from Westphalia, Saxony and the lands beyond the Elbe to gather in the name of God to form an army to protect the Christians and new converts in Livonia.²³ Barbara Bombi in particular has noted the pope's focus on the obligation of the secular knights (*milites*) to take part in the defence of the Christians in Livonia. She interprets this as a possible inspiration for the later foundation of the Order of the Sword Brothers, insofar as a group of secular knights may have heard the papal call as just that, a call to join together in an order-like community as was the case with the already existing military knightly orders.²⁴ However, Bombi also concludes that it was probably not until 1204 that Pope Innocent indicated in writing that he was aware of the foundation of this new Order. Here he described in a letter to the archbishop of Hamburg-Bremen, how there were now

three religious orders in Livonia under Bishop Albert's leadership, that is to say the Cistercian monks and regular canons, who, insisting on discipline and doctrine, fight against the [pagans] with spiritual weapons, and the pious laymen, who, in the habits of the Templars, defend the new plantation of the Christian faith manfully and

²⁰ With regards to Bernard zur Lippe's life and work, including the mission in Livonia and Estonia, see Paul Johansen, 'Lippstadt, Freckenhorst und Fellin in Livland. Werk und Wirkung Bernhards II. Zur Lippe im Ostseeraum', in Luise von Winterfeld, A.K. Homberg, P. Johansen, H. Thümmeler & B. Riering eds, *Westfalen, Hanse, Ostseeraum* (Veröffentlichungen des Provinzialinstituts für Westfälische Landes- und Volksforschung. Reihe 1. Wirtschafts- und Verkehrswissenschaftliche Arbeiten 7), Aschendorff: Münster 1955, 97–160; Wolfgang Bender, 'Bernhard II. zur Lippe und die Mission in Livland', in Jutta Prieur ed., *Lippe und Livland. Mittelalterliche Herrschaftsbildung im Zeichen der Rose*, Verlag für Regionalgeschichte: Gütersloh 2008, 147–68; Bernd Ulrich Hucker, 'Fürst aller Christen Livlands'. Bernhard II. und sein Sohn Hermann zur Lippe', in Prieur ed. 2008, 169–84; Ulrich Meier, 'Der Eckstein ist gekommen ...'. Die Konsolidierung der Herrschaft Lippe im 13. Jahrhundert', in Prieur ed. 2008, 45–64.

²¹ HCL XV,4.

²² See for example HCL XV,3.

²³ DD 1:3, 254, <https://diplomatarium.dk/> (accessed February 2025). See also Barbara Bombi, 'Innocent III and the Origins of the Order of Sword Brothers', in Victor Mallia-Milanes ed., *The Military Orders 3: History and Heritage*, Routledge: Abingdon 2008, 147–53, here especially 148.

²⁴ Bombi 2008, 148.

powerfully against the invading [heathens] (*tres religiosorum ordines, cisterciensium videlicet monachorum et canonicorum regularium, qui discipline insistens pariter et doctrine spiritualibus armis contra bestias terre pugnent, et fidelium laicorum, qui sub Templarium habitu barbaris infestantibus ibi novellam plantationem fidei Christiane resistant viriliter et potentur, studuit ordinare*).²⁵

Thus, it can be concluded that a group of newly minted Sword Brothers at this early stage was large enough to be highlighted by Bishop Albert (whom the Pope refers to in his letter) and also noticed and recognized by the Pope himself.

The number of Sword Brothers at this time, however, cannot have been very large, with approximately 5–10 knights. It was not until a few years later in 1205 that Henry actually mentioned the Sword Brothers' first military action, which took place in late winter that year.²⁶ Here, a force of allied Semigallian warriors together with Bishop Albert's own men (*familia episcopi*) and some Sword Brothers (*fratribus milicie Christi*) ambushed a Lithuanian force of raiders on-route to their own lands. The ambush ended in a victory for the Semigallians and Germans, but one does not get the impression that the Sword Brothers made up a particularly large proportion of the fighting men. Henry does however suggest that the few brothers may in fact have been the ones most eager to fight despite being severely outnumbered by the Lithuanians. Thus, the chronicle states:

Thereupon certain of the Germans approached the knight Conrad and begged insistently that they go first into battle with the enemies of Christ. They asserted that it was better to go to death gloriously for Christ than, to the confusion of their tribe, to take flight dishonorably. Conrad, with his horse and himself well-armored, like a knight, attacked the Lithuanians with the few Germans who were on hand. But God sent such fear into the Lithuanians and they were so dazzled by the brightness of the German arms that they turned away on all sides (*Considerantes hoc quidam ex Theutonicis Conradum aggrediuntur militem instanter deprecantes, ut ipsi primum cum hostibus Cliristi prelium ineant, asserentes magis expedire gloriose mortem pro Christo subire quam ad confusionem gentis sue inhoneste fugam inire. Qui more militari tarn in equo quam in se ipso bene loricated cum paucis qui aderant Theutonicis Lethones aggreditur. Sed ipsi nitorem armorum istorum abhorrentes, Deo eciam timorem immittente, ab eis ex omni parte declinant*).²⁷

Would it be possible to assume that the few devoted and eager Sword Brothers were the ones who so willingly wanted to attack the Lithuanians despite the uneven odds, most likely seeking a martyr's death?

