



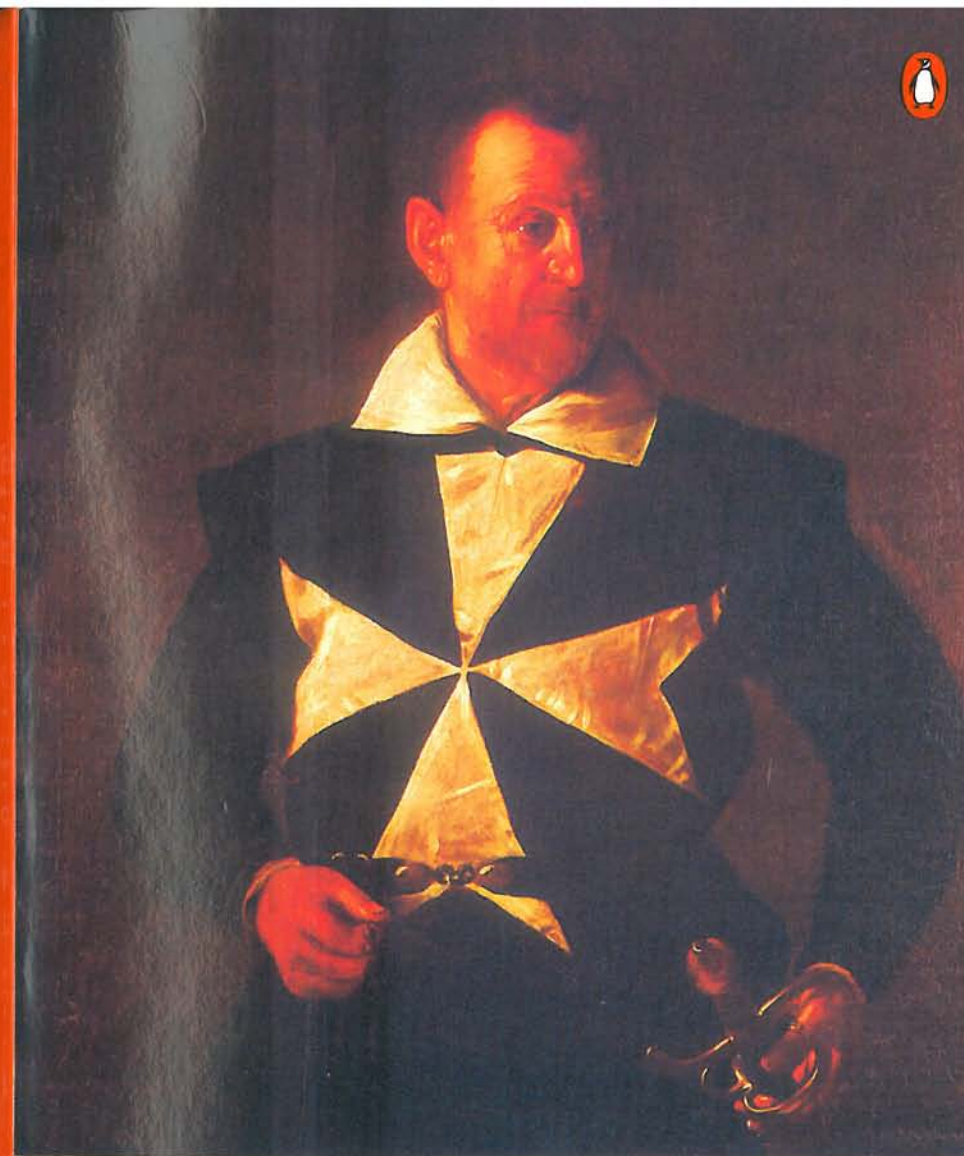
THE MONKS OF WAR

The Military Religious Orders

DESMOND SEWARD



Desmond Seward THE MONKS OF WAR



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The military religious orders emerged during the Crusades as Christendom's stormtroopers in the savage conflict with Islam. Some of them still exist today, devoted to charitable works. *The Monks of War* is the first general history of these orders to have appeared since the eighteenth century.

The Templars, the Hospitallers (later Knights of Malta), the Teutonic Knights, and the Knights of the Spanish and Portuguese orders were 'noblemen vowed to poverty, chastity and obedience, living a monastic life in convents which were at the same time barracks, waging war on the enemies of the Cross'. The first properly disciplined Western troops since Roman times, they played a major role in defending the crusader kingdom of Jerusalem, in the 'Baltic Crusades' which created Prussia, in the long reconquest of Spain from the Moors, and in fighting the 'Infidel' right up to Napoleonic times. This celebrated book tells the whole enthralling story, recreating such epic sieges as Rhodes and Malta and the destruction of the Templars by the Inquisition. Acclaimed on publication, it has now been revised and updated, with a concluding chapter to take events into the 1990s.

Undeniably the work of someone who knows and accepts the standards of critical history, but ... who sees the past also as an epic or a colourful spectacle' - Professor David Knowles in *The Times Literary Supplement*

His scholarship is great, his theme both interesting and largely unexplored and his judgement sound' - *Economist*

The book is excellent and firmly based on the primary sources of which Seward has a remarkable grasp' - *New Society*

'Compulsive reading, attractively written, and retaining one's fascinated interest throughout' - *Catholic Herald*

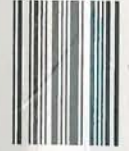
The cover shows *Portrait of Aloi de Wignacourt* by Caravaggio in the Palazzo Pitti, Florence (photo: Nicolo Orsi Battaglini)

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THE CRUSADE ON THE BALTIC

Throughout the history of the *Deutscher* the German genius is very evident, romantic idealism implemented with utter ruthlessness. Tradition claims that a Hospital of St Mary of the Germans had been founded at Jerusalem in 1127. After the débâcle of 1187, members of this establishment were included in a new foundation, a field hospital set up in 1190 by merchants from Bremen and Lübeck during the siege of Acre. Their first headquarters was a tent, made from a ship's mainsail, on the seashore.¹ In 1198 some noblemen who had come with the abortive German crusade joined these brethren to form a military order, 'the Teutonic Knights of St Mary's Hospital of Jerusalem'. Heinrich Walpot von Bassenheim, a Rhinelander, was appointed Master, recruits were enrolled and the new Order was given statutes similar to the Templars' but with provision for hospitaller work. There were three classes of brother: knight, priest and sergeant. Brother-knights, who had to be of noble birth and German blood, wore a white cloak with a black cross over a white tunic; priests wore a longer-skirted version, while the sergeants' cloak was grey, its cross truncated with only three arms. In certain hospitals a fourth class existed – nursing women known as half-sisters.