Milites ad terminum in the service of the Sword Brothers

Of course, not all devout secular knights were ready to take eternal religious vows and join an order like the Sword Brothers. However, if they wanted a share of the spiritual rewards of the church,

²⁵ Bombi 2008, 151. My translation.

²⁶ HCL IX,1-4.

²⁷ HCL IX,3.

they could join the Order for a shorter or longer period without having to take the perpetual vows that otherwise set the framework for the daily life of the knightly brothers of the Order. The term that was given to these secular knights with a temporary affiliation to a knightly military order at the time was *militēs ad terminum*.²⁸ A closer look at the rule of the Knights Templar reveals that such knights with a temporary, fixed term of service already appear there as an institutionalized part of the Order's military forces. On a more prosaic level, the rule states that 'those who serve the house for a fixed term' have to adhere to some of the similar rules for dressing as the ordinary brothers and are not allowed to wear pointed shoes or shoe-laces since they are the hallmarks of the (Muslim) pagans.²⁹ While this rule seems to have been aimed very specifically at the service of the Knights Templar in the Holy Land, there are other provisions in the rule regarding *militēs ad terminum* that appear more generic and applicable also outside the Knights Templars' primary operational zone in the Middle East. A later section thus states that 'all secular knights who desire with a pure heart to serve Jesus Christ and the house of the Temple of Solomon for a fixed term [should] faithfully buy a suitable horse and arms, and everything that will be necessary for such work'.³⁰ The clause goes on to state that the knight himself and the commander of the local house of the Order must carefully write down the value of the horse and equipment that the knight brings with him into the service so that the Order can later replace any losses. The article also states that the Order undertakes to provide the knight and his squire with all necessities, including horseshoes (!). Finally, it states that when the knight leaves the Order again, he is encouraged to leave half of the horse's value in cash to the Order, whereas he can keep the other half if he so wishes 'out of charity'.³¹ The last part of the clause thus seems to imply that the knight's horse is either left to the Order or even sold to realize the necessary sum when the knight returns to secular life. It is also worth noting that it is assumed that the knight has a squire like the other brother knights. It is unclear, however, whether the squire was the knight's own man, who had followed him into the service of the Order, or whether it was a squire that the Order made available among its own brothers' sergeants. In any case, the squire ensured that the knight could fight with the efficiency that was crucial on the battlefield, while at the same time also play an individual role in the battle as a lighter equipped mounted sergeant. The aspect of the knight's active participation in military campaigns is very important in the rule of the Knights Templar and the guidelines for the knights' military deployment that are laid down there. The rules thus supported both the brother knights and the secular knights, ensuring both discipline and fighting efficiency among its ranks.

It is important to bear in mind that the opportunity to serve for a shorter period of time most likely primarily attracted individual knights who were not part of a larger group of crusaders, who more often fought as a more or less solid unit under the leadership of their feudal lord or a designated leader of crusaders that could even receive payment for their service.³² *Militēs ad terminum*

²⁸ See the overall discussion in Forey 2008.

²⁹ TR §22, translation from Upton-Ward 1992, 25.

³⁰ TR §22, translation from Upton-Ward 1992, 35.

³¹ TR §22, translation from Upton-Ward 1992, 35.

³² See for example the chronicle of Henry of Livonia, in which he at least one time refers to hired men in relation to crusaders serving in Livonia (XI,9). It is not quite clear from the text if it is in fact crusaders that also receives money for their service, or rather certain groups of fighting men solely serving for money. We shall return to that question a little later in the article.

was thus an obvious opportunity for an individual knight to fight for the Christian faith and thereby acquire a spiritual reward in the form of indulgences, without necessarily living quite as rule-bound as the actual knights of the Order and without the eternal vows.³³

The crucial question, however, is whether this system of time-limited service of individual knights also applied in Livonia among the Sword Brothers. From contemporary chronicles, such as Henry of Livonia and Arnold of Lübeck, it is not immediately possible to identify any *militēs ad terminum* from the narratives of the texts. This does not necessarily mean that such secular knights are not there but are simply not identified as such by the chroniclers. The fact that it is nevertheless likely that the Sword Brothers actually made use of this type of enlisted knights is of course due to the fact that their Order's rules were the same as those of the Knights Templars. It therefore seems likely that they were also open to this type of temporary service in their ranks. The very foundation of the Order, based on a small number of knights who wanted to unite and live in a regulated, religious community, as had been the case with the first Knights Templars, also speaks in favour of a certain openness to fixed short term service, as they must have been very aware of the fact that not everyone could give up their worldly lives to devote themselves entirely to the service of God in Livonia. One need only think of Bernard zur Lippe, who had had to give up a clerical career in his youth to fulfil his obligations to the family. It was only at a mature age, with the approval of his family, that he was able to rededicate himself to the monastic life and later become abbot and bishop in Livonia. By accepting service as *militēs ad terminum*, the Order thus opened its ranks to those of their peers who were either unable or unwilling to fully enter a knightly order, while still sharing in the spiritual merits of the order.