The new brotherhood's hierarchy resembled that of the Poor Knights. Under the *Hochmeister* (*Magister Generalis*) were the *Gross-Komtur*, the *Ordensmarschall* (later called *Grossmarschall*), the *Spittler* (Hospitaller),* the *Tressler* (Treasurer) and the *Trapier* (Quarter-

* The Spittler's headquarters would later be at Elbing at the mouth of the Vistula – the modern Elblag – in western Prussia.



4. A Teutonic Knight

master), who constituted the Grand Council. The General Chapter, which elected the Hochmeister, met every September on the feast of the Holy Cross. A commandery contained no fewer than twelve knight-brethren under a *pfleger* or *hauskomtur*. The houses of a province formed a *landkomturei* or *ballei*. In charge of German *balleien* was the *Landmeister* whose headquarters were at Mergentheim in Swabia.

Eventually this organization would be repeated in many parts of Europe. At first the Hochmeister stayed in the east, though later he moved his headquarters to Italy, then to Prussia and finally to Swabia. Elsewhere, since he was so far away, the Knights were ruled by Landmeisters, and not just those Knights in Germany but also those in Prussia, Livland (today's Baltic states), Greece and Italy. The headquarters of the *Italienische Landmeister* was at Venice.

The empire endowed the new brethren generously with lands in Germany, Sicily and southern Italy, while they were also given Greek estates by the Frankish lords of Achaia. Teutonic Knights could not hope to compete with Templars or Hospitallers in Syria, so they devoted their energies to Armenia, where their chief strongholds appear to have been Amouda – a plain keep of Rhineland pattern – and Haruniye. King Lavon the Great became a *halbbruder* or *confrère*. In 1210 most brethren perished with their third Hochmeister, Hermann Bart, on an obscure Cilician campaign. At that date the Teutonic Order numbered twenty at most.

Hermann von Salza, his successor, was the real founder of the Order's greatness.² Born in about 1170, in his youth he attended the court of the dukes of Thuringia, where he was supposed to have acquired distinguished manners, and certainly he knew how to win the favour of princes. In 1219 King Jean de Brienne awarded the Hochmeister the privilege of bearing the Gold Cross of Jerusalem under the Order's black cross in his achievement of arms to commemorate the knights' bravery at the siege of Damietta. In 1226 the Emperor Frederick II made Hermann and his successors Princes of the Empire, while the pope presented him

with a magnificent ring, afterwards used at the inauguration of every Hochmeister. It is a testimony to Hermann's statesmanship that he succeeded in remaining on good terms with both papacy and emperor; at the 'coronation' of the excommunicated Frederick as King of Jerusalem in 1229, Teutonic Knights mounted guard in the Holy Sepulchre and Hermann read the emperor's proclamation in French and German. The sceptical, ruthless Frederick appears to have had a genuine regard for the dedicated religious, and encouraged his order's progress. In 1229 a second headquarters was built, Montfort (or 'Starkenbergh'), north-east of Acre, whose original function was to defend the thin corridor which then connected Jerusalem with the sea. However, there is not sufficient space to deal fully with their activities in Palestine, where they were always overshadowed by Templars and Hospitallers. The German brothers were to find their true destiny in Europe.

King Andrew II of Hungary was worried about eastern Transylvania, savagely raided by heathen Kumans. In 1211 he gave its mountainous Barcasag district to the Teutonic Order. The brethren adapted methods of warfare learnt in Syria and Armenia, building a network of wooden fortresses, and the Turkish Kumans proved neither so numerous nor so skilful as their Anatolian cousins. By 1225 the 'Burzenland' had not only been pacified but settled with German colonists. King Andrew grew alarmed; in any case the Kumans were now being integrated with the Magyars. Suddenly he descended on the Burzenland with a large army and evicted the knights. After loud protests Hermann began to look elsewhere.

Livonia, the modern Estonia and Latvia, was peopled by pagan Baltic and Finnish tribes. To the east it was bounded by Russian princes, whilst to the north it was scantily settled at Reval by Danes. The idea of a Holy War in northern Europe was not new. In 1147 the ubiquitous St Bernard had summoned all Germans to a crusade against the heathen Wends, who lived across the Elbe. Livonia was a fair enough prospect for land-hungry Teutons. In 1201 Albrecht von Buxhövdn sailed from

Lübeck with a great fleet of colonists to found Riga at the mouth of the river Dvina, in the land of the Baltic Livs. The town prospered and many Livonians were converted. Nevertheless the little colony could not afford to depend on stray crusaders for protection, and in 1204 Albrecht, now Bishop of Riga, founded the Sword Brethren, who took the Templars' rule. The habit was white, marked with a red sword and red cross on the left shoulder. Their purpose was the defence of 'Mary's land', commemorated in the lines spoken by the Master in the ceremony of profession:

Dis Schwert entfange von meiner Hand
Zu schützen Gotts und Marien Landt.