Leaving aside these indirect arguments in favour of the use of *militēs ad terminum* by the Sword Brothers, there is a papal letter from 1226 wherein Pope Honorius III (r. 1216–1227) actually allows the Order to receive (secular) knights in its service beyond the time they were otherwise committed to as crusaders. The text states in Honorius' words that

we indulge you with the authority of those present, so that if those of the pilgrims who come to Livonia for the defense or expansion of the Catholic faith in those parts, voluntarily wish to remain with you for the guarding of your castles or for your other services, you may permit them as long as it is of their own free will, to retain freely (*Hinc est, quod vobis auctoritate praesentium indulgemus, ut, si qui peregrinorum in livoniam venientium pro fide catholica defendenda in illis partibus aut dilatanda, vobiscum pro castrorum vestrorum custodia seu pro aliis servitiis vestris sponte remanere voluerint, liceat vobis eos, quamdiu de ipsorum voluntate fuerit, libere retinere*).³⁴

A similar letter was sent by Honorius to the knightly Order of Calatrava in Spain already in 1220. Here he also allowed them to recruit (former) crusaders into their ranks with the promise of indulgency so that they could help guard the frontier against Muslim raiders.³⁵ Based on this, it

³³ Forey 2008, 9.

³⁴ Friederich Bunge & Hermann Hildebrand eds, *Liv-, Esth- und Curländisches Urkundenbuch nebst Regesten* I, XCI, Hüge und Ströhm: Reval 1853–1914, reprint 1967–1981.

³⁵ Forey 2008, 5.

seems very likely that there would in fact have been *milites ad terminum* serving the Order of the Sword Brothers in Livonia as part of their active military force. It is however impossible to ascertain their numbers.

Hired men in the service of the Sword Brothers

When Pope Gregory IX (r. 1227–1241) summoned Bishop Albert's successor, Bishop Nicolaus of Riga (r. 1229–1253), to appear before him in Rome in 1234, he also summoned the Sword Brothers and the burghers of Riga. This was based on a number of complaints that had reached the Pope's ears. In various ways, the knightly brothers and burghers had violated the Roman Church and its rights in the lands of Estonia, Livonia and Courland, the Pope wrote. In the letter, Gregory pointed in particular to the Danish King Valdemar II's (r. 1202–1241) complaints against the Sword Brothers. They had shortly before taken the Danish king's castle in Reval (mod. Tallinn, Estonia), expelled the Danes and allegedly caused a major bloodbath among the king's subjects in the provinces of Revalia and Vironia. In his letter, the Pope specifically mentions that he actually considers the Sword Brothers to be schismatics and thus enemies of the Church.³⁶ In direct continuation of these serious accusation (which is elaborated a little later in the letter), the Pope then mentions that the Sword Brothers had also committed the crime of having led both hired men and crusaders into battle against the faithful supporters of the Roman Church in the region.³⁷ As is customary, the crusaders are referred to as 'pilgrims' (*peregrinos*) in the papal letter, whereas the hired men are described as just that; *soldarios ... conducendo*. In other words, some fighting men served the Order in exchange for payment and not necessarily (only) for spiritual rewards.

The question then arises as to what type of fighting men we are talking about. While ordinary crusaders also often received some form of payment for their service, there is little mentioning of this or actual enlisted troops in the contemporary sources about the military conquest of Livonia and Estonia.³⁸ In the chronicle of Henry of Livonia for example, we only hear once about someone who definitely seems to have been paid for their military service. At the same time, however, the chronicle may in fact have other groups of military personnel who probably also were paid by their masters, even if it is not mentioned in the text. One such example can be seen in connection with a longer reference in the chronicle to a battle between one of Bishop Albert's vassals and a smaller local Rus'ian prince from Kokenhusen (mod. Koknese, Latvia). The Germans had made

³⁶ The text reads as follows in the particular paragraph 38 of the papal letter: 'Item quod sismaticos se exhibuerunt in pluribus se ecclesie opponendo. soldarios quoque contra ipsam conducendo et compellendo ipsos ecclesie neophitos necnon et uassallos immo etiam et aliquos peregrinos ad resistendum dicte ecclesie' (Moreover, because they showed themselves to be schismatics in many cases by opposing the church. Also by hiring soldiers against [the church] and compelling even the neophytes of the church, as well as the vassals, yes, even some strangers, to resist the said church).

³⁷ DD 1:6, 199. This papal letter is particularly interesting in that it is probably one of the very few texts that mentions the chronicler Henry of Livonia outside of the chronicle itself. In the papal letter, one of the signatories is Henricus of Papendorf believed to be the very same person as the chronicler, cf. Heinrich von Lettland, *Livländische Chronik*, trans. Albert Bauer, Wissenschaftlicher Buchgesellschaft: Darmstadt 1959, ix–xvi.

³⁸ Any crusader army had in essence to rely on paid troops, both among the proper crusaders and among the lower ranks of fighting men, cf. Christopher Tyerman, *How to Plan a Crusade*, Allen Lane: London, 2015, 185–91. Tyerman also points out that specialists were often needed (and hired) to serve the siege engines of the crusader armies (pp. 272–3). that was probably also the case in Livonia and Estonia.

an agreement with the prince to share the access to a local castle in exchange for Bishop Albert sending some skilled stonemasons to help the prince reinforce the castle. The common goal was supposedly to ward off any attacks from the Lithuanian side. At least that is how Henry presents this (politically) messy affair. He writes rather bluntly that the prince was by no means satisfied with the agreement, as along with the stonemasons, a smaller force of twenty armed men arrived from Riga consisting of heavily armed knights and a number of crossbowmen to man the ‘shared’ castle. Based on other contemporary sources, it is highly possible that this particular group of crossbowmen were in fact professional and highly specialized fighting men hired by the Order to serve in return for money.³⁹

Not long after this force had arrived at the castle, construction work began and, according to Henry, the majority of the men were put to work cutting stone in a nearby quarry to be used for the expansion of the castle. Henry explicitly writes that the Germans – somewhat carelessly as it turned out – had left their swords and other armaments (*gladiis et armis*) above the quarry. The Rus’ians took advantage of this and now attacked the unarmed Germans in the quarry, cutting most of them down. A few managed to escape, while the bodies of seventeen slain Germans were thrown into the river as a final taunt from the side of the Rus’ians against their killed enemies and their German master.⁴⁰

It is interesting to notice that this particular incident is immediately followed by another incident that specifically refers to the abovementioned hired soldiers in the service of Bishop Albert. The point is that the Rus’ians only dared to attack the small group of German soldiers because they had learnt that the bishop, as usual, had left Riga to go to Germany to recruit more crusaders for the ongoing military campaigns. His entourage also included crusaders who, after a full season in Livonia (the aforementioned ‘pilgrims’ year’), had now fulfilled their current vows and could return home with promises of indulgences. However, the ships were still anchored near the monastery of Dünamünde when the word of the Rus’ians’ fraudulent attack reached the bishop and his retinue. To protect Riga and take revenge on the treacherous Rus’ians, Bishop Albert immediately promised a renewed and full indulgence to those of the returning crusaders who would enlist for a new season in Livonia, even though they had already completed and endured one pilgrims’ year. He reminded them of the full (plenary) indulgence they already had received but promised them an even greater indulgence and eternal life if they would only take up the cross once more.

³⁹ It is not the scope of this article to go into any discussion of the differences between hired fighting men and mercenaries proper. The term ‘mercenaries’ (compared other forms of paying for military service) is much debated among medieval scholars and many medieval trained fighting men were probably soldiers by profession and would therefore receive payment, access to booty and such like in return for their service. But that seems not to make them mercenaries in any medieval sense of the word. For more detailed discussions on the topic, see Kelly DeVries, ‘Medieval Mercenaries. Methodology, Definitions, and Problems’, in John France ed., *Mercenaries and Paid men. The Mercenary Identity in the Middle Ages* (History of Warfare 47), Brill: Leiden 2008, pp. 43–60, here especially 45, 55–6; see also the discussion on ethnicity and the concept of being a foreigner as a mercenary in Stephen Morillo, ‘Mercenaries, Mamluks and Militia: Towards a Cross-Cultural Typology of Military Service’, in France ed. 2008, 243–60. A more recent discussion on the topic of medieval mercenaries versus paid fighting men can be found in Juho Wilksman, *Comparing Military Cultures: Warfare in the Aegean region from the Fourth Crusade to the Early Fifteenth Century*, University of Helsinki: Helsinki 2021. Here the author also touches upon the use of highly specialized groups fighting men such as crossbowmen (p. 85–6). See also the discussion on mercenaries during the crusades in Steve Tibble, *The Crusader Armies, 1099–1187*, Yale University Press: London 2018, 129–31.

⁴⁰ HCL XI,9.

According to Henry, around 300 of the returning crusaders were persuaded to remain in Livonia for another period to serve as a wall around the house of the Lord, as the text states. However, Henry also mentions that some of the fighting men only allowed themselves to be enlisted (*conduco*) for a new period against payment.⁴¹ This is the only time in Henry's chronicle where there is such a direct reference to enlisted troops in the sense of 'hired men', whereas their use in other crusading contexts is quite well known and well documented.⁴² There is therefore much to suggest that Henry of Livonia's accounts may actually contain quite a few references to such hired groups of specialists, if we look a little more closely in the text; for example the above mentioned crossbowmen who took part in the ill-fated campaign to Kokenhusen.