They are supposed to have admitted postulants of ignoble birth, but recent research seems to disprove this legend.³ Master Wenno von Rhorbach was murdered by one of his own brethren in 1208,⁴ yet they were fine soldiers. For Albrecht, colonization was as much a part of the crusade as conversion. First his *Schwertbrüder* built the castle of Wenden as a headquarters, then they invaded Estonia with an army half-German, half-Livonian, penetrating the deep pine forests to rout the natives and their Russian allies; in 1227 they conquered the island of Oesel (Saaremaa), shrine of the god Tarapilla. German burghers settled in the new towns and the colony rested on sound foundations when its bishop died in 1229.

The bishop, later Archbishop of Riga, was the true governor of Marienland, and at first a system of dividing conquered territory between bishop and brethren worked very well. ('Thus arose the first Order State,' observes their modern historian, Friedrich Benninghoven.) Large estates were given to German nobles, in return for military service. Shortly after Albrecht's death the Sword Brethren proclaimed a Holy War against 'the Northern Saracens' and made steady progress. They possessed six preceptories, each administered by a guardian or '*vogt*', their chief strongholds being Wenden and Fellin, though the Master's seat was the Jurgenhoff at Riga. They also had chaplains, according to the

priest chronicler, Heinrich von Lettland. Soon they wrested sovereignty from the bishop, seizing church lands, while their stern rule embittered their subjects who rebelled more than once. In 1237 the second Master, Wolquin Schenk (probably a son of the Count of Naumberg), was defeated and slain with fifty of his brethren – ‘cut down like women amid the marshes’ – at Siauliai by the Kurs in alliance with the Lithuanian prince, Mindaugas.⁵

In the meantime Hochmeister Hermann von Salza had seen other opportunities. The seaboard from the Vistula to the Niemen and its hinterland of lakes, marshes, sandy heaths and pinewood were inhabited by the heathen *Prusiskai*, a Baltic people who spoke a language closely related to Lithuanian.⁶ The latter, in the primeval forest north and east of Poland, resembled the Prussian tribes in everything except disunity and were now coming together under the able Mindaugas. Balts worshipped idols in sacred groves and fields, and attributed divine powers to the entire creature-world, including their own animals.⁷ They practised human sacrifice, by burning or beheading, and buried animals alive at funerals; dead warriors were cremated astride their horses, while widows were often made to hang themselves. Stockades of towns and temples were adorned with animal skulls to ward off the evil eye, their grim shrines served by weird priests and soothsayers. The Prussians’ domestic habits were as unpleasant as their religion. The old, the sick, the blind and the lame were invariably slaughtered. Drunkenness from mead and fermented mares’ milk was a major pastime while tribesmen often drank the living blood from their horses’ veins. Inter-tribal warfare was endemic. Hermann decided that Prussia would make a good training ground for the wars in Outremer.

Konrad, Duke of Mazovia, had become so demoralized by Prussian raids that he abandoned the entire province of Chelmo. In 1222 the bishops of Kujawia and Plock recruited a handful of German knights to form a new military order as protection, the Order of Dobrzyn, though it proved to be ineffectual. Konrad offered Chelmo to Hermann with any other territory his brethren might succeed in conquering. In 1223 the Hochmeister obtained

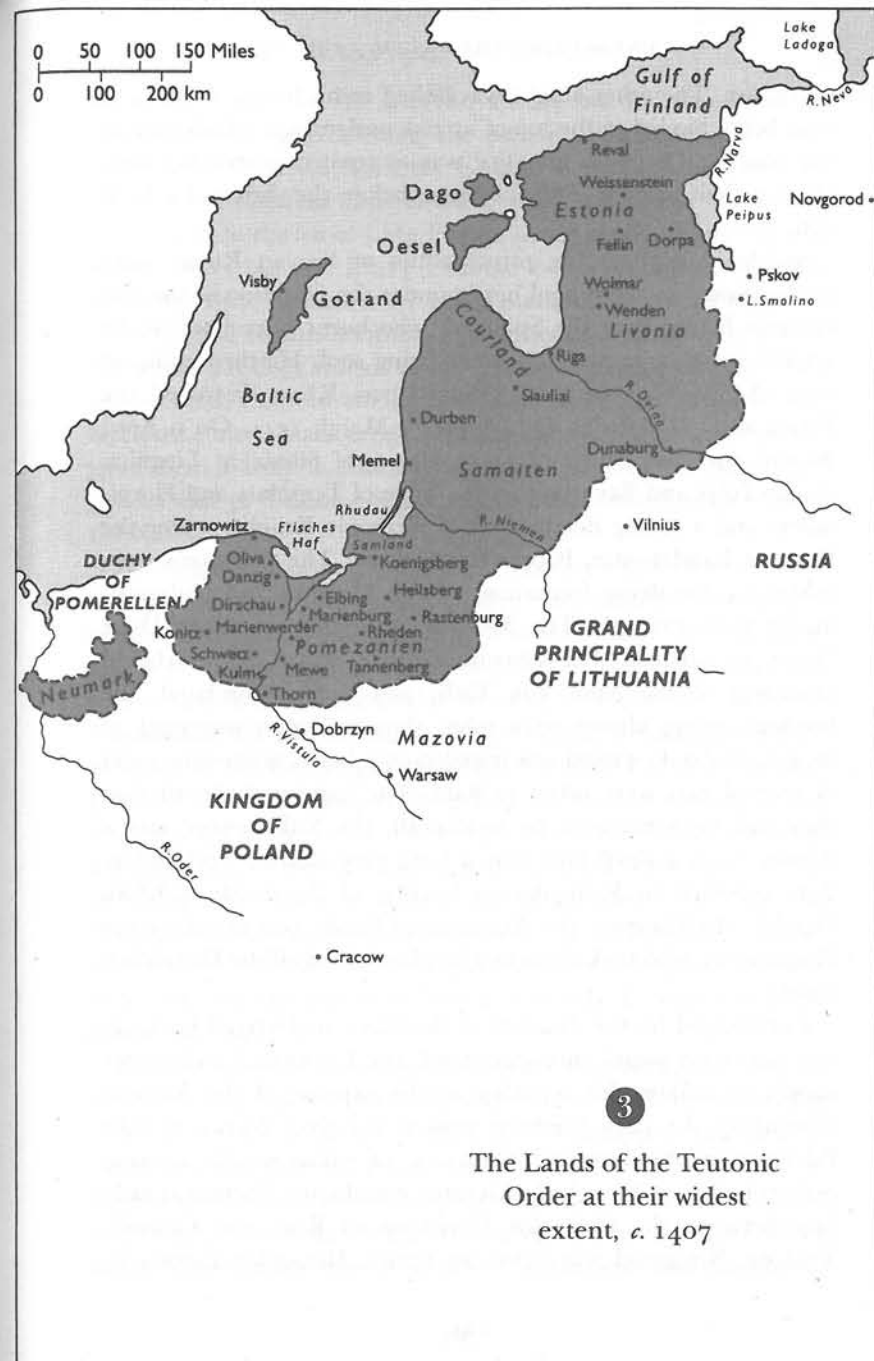
a document from his friend the emperor, known as the Golden Bull of Rimini, later confirmed by the pope, which gave him full sovereignty over these lands with nominal papal suzerainty. Two knights arrived in 1229 and built the castle of Vogelsang (‘Bird-song’) on the Vistula but were soon killed by the Prussians.⁸