As such, it is most likely that the bulk of the hired men are to be found among the foot soldiers often mentioned in the chronicle, which would reflect the situation in other crusading areas, where the larger contingents of foot soldiers were often hired specialists, such as foot sergeants, archers and crossbowmen.⁴³ The armies also often included units of more lightly equipped foot soldiers who had specialized tasks in the field as scouts or as dedicated skirmishers.⁴⁴ In Livonia and Estonia it seems as if the lightly equipped units were predominantly made up of units from the local allied peoples who had converted to Christianity or at least accepted German supremacy.⁴⁵ Part of their obligation was to provide locally equipped troops when the bishop or the master of the Sword Brothers summoned the Livonian army (referred to by Henry as '*Malewa*').⁴⁶ Interestingly, Henry describes several times how the local warriors asked 'to be given at least a few men who knew how to organize an army and drill it for battle' (*rogat sibi saltem aliquos dari viros doctos in bello, qui exercitum sciant regere et ad pugnam informare*) in order to train their own troops.⁴⁷

Even when they went into the field and had the units set up in battle order, the training and battle tactics of the different units were reflected in the way they were organized. As an example, Henry describes how an army on the march had the German soldiers marching forward along a central road, while the allied units of the Livs (*Lyvones*) and Latvians (*Lettis*) marched along roads to the right and left respectively. The same was true when the army lined up for battle, again with the Germans in the centre and the Livs and Latvians on the right and left wings respectively, where they could use their lighter equipment to greater effect.⁴⁸ Several times it is also mentioned explicitly and almost formulaically in the text that the German contingents usually consisted of both horsemen and foot soldiers.⁴⁹

Among the German foot soldiers, we most often hear about units armed with crossbows. This

⁴¹ HCL XI,9.

⁴² James M. Powell, *Anatomy of a Crusade 1213–1221*, Pennsylvania University Press: Philadelphia 1986, 187; Wilskman 2021, 85.

⁴³ Wilskman 2021, 85.

⁴⁴ Powell 1986, 99. In a specific example regarding King Louis' crusade to Egypt in 1248, the entire army probably consisted of around 15,000 soldiers. Of these, less than 3,000 were knights, 5–6,000 mounted sergeants and around 5,000 footsoldiers equipped with crossbows. The rest consisted of lightly equipped foot soldiers (p. 99).

⁴⁵ Murray 2013, 33–4.

⁴⁶ HCL IX,3.

⁴⁷ HCL IX,2; Murray 2013, 34.

⁴⁸ HCL XXI,2–3.

⁴⁹ See for example HCL XXI,2 and XXII,3.

also applies to a large extent to the crusading areas outside Livonia and Estonia.⁵⁰ During several church councils, the crossbow (sometimes together with the use of bows) had been banned as a weapon against other Christians, but armies were still allowed to use it against non-Christian opponents.⁵¹ The ecclesiastical bans however do not seem to have had much of a real effect in their time. Here the crossbow remained a very important, effective and widespread weapon. In the case of Denmark, the provincial laws dealing among other things with the Danish military *leding/lething* (Lat., *expeditio*) not only allowed, but actually prescribed that each ship's crew had to have at least one armed crossbowman (or Bowman) on board when the ships were called to battle, simply because it was an extremely effective ranged weapon.⁵² When it comes to the various crusading armies, we also see that the crossbow was a key weapon both in the field and in connection with sieges and/or the manning of castles. Of course, it could be argued that ecclesiastical law was on their side in these cases, as crossbows were (primarily) used against the Church's enemies during the crusades, which also applied to Livonia and Estonia. We do however also see a widespread use of crossbows in battles that only involved Christians.⁵³ There are thus many indications that units of foot soldiers armed with crossbows were recruited as specialized soldiers, who served for money either individually or, more likely, as regular units. Contemporary sources mention such units being commanded by 'a master of the crossbowmen'.⁵⁴

However, it is important to emphasize that in Livonia and Estonia there were also other types of Western foot soldiers on the battlefield as part of the Christian armies. Henry of Livonia writes several times about the 'Christian foot soldiers' (*pedites christianorum*) in contrast to the local auxiliary troops, but also in clear contrast to the specifically mentioned units of crossbowmen

⁵⁰ The classical studies of the armament, composition and tactics of the crusader armies are of course still R.C. Smail, *Crusading Warfare, 1097–1193*, Cambridge University Press: Cambridge 1956, with several later reprints, followed by Christopher Marshall, *Warfare in the Latin East, 1192–1291*, Cambridge University Press: Cambridge 1992, reprinted 1996, supplemented by John France, *Western Warfare in the Age of the Crusades, 1000–1300*, Cornell University Press: Ithaca 1999. More recently have appeared Nicholas Morton, *The Field of Blood. The Battle for Aleppo and the Remaking of the Medieval Middle East*, Basic Books: New York 2018 and Steve Tibble, *The Crusader Armies, 1099–1187*, Yale University Press: New Haven 2018. They all cover the use of arms and armour in the crusader armies in details, including the importance of the crossbow.

⁵¹ Michael Prestwich, *Armies and Warfare in the Middle Ages. The English Experience*, Yale University Press: New Haven 1996, 129–31; David Nicolle, *Medieval Warfare Source Book. Warfare in Western Christendom*, Brockhampton Press: London 1999, 130. As an example, during the Lateran Council of 1139 (canon 29) the pope once again banned the use of 'that murderous art of crossbowmen and archers, which is hateful to God, to be employed against Christians and Catholics from now on'. Translation from Norman P. Tanner ed., *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, vol. 1–2, Georgetown University Press: Washington 1990, <https://www.papalencyclicals.net/councils/ecum10.htm>.

⁵² Jensen 2024a, 58–9. See also Beñat Elortza Larrea, *Polity Consolidation and Military Transformation in Scandinavia from a European Perspective, c. 1135–1320* (The Northern World 94), Brill: Leiden 2023; Beñat Elortza Larrea, 'The Transformation of Naval Warfare in Scandinavia during the Twelfth Century', *Journal of Medieval Military History* 18 (2020), 81–98.