The year after, one of the Teutonic Order’s great heroes came with twenty knights and 200 sergeants to take possession of Vogelsang. It was Hermann Balke, styled *Landpfleger* (Preceptor), whose skill in war was equalled by his modesty and generosity. It is no exaggeration to call Balke the Pizarro of the Baltic lands. Most of his troops were volunteers who regarded themselves as Crusaders, the brethren acting both as command structure and as panzers. The Emperor gave lands in Apulia to establish southern Italian commanderies, providing the necessary financial resources. Help also came from Bohemia and Silesia. Transport was supplied by the seafaring merchants of Lübeck. In 1231 Hermann crossed the Vistula and stormed a fortress-temple, hanging the Prussian chief from his own sacred oak tree. This *Landpfleger* used his enemies’ tactics of forest ambush. At first the Prussians were scornful of his tiny force, but soon they came to dread it. White-robed horsemen attacked them even in the snow and, riding over frozen rivers or charging out of blizzards like winter ghosts, their great cloaks served for camouflage. ‘Often under the weird glitter of the Northern Lights combat was joined upon the ice that covered the rivers and marshes, until the solid crust broke beneath the weight of the warriors and the men of both sides were engulfed to their chilly doom.’⁹ Tribesmen who fought on horseback with sword and battleaxe or on foot with bows found the uncanny strangers’ terrible charge irresistible, very different from undisciplined Polish levies. The ‘*Pruzzes*’, as the Germans called them, retreated to simple forts which were easily overrun by the brethren who employed *ballistae*, huge stone-throwing catapults, and used crossbows to pick off the defenders on the walls. Balke allied with one tribe to defeat another, Prussians who submitted and accepted Christianity being left in possession of their lands and enlisted as auxiliary troops.

Systematically he reduced the territory between the Vistula and the Niemen, penetrating up the rivers and consolidating his gains by wooden blockhouses.

In 1232 the town of Kulm (Chelmno) was founded on the left bank of the Vistula, in 1233 that of Marienwerder. The same year a Northern crusade was launched, the brethren joining forces with Duke Konrad and Duke Swientopelk of Pomerellen, and a great victory was won on the Sirgune where 1,500 Prussians fell. In 1234 the Hochmeister himself came to inspect Kulm and Thorn (Thorun). The year after, the Order of Dobrzyń was united with the Teutonic Order. Elbing was founded in 1237 near the mouth of the Vistula, and brethren could now attack along the Frisches Haff. By 1238 Pomezanien and Pogezanien were completely subdued. A new polity had been created, the *Ordensstaat*, or Order-State, ruled by the brethren themselves; German colonists, not only noblemen and burghers but peasants too, were brought in and given land. After the disastrous defeat of the Sword Brethren in 1237¹⁰ the survivors applied for affiliation with the Teutonic Knights, a union ratified by the pope. Hermann Balke left Prussia with sixty knights to become Landmeister of Livonia with a hierarchy of officers similar to the Hochmeister's. A Landmeister of Prussia was also appointed, though Livonian Landmeisters always enjoyed greater independence. Two years later he and Hermann von Salza died, leaving their Order an extraordinary and magnificent destiny. Already it controlled 150 miles of the Baltic coastline from which to launch its conquest of the interior.

The vocation of the Teutonic Knight in Prussia and Livonia differed from those of his comrades in Palestine, who were in contact with a superior civilization. Prussians were aggressively barbarous and their land of swamps and forests held no sacred associations. Extremely treacherous, the tribesmen were expert at ambushes and their ways with prisoners did not endear them. The Order's chronicles describe the fate of two knights. One was placed in a cleft tree-trunk held apart by ropes which were released, crushing the wretched brother, whereupon the tree was



3
The Lands of the Teutonic
Order at their widest
extent, c. 1407

set on fire. The other knight was lashed to his horse, mount and man being hauled to the top of an oak underneath which a great fire was lit. The usual practice was to roast captured brethren alive in their armour, like chestnuts, before the shrine of a local god.

Suddenly in 1237 the principalities of Kievan Russia were overwhelmed by a Mongol horde under the grandson of the late Genghis Khan, Batu the Splendid, who burnt Kiev itself to the ground in 1240, massacring every living soul. He then galloped west. A division commanded by Baibars Khan destroyed the Polish army of Boleslav the Chaste in March 1241. On 9 April Baibars met the troops of Duke Henry of Silesia at Liegnitz: 30,000 Poles and Bavarians with a force of Templars and Hospitallers and a strong detachment of Teutonic Knights under the Prussian Landmeister, Poppo von Osterna. The Christians were misled by the dense formations of the Mongols and underestimated their strength. The Mongols seem to have taken Duke Henry by surprise. The Christians broke before the whirlwind onslaught of the Nine Yak Tails, and were annihilated, the brethren dying almost to a man, though Poppo managed to escape. The duke's head was impaled on a lance, while nine sacks of severed ears were taken to Batu. The fugitives believed that they had been defeated by witchcraft; the Yak banner was a demon 'with a devil face and a long grey beard'. Fortunately Batu returned to Mongolia on hearing of the death of Khan Ogodai. (In Hungary the Arpad royal family was saved by the Hospitallers, who took them to a fortified island off the Dalmatian coast.)

Encouraged by the disasters of the Slavs, undeterred by Liegnitz and with papal encouragement, the Livonian Landmeister sought to enlarge his territory at the expense of the Russian schismatics. In 1240 brethren crossed the river Narva to take Pskov; their objective was Novgorod, of whose wealth alluring reports had been brought by German merchants. There was little love between the Orthodox Christians of Russ and Catholic Teutons. Novgorod was ruled by Prince Alexander Yaroslavo-

vitch, surnamed Nevsky after his victory on the river Neva in 1240 when he had defeated the Swedes. Alexander chose his ground with care. In April the Knights – outnumbered sixty to one if the *Livlandische Reimchronik* is to be believed – were manoeuvred on to the ice of Lake Peipus, which could support lightly armed Slavs but not heavy German cavalry. Twenty Knights died with their Landmeister, as did many of the troops who had accompanied them. Eisenstein's film *Alexander Nevsky* caricatures the scene, but does at least provide some idea of the dread which the brethren inspired among Balts and Slavs; their huge horses, faceless helmets, black-crossed shields and billowing white cloaks gave them a truly nightmarish appearance. The 'Ice Slaughter' put an end to Teutonic hopes of expansion into Russia beyond the Narva.

Although a Christian, the Duke of Pomerellen, Swientopelk, at first the brethren's enthusiastic ally, had become increasingly restive. Like Andrew of Hungary, he now realized that a dangerous power was emerging as his neighbour. Too many Germans had settled in Pomerellen. The building of Elbing on the lower Vistula and the Order's claim to the Vistula delta alarmed him as much as the Germanization of his erstwhile Prussian enemies. Liegnitz and Lake Peipus gave him his chance to redress the situation. In late 1242 he attacked the brethren without warning, using his fleet of twenty ships to strike at them from the river. At the same time, aided by their untamed kinsmen in the east, the Prussian tribes revolted and relapsed into paganism. In the Kulmerland (Chelmno) alone 40,000 Germans perished. One tribe, the Pomezaniens, stayed loyal, but only Thorun and a few castles held out.

Livonia was laid waste by Mindaugas and his savage Lithuanians. He had united them under his leadership, killing or cowering rival princes and making himself king. He equipped his mounted warriors with chain mail and swords captured from Germans or Slavs and with short throwing spears; they employed Mongol-style tactics but, instead of shooting arrows, hurled their javelins at short range. His infantry were armed with pikes, axes and crossbows.

He put his entire domain on a military footing, every able-bodied male being recruited to raid and lay waste in carefully planned campaigns. He increased his territory steadily at the expense of the Slavs, who submitted to his rule or else paid tribute. The dynasty he founded would continue his formidable organization and his aggressive policies.

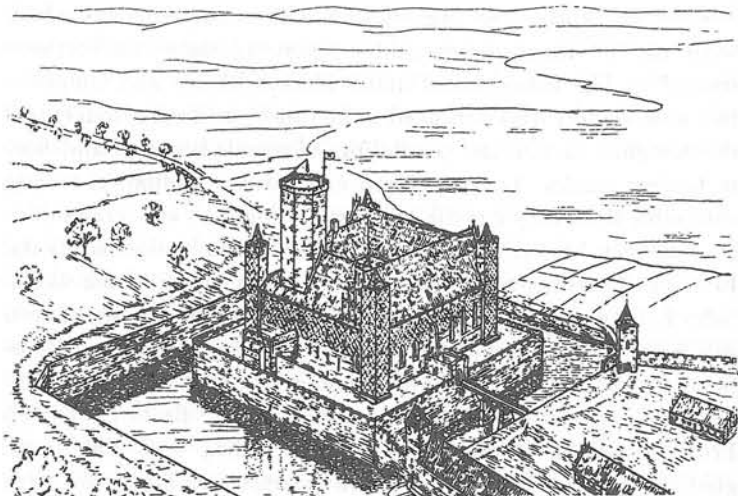
However, the Teutonic Order now had commanderies all over Germany with the manpower to cope with the situation. A hundred commanderies from the German bailiwicks attended the chapter-general of 1250. Nevertheless, it took a full-scale crusade to rescue their beleaguered brethren in Prussia. In 1254 an army of 60,000 Germans and Czechs marched to their aid, led by Rudolf of Habsburg and Ottokar II of Bohemia. The most thickly populated region of Prussia, the Samland peninsula north of the Pregel estuary, was overrun and the Sambians, the foremost Prussian tribe, were conquered. Königsberg was founded, named after King Ottokar. Hochmeister Poppo von Osterna finally restored order and by 1260 had overcome all the western tribes as well.¹¹

In Livonia the Lithuanians were beaten off, while two capable Landmeisters, Gruningen and Struckland, tamed the Kurs – Memel being built to stop arms from reaching the Kurs. Mindaugas made peace, seemingly converted to Christianity; with the pope's blessing he was crowned King of Lithuania. The brethren's aim was now to join Livonia to Prussia by conquering the Lithuanian seaboard. However, in 1260 Livonia was raided by tribesmen whom Mindaugas declined to control. Through the Kurs' treachery Landmeister von Hornhausen was ambushed at Durbe, perishing with 150 Knights who included the Marshal of Prussia. Mindaugas threw off Christianity and attacked, joined by Russians who seized Dorpat. The Kurs and Estonians rose in revolt. In 1263 Mindaugas's nephew Treniota crushed the Livonian brethren outside Riga and swept on into Prussia. But by some providence Mindaugas, Treniota and Alexander Nevsky all died later that year. By 1267 the Kurs had at last been brought to heel.