⁵³ France 1999, 68–9; Nicolle 1999, 130–1.

⁵⁴ See for example the detailed descriptions of the use of units of crossbowmen (including references to a master of crossbowmen) in the chronicles of Joinville and Villehardouin, both dealing with these types of foot soldiers in relation to crusading activities (against the orthodox Christians in Constantinople in 1204 and the attack on Damietta in the 1240s). Translations into English are available in Caroline Smith trans., *Joinville and Villehardouin. Chronicles of the Crusades*, Penguin Books: London 2008, 41, 47 (Villehardouin) and 188 (a master of crossbowmen), 238, 255 a specialized weapons maker for crossbows), 280, 281 (Joinville).

(*balistarii*) and of course the mounted knights.⁵⁵ These were most likely relatively heavily armed foot soldiers who carried shields, long spears and other forms of small arms. In addition, they probably wore helmets of various kinds as well as types of body armour and were thus generally more heavily armoured and armed than their local opponents, as Henry points out several times.⁵⁶ Presumably, such heavily armed foot soldiers played a central role both in guarding the Order's castles but also in serving in the field armies on campaign.

While the units of the more heavily equipped foot soldiers among the Germans are mentioned relatively sporadically by Henry of Livonia, he is all the more concerned with the crossbowmen. He refers to these specialists again and again as particularly potent units when it came to sieges, the defence of castles and major or minor field battles and skirmishes. Against this background, it makes sense to consider whether the crossbowmen that Bishop Albert sent to the castle in Kokenhusen might in fact have been such specialized hired soldiers as suggested above. In any case, the chronicle often mentions these *balistarii* and how they repeatedly broke an enemy attack and forced an enemy to flee due to a rain of heavy crossbow bolts that penetrated the simpler and lighter armour of the local warriors as easily as anything.⁵⁷ Henry even writes that the rain of crossbow bolts was a sure sign to an attacking enemy that the castle in question had a German garrison. Thus, this type of weapon was so archetypical of Christian armies that it became more or less synonymous with a western-European army.

It is not inconceivable that some of the many crossbowmen were recruited locally, for example among the local inhabitants of Riga, but it is more likely that the majority were professionals in the true sense of the word and were recruited from outside by the Sword Brothers or the bishop of Riga, who also had these specialists in his service.⁵⁸ The Chronicle also mentions that in the event of an impending war, the Sword Brothers would fortify their castles, build cisterns for fresh water and have an abundant supply of 'weapons and crossbows' (*armis et balistis*).⁵⁹ In this way, they believed they could repel almost any attack, either directly from the castle walls or by sending units of crossbowmen into the field together with their other units.

The Order's enemies were of course well aware of the military value of these crossbow-armed units as many of their companions had lost their lives to a crossbow bolt in the many clashes with these battle-hardened and experienced specialists. That they also actively tried to equalize the military advantage that crossbows often gave the western forces is evident from a series of events in 1222 described in detail by Henry of Livonia. That year, King Valdemar II of Denmark had once again led an army towards Saaremaa and had a stone castle built there. There are indications that the attack may have been coordinated with Bishop Albert and the Sword Brothers, who quickly sent a joint force to the island to support the Danes and take part in the defence of the new castle, when the local islanders rose up to counterattack the invading enemy. However, Henry's account

⁵⁵ See for example HCL XV,3; XV,7; XXVII,1.

⁵⁶ See HCL X,8; XII,2 and especially XV,3. The vulnerability of the western foot soldiers when they take off their armour is also relayed by Henry in some cases, see for example HCL XI,9. See also Wilskman 2021, 85, suggesting that especially the better trained and equipped units of these foot soldiers/infantrymen from time to time would have served as actual mercenaries.

⁵⁷ See for example HCL I,6; X,8, 12; XIV,5.

⁵⁸ Murray 2013, 30–1, 33.

⁵⁹ HCL XXV,5.

also suggests that he believed that the Danes were too weak to defend their new castle on their own. Therefore, they were completely dependent on the help of the Germans. The Germans, on the other hand, used the occasion to press the Danish king on his sovereignty over Estonia, while at the same time providing a contingent of war-hardened men to defend the Danish castle. Henry once again emphasizes the participation of ordinary foot soldiers and crossbowmen.⁶⁰

With the help of some of their Estonian neighbours on the mainland, the people of Saaremaa, however, got hold of some siege engines hoping to defeat the Danes and Germans in the new castle. The islanders were able to deploy as many as seventeen machines against the castle, which was bombarded with stones, although the Estonians also suffered serious losses due to the crossbowmen on the castle walls. The irony of the story is that the siege engines used by the islanders were modelled on one particular siege engine that the Danes had themselves donated to the Estonians in Warbola. Now the technology was turned against themselves and ultimately forced the garrison to surrender. Henry writes laconically that it only happened because the castle was not yet completely finished: It had ‘no houses and buildings, nor was there a shelter or refuge within the unfinished fort’ (*qui erant in Castro, quia domos et edificia non habebant et non erat eis locus neque refugium in Castro nondum edificato*).⁶¹