Even so, Durbe had precipitated a Prussian rebellion which went on for thirteen years, the 'great apostasy' as brethren termed it. The tribes united under Herkus Monte and Glappon, two able leaders who had lived in Germany and who understood the Knights' tactics, the possibilities of wooded terrain and how to besiege castles. They acquired crossbows and stone-throwing catapults, then they cut the waterways. Almost every commandery fell, even Marienwerder; Königsberg had to be rescued by the Livonian Landmeister. To survive, brethren acted on the axiom 'who fights the Order fights Jesus Christ'. Double apostates who worshipped snakes could not hope for any mercy.¹² Tribes disappeared without trace, their villages obliterated, Prussian '*capitaneis*' (leaders) being kidnapped or hunted down. Brethren copied Prussian tactics, sending raiding parties deep into the forest, guided by friendly tribesmen.¹³ No quarter was given. By 1273 the Prussian Landmeister Konrad von Thierberg, having broken his rebellious subjects for good, went on to conquer hitherto untamed tribes. Their last leader, Skurdo, laid waste his own lands and took his people to Lithuania. By the end of 1283 only 170,000 Prussians remained in Prussia.¹⁴

No doubt the Knights found justification in the Old Testament. 'So Joshua smote all the country of the hills and of the south and of the vale, and of the springs, and all their kings: he left none remaining, but utterly destroyed all that breathed as the Lord God commanded. And Joshua smote them from Kadesh-Barnea even unto Gaza and all the country of Goshon even unto Gibeon. And all these kings and their land did Joshua take at one time, because the Lord God of Israel fought for Israel.' Many Landmeisters must have seen themselves as Joshuas.

These early Teutonic Knights were famous for a meticulous observance of the Order's rule.¹⁵ Self-renunciation was absolute, the only possessions allowed being a sword,¹⁶ a habit and a right to bread and water; no brother was allowed to use his family coat of arms – the black cross was the sole blazonry permitted, though Livonian banners bore the Virgin.¹⁷ Fur coats, indispensable in Baltic winters, had to be of goat or sheep skin. Beards were



5. The commandery of the Teutonic Knights at Rheden in West Prussia as it must have appeared at the end of the thirteenth century. The four wings form chapel, dormitory, refectory and chapter house, fortified on the outside, while the cloisters are on an upper floor in case enemies should penetrate to the courtyard

compulsory. Brethren slept by their swords, fully clothed, rising in the night to say Office. No meat was eaten in Lent or Advent, when the diet was restricted to porridge with an occasional egg. The Bible was read at all meals. Self-flagellation took place every Friday; to curb the flesh still further, a mail shirt was sometimes worn next to the skin. On campaign the Knights heard Mass daily, before dawn in the Marshal's tent, where the Office was recited at the prescribed hours. Silence was kept on the march as in the cloister. On the battlefield the Marshal enforced discipline with a club. It was scarcely surprising that this strict observance began to relax during the later thirteenth century.

Triumph on the Baltic was offset by Outremer's collapse. In 1271 Starkenberg was lost, in 1291 the German Hospital vanished

with Acre. Armenia was falling to the Mamelukes, Greece to the Byzantines. The Hochmeister waited in vain at Venice for a crusade to recover the Holy Land. In 1308 the Archbishop of Riga, hoping to regain control of the city, asked Pope Clement V to suppress the Teutonic Order because of its luxury, cruelty and injustice; accusations of sodomy and witchcraft followed. In 1309 Hochmeister Siegfried von Feuchtwangen moved the Grand Commandery to Marienburg, the Prussian Landmeister's post being merged with that of Hochmeister.

THE ORDENSLAND:
AN ARMY WITH A COUNTRY

Marienburg (known as 'Malbork' since 1945) was the symbol of the Order: a combination of fortress, palace, barracks and monastery. It dominated the Vistula, down which not only Prussian but Polish trade reached the Baltic. Like all military religious, the celibate brethren had a deep and tender devotion to the Virgin Mary, an enormous yet gracious statue of whom dominated the castle. None the less the splendour of their court was greater than that of many of the visiting European kings. It was presided over by the reigning Hochmeister, whose white habit was embroidered with a great black-and-gold cross, charged with the Hohensaufen eagle and the lilies of St Louis. He was always escorted by four carefully chosen knights-in-waiting, the *Hochmeister companions* who stood at his side to prevent a repetition of the tragedy of 1330. (That year Werner von Orselen, a demanding superior noted for piety, had severely punished a certain Johann von Biendorf for gross immorality; one dark November evening as the Hochmeister was attending Vespers in his private chapel the revengeful knight stabbed him to death.) Hochmeisters more than rated such semi-regal state; their Prussian and Livonian lands were outside the empire so they were real sovereigns. Under Hochmeister Luther, Duke of Brunswick, a talented musician, the great castle became another Wartburg, the setting of scenes worthy of *Tannhäuser*. There were frequent song-contests and on one occasion a pathetic figure appeared from the past, a Prussian harpist who sang in his own almost forgotten tongue. Jeering, the knights awarded this ridiculous ghost a prize, a sack of rotten walnuts, before sending him back to the forest and his sacred oak trees. Marienburg was a truly Wagnerian capital

and indeed the minnesinger Tannhäuser seems to have been a *Deutschritter* for a short period.

A young knight might serve some years in a frontier blockhouse, but the greater part of his career was passed in the commanderies. He could be posted to the Levant – Greece or Armenia – while there were commanderies in Italy and even France, though after the thirteenth century few brethren lived outside Germany or the Baltic lands. It has been suggested that Hermann von Salza himself gave the Order a bureaucratic tradition derived from Norman Sicily, and certainly the administration followed a uniform pattern from the Mediterranean to the Baltic.¹ Officials developed the art of scientific book-keeping; financial and legal experts were employed and archives meticulously kept, including a personal dossier on each brother. Chaplains and sisters ran sixty hospitals and refuges for the destitute. Each Landkomtur was responsible for his district's colonization, later tax collection and the maintenance of roads and schools, as well as defence, while he was also president of the provincial Landthing. The chief relaxation of all brethren was hunting; not for pleasure but the necessary extermination of primeval fauna – wolf, bear, lynx, elk, aurochs and bison – which terrorized the settlers or ruined their crops. If elderly or infirm, brothers retired to a kind of Chelsea Hospital at Marienburg. Most came from the Rhineland or Westphalia – Westphalians predominating in Livonia. The latter, more dour and reserved, disliked the Rhinelanders' noisy volatility and tended to think them frivolous. Celibacy did not seem so ghastly a privation to the medieval mind as it does to the modern, and the Order offered an adventurous career to landless younger sons; a fair number of ne'er-do-wells took the habit in order to avoid criminal proceedings. For fear of nepotism the brotherhood would not admit Prussians, whether German or Balt, after about 1400.

The settlement of Prussia was the outstanding colonial achievement of the Middle Ages, the most successful economically. Nearly a hundred towns and a thousand villages were established under the brethren's auspices. Cultivation spread inland from the

Baltic and up the lower Vistula until the southern and south-eastern borderlands came under the plough. German and Dutch peasants, led by a *locator*² who combined the functions of immigration agent and village mayor, were given freeholdings in return for rent in kind. Marketplaces were set up. There were no labour dues, and peasants were not tied to the soil. Noblemen came too, and were granted estates, forming the new gentry.³ An alliance was forged with the Cistercians, the White Monks who had a genius for transforming forest and swamp into fertile farmland. Most Prussians were reduced to serfdom though steadily Germanized. Marshes were drained, sea walls built, forests cleared and the sandy soil conquered by the heavy German plough. Customs duty was levied, but there were no inland tolls on the well-kept roads or the rivers, which were patrolled by the brethren. Understandably, there was little brigandage. By the fourteenth century, Prussia had the most contented peasant freeholders in Europe.

The Knights had learnt the value of commerce in the Levant and kept a fleet of merchantmen. They copied Templar banking methods, bills of exchange being accepted at larger commanderies. They enforced a uniform system of weights and measures, and minted their own coinage. In 1263, at the height of the Prussian rebellion, they obtained papal permission to trade, exporting grain in vast quantities from their estates. The *Gross-Schaffer* ('Grand Shepherd'), directly responsible to the Gross-Komtur at the Marienburg, was in effect a Minister of Trade; he managed the cornlands of West Prussia, employing salesmen to buy and sell grain. The Gross-Schaffer of the Grossmarschall at Königsberg supervised those of East Prussia and also the export of yellow amber, much prized for rosaries, of which the Order had a monopoly. In addition, the Ordensland exported silver, timber, salt, cloth, wax, furs, horses and falcons. It imported iron, copper and wine from western Germany, wool and, later, cloth from England. As a member of the Hanseatic League, the Hochmeister was well able to sympathize with the ambitions of his merchants, who grew rich and had every reason to be grateful to

the Order. They belonged to 'weapon clubs', riding fully armed with the Knights in emergencies.

Every landowner, whether German noble or Prussian chieftain, held his land from the Order in return for military service. He also had to pay annually a bushel of grain, with another bushel for every 'plough' of land. (A plough was four hides, a hide being the minimum needed to feed a family.) Immigrant smallholders paid tithes in grain and silver – as much as a mark of silver per hide. The annual levy on millers could be fifty marks of silver in addition to payments in grain. Innkeepers paid four marks. Even the poorest Prussian serf, farming a single hide, had to contribute two-thirds of a bushel of wheat, rye or oats and had to perform specified labour dues on the Order's land.

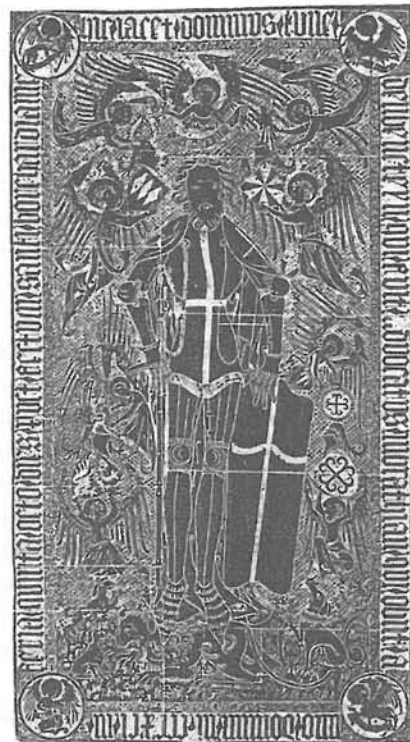
When a Hochmeister died, the Gross-Komtur summoned the Land-Komturs (senior commanders) of Germany, Prussia and Apulia as the first stage in an electoral system designed to avoid lobbying. They nominated a president who selected twelve electors – seven knights, four sergeants and a priest – each one joining in the process of selection as soon as he was chosen. When the twelve were complete, they elected the new Hochmeister. He was a limited monarch, whose bailiffs comprised a council rather like a modern cabinet of ministers and whose household revenues were kept separate from those of the *Ordensstaat*. One law governed Prussia, that of the Hochmeister and his council, applying to laymen and clerics alike. The Church was very much the servant of the knights' state. There was no archbishop, and all four bishops were priest-brethren of the Order. It is this uniformity of law and administration, co-ordinating foreign policy, internal government, church affairs, trade and industry, which gives substance to the claim that Prussia was the first modern state.