The survivors of the castle were supposedly told to leave the island, after which the islanders razed the half-finished castle to the ground. The fighting didn’t end there, however, as a rebellion had already spread to the mainland, where several of the local Estonian tribes and their Rus’ian allies attacked both the Danes and Germans in the area. Castles and settlements were overtaken and burned down, Christian priests were killed and, of course, the Estonians appropriated all the weapons they could find from both the Danes and Germans. Henry mentions in particular the large number of crossbows that the Estonians captured from the Sword Brothers, after which they set about to teach ‘one another the ballistarian art, and they divided among themselves a great many [crossbows], which they had seized from the Brothers of the Militia’ (*docentes ad invicem artem balistariam, dividentes balistas fratrum milicie quam plurimas inter se, quas rapuerant*).⁶² So even the local people recognized the crossbow’s worthiness as a military tool.

The merchants of Livonia: active crusaders or pragmatic traders

Another resourceful group that had a significant impact on the military activities of the Sword Brothers in Livonia were the western merchants. Through their connections with local traders and controlling most of the larger ships available, these men linked the local trading centres in Livonia and Estonia to both Germany and Scandinavia. At the same time, they ensured a steady influx of crusaders as well as general supplies to support the ongoing missionary work and the many ongoing military campaigns. In this respect, it can be argued that the merchants actually constituted a significant part of the overall military power potential in the region, especially in terms of logistics, even though they were not formally part of the actual military forces in Livonia. Yet several times in the chronicle of Henry of Livonia the merchants are specifically mentioned as a special group of people who were directly called upon in connection with upcoming military actions. At one point,

⁶⁰ HCL XXVI,2.

⁶¹ HCL XXVI,3.

⁶² HCL XXVI,8.

Henry lists the individual groups that participated in a particular expedition in 1223: ‘the knights and infantry, the brothers of the militia and the pilgrims, the merchants and the Livonians’ (*tam equites quam pedites, fratres milicie cum peregrinis et cum mercatoribus et Lyvonibus*).⁶³ It is also important to remember that among the merchants, there were two distinct main groups of people: firstly, those who resided in Riga and thus lived permanently in Livonia, and secondly, those who were based in one of the larger trading cities in the West, for example in Lübeck or perhaps in Visby on Gotland. The latter’s presence in Livonia was more seasonal and their obligations in relation to the defence of the Christian territories were probably correspondingly smaller. The situation was different for the merchants who lived in Riga. They were directly or indirectly obliged to take part in the defence of the city and the surrounding countryside. This is probably what is reflected in Henry’s descriptions when he occasionally refers to the merchants as a special group among the other regular fighting men.

However, the merchants who came from outside were by no means strangers to violence or direct acts of war. This is already evident in the early phase of the mission in Livonia, where Henry describes how western merchants were a very strong and direct resource for the first missionaries by ensuring the connections between the secular magnates and church leaders in Saxony and Scandinavia and the new missionary fields in Livonia and Estonia. It was also the merchants who brought the first missionaries to Livonia. The chronicle explicitly states that there were friendly relations between the western merchants and the local traders, which may have made it easier for the first missionaries to gain a foothold among the locals and subsequently obtain permission to establish a church in the area. It should also be noted that Bishop Meinhard used his contacts among the merchants to bring experienced stonemasons to Livonia from Gotland when he decided to fortify his newly established bishopric in Üxküll. And although Meinhard most likely had a small military garrison of his own in his fortified church, he again had to rely on the western merchants and traders when a major revolt among the only partly converted locals threatened to destroy the entire established mission. That happened towards the end of the bishop’s lifetime. Henry writes that the hard-pressed bishop received promises from Saxon, Danish and Norwegian merchants that they would come to the aid of the beleaguered missionaries with an army if necessary, because ‘... each of the trading groups had promised that if necessary they would bring an army’ (*promiserant enim aliqui de Theuthonicis et quidam de Danis et de Normannis is et de singulis populis exercitum se, si opus foret, adducturos*).⁶⁴

At that time, nothing more came of the merchants’ promises of military support and the aging Bishop Meinhard soon died and was succeeded by Bishop Bertold and soon after by Bishop Albert. The latter also realized that he had to secure good conditions for the merchants in Livonia if he was to continue to draw on them. Therefore, in connection with the founding of Riga, he secured a papal ban prohibiting all trade at the other local trading centres, thus securing Riga a significant privilege. The local merchants were happy to take up arms against their own to enforce this papal ban: Henry tells how the ship of a merchant and his crew were rounded up by other merchants when

⁶³ HCL XXVII,1. The merchants and their ships were essential not only around the Baltic Sea, but to the crusades in general, cf. Tyerman 2015, 266–72.