The Ordensland could boast a literature, although, like most contemporary princes, many of its rulers could neither read nor write.⁴ Several brethren wrote biblical commentaries, among them Heinrich von Hesler (*fl. c.* 1300) and the Ermeland canon Tilo von Kulm (*fl. c.* 1340). Heinrich's commentaries, *Evangelium Nicodemi* and *Apocalypsis*, are interesting for their criticism of the

landowners' harsh treatment of the peasants. Hagiography was not neglected, and Hugo von Langenstein (*fl. c. 1290*) wrote a life of St Martina which was much admired in its day. He also compiled the *Mainauer Naturlehre*, a strange work which deals with geography, astronomy and medicine. The Order's mystics did not emerge until the end of the fourteenth century, though its first great historians were at work much earlier. The tradition begun by the *Chronica Terre Prussie* of Petrus von Dusburg – translated into rhyming German by Nikolaus von Jeroschin and continued up to 1394 by Wigand von Marburg, the Hochmeister's herald – would reach its height in the fifteenth century with the 'Annals' of Johann von Puschke.⁵ The chronicle of Petrus (*fl. c. 1330*) has an introduction in which each weapon is sanctified by its scriptural precedents, giving holy war an almost sacramental quality. There were also various translations of the Old Testament, especially of Job and the Maccabees, which, like the chronicles, were read in the refectories.

Chroniclers also flourished in Livland. Conquest and settlement, the union of the *Schwertbrüder* with the Teutonic Knights and the early years of 'Marienland' were vigorously recorded as the *Chronicon Livonicum Vetus* by Heinrich von Lettland (d. 1259). In the next century the story was continued by Hermann von Wartberge. One should also mention a short chronicle in German, *Die Riterlichen Meister und Brüder zu Lieflant*, by Dietleb von Alnpeke. These early Livonian chronicles strike a noticeably grim note, compounded of savagery and anxiety, even when compared with those of Prussia, which are harsh enough. The German presence on the shores of the northern Baltic was far more precarious than in Prussia – at times the 'Crusaders', both brethren and colonists, saw themselves as a beleaguered garrison.

The Teutonic Knights' one real aesthetic achievement was their architecture. A typical '*domus conventualis*' was a combination of austerity and strategic necessity. By 1300 there were twenty-three of them in Prussia alone. At first these houses consisted of a strong watch tower on the Rhineland pattern, with curtain-walls enclosing wooden conventual buildings, the whole surrounded by



6. Brass of the Teutonic Knight Kuno von Liebenstein, c. 1396

moats and earthworks. However, towards the end of the thirteenth century they began to build commanderies of a specific design. Chapel, dormitory, refectory and chapter house formed four bulky wings, fortified on the outside, often with a free-standing watch tower. There were cloisters, but these were on an upper floor in case enemies should enter the courtyard. The brethren's architects evolved a style which, although borrowing from Syrian, Italian, French and even English sources, remained their own.

Marienburg was the outstanding example. Here, the original fortified monastery grew into four great wings of several storeys enclosing a courtyard with arcaded galleries on two storeys against such rooms as chapel, chapter house, dormitory, kitchen and armoury. Square towers at the corners were linked by a crenellated rampart along the roof. In the days of the Prussian Landmeisters, the *Hochschloss* followed the basic pattern: a quadrangle with cloisters enclosing a courtyard, strengthened by towers at each angle. The Marienburg one was built in stone, but the later outworks, the *Mittelschloss* and the west wing, were of brick. The *Mittelschloss* contained the great refectory with star-shaped vaulting resting on delicate, attenuated, granite pillars. The Hochmeister's apartments were in the west wing and his personal dining-room, the charming 'summer refectory', centred round a single pillar whose stem supported a mass of decorative brick vaulting. This graceful mingling of brick and stone produced an ethereal, almost mystical effect. The nineteenth-century Romantic poet Eichendorff was so moved by its 'light diaphanous quality' that, standing in the summer refectory, he coined the phrase 'music turned to stone'. There were other great castle-commanderies at Thorun, Rheden, Mewe, Königsberg and Heilsberg. At Marienwerder the bishop's palace was both castle and fortified cathedral in one vast, yet undeniably elegant, red-brick building. The Ordensburgen's sombre history was relieved by the gaiety of their exquisite architecture.

The commanderies dominated the landscape of the *Ordensland*. However, there were other buildings in the brethren's distinctive style: walled towns and churches such as the Marienkirche at Danzig with its fantastic red gables. In Livonia, stone was plentiful, and brick was seldom used, but otherwise its architecture was very similar to that of Prussia. Towns were strengthened with massive citadels. At Reval and Narva there were tall towers named *Langer Hermann*, perhaps to commemorate the brave Landpfleger. The independent-minded Livonian bishops built castles in emulation of their Prussian colleagues, similar to the *domi conventuales* of the brethren, as the requirements of a dean

and chapter were very like those of a *Haus-Komtur* and his twelve brother-knights. (The twentieth-century SS named their own fortresses *Ordensburgen*.*)

Livland differed from Prussia in many ways. The Archbishop of Riga and his four bishops disputed power with the Order, frequently appealing to the pope and sometimes even to the heathen Lithuanians. So independent of Prussia was the Hochmeister's viceroy, the Landmeister, that some historians do not appreciate that he and his thirteen komturs were no longer Sword Brethren but Teutonic Knights. (He was appointed from two names submitted to the Hochmeister by the Livonian komturs.) His authority was far from absolute and often he had to seek approval from the province's *landtag* (assembly). However, the settlers were well aware that they depended on the Order for their survival. Largely confined to the towns, they formed a tiny percentage of the Livonian population, being always overwhelmingly outnumbered by the Baltic and Finno-Ugarian inhabitants.⁶ Riga and the great commanderies of Dunamunde, Uskull, Lennewarden, Ascherade, Dunaberg, Wenden and Fellin were linked by water so that reinforcements could be rushed in should the natives rebel. During the night of 22 April 1343 the Estonians murdered 1,800 German men, women and children before attacking Reval. There they were routed by Landmeister von Dreileve, who swiftly restored order.⁷