⁶⁴ HCL I,11. See also the overall discussion on the merchant’s involvement in Baltic Crusades in Mark R. Munzinger, ‘The Profits of the Cross: Merchant Involvement in the Baltic Crusade (c. 1180–1230)’, *Journal of Medieval History* 32 (2006), 163–85.

he had violated the ban: ‘the other merchants ... brought up other ships and attacked them. They finally took two men, the captain, namely, and the pilot of the ship, put them to a cruel death, and forced the other to return’ (*Tandem duobus viris, gubernatore videlicet et ductore navis, exceptis et crudeli morte peremptis alii autem redire coguntur*).⁶⁵

Thus, the merchants were more than willing to take up arms to protect their lucrative trade while also supporting both the bishop and the Sword Brothers. One thing that stands out, however, is the Sword Brothers’ seemingly limited control over any seagoing ships. Admittedly, one can read several times in the chronicle how the Sword Brothers, along with the other fighting men in the Livonian army, used smaller vessels when the campaigns led them up or down some of the major inland waterways in the area. It is therefore likely that the Sword Brothers had smaller vessels at their disposal, suitable for navigating the area’s rivers, lakes and marshlands. However, there is very little to suggest that the Sword Brothers – unlike several of the other major knightly orders – actually had larger ships that could cross the Baltic Sea and otherwise support the Order logistically. The Teutonic Order subsequently came to possess significant naval forces, but this does not seem to have been the case with the Sword Brothers.⁶⁶ The only time Henry hints that the brothers seem to have considered building a maritime force is in 1215. Here he briefly describes how they together with the bishop’s men acquired a cog and had it remodelled as if it were a floating fortress (*emerunt coggonem, munientes eum in circuitu tamquam castrum*). At the same time, the ship was equipped with fifty heavily armed men-of-war equipped with heavy crossbows. The plan was for the ship to lie in the mouth of the Daugava River and guard the access to the harbour of Riga a little further up the river (*et locantes in eo viros quinquaginta cum balistis et armis, statuentes eum in ore fluminis Dune ad custodiendum portus introitum*).⁶⁷

Apart from this particular incident, we hear nothing else in the chronicle about an actual naval force under the direct control of the Order. Thus, throughout their history, the Sword Brothers remained dependent on the active support of the merchants, both in times of peace and in times of war. The merchants, on the other hand, could, when necessary, take part in various military expeditions, either defensively or more offensively, thus supporting both the bishop and the Order without being formally subordinate to either of them.

Conclusion

Based on a brief account of the establishment of the Sword Brothers, this article set out to discuss what military resources the military Order could draw upon in its many military engagements in Livonia and Estonia in the early thirteenth century, apart from the many crusaders who went there on an annual basis. In the sources, these Western crusaders are usually referred to as ‘pilgrims’ who had set out to fulfil their vows and expecting a spiritual reward in the form of indulgences for their efforts.

The sources, however, also reveal that there were other people accustomed to war who placed themselves in the service of the Sword Brothers – sometimes in such a way that they could be difficult to distinguish precisely from the abovementioned crusaders. The article presented a number

⁶⁵ HCL IV,7.

⁶⁶ William Urban, *The Last Years of the Teutonic Knights. Lithuania, Poland and the Teutonic Order*, Green Hill Books: Barnsley 2019, 81, 276.

⁶⁷ HCL XIX,11.

of examples from the sources where the warriors in question were most likely hired fighting men who, with their special skills such as crossbowmen or foot sergeants, were recruited either by some of the larger magnates, by the Livonian bishop or even by the Sword Brothers themselves to perform military service through garrison duty at one of the region's many castles and fortresses or in connection with actual military campaigns. Between the crusaders and the hired men, however, there was also a special category of fighting men – secular knights – who joined the Order directly to provide their service to the Sword Brothers alongside the knightly brothers of the Order, but for a limited period of time. As such, they were to be distinguished both from the actual brother knights with their eternal vows and from the annual crusaders, who may have taken vows to go on crusade, but not necessarily with any institutional affiliation to a specific order. In this sense, these secular knights served the Sword Brothers just like the ordinary brother knights (according to the Order's rules) but could return to their secular life after a certain period of time. The sources know these knights as *milites ad terminum*. This type of service is known from several of the larger crusade areas, and the sources revealed that there were also such knights in Livonia among the Sword Brothers who served the Order with papal approval.

The article also touched briefly on the Sword Brothers' use of local warriors in their military array, where the locals served as lightly equipped foot soldiers or horsemen with special tactical tasks on the battlefield and on campaign. This is also well known from other crusading areas, although sometimes such units could be specially recruited Western units and in other cases local warriors who, as in Livonia, were recruited for military service in the crusader armies or in the local military knightly orders.

Finally, the article also briefly examined the special role of Western merchants in the military subjugation of Livonia and Estonia, where they ensured the vital connection between these borderlands and the homelands of the Western powers. The merchants, however, did also from time to time more directly support the ongoing military campaigns with their ships and small boats. At the same time, nothing seems to indicate that the Sword Brothers themselves established any significant naval force during the relatively short life of the Order. There are examples in the sources that the Sword Brothers took part in sea-borne or sea-supported campaigns, but everything seems to suggest that the brothers mainly relied on the merchants' fleet of transport ships in such cases.

To summarize, this article has tried to nuance the picture of the Sword Brothers' military potential (and network) in the first part of thirteenth-century Livonia and Estonia, while also pointing out some of the actors who supported the Order in its (military) activities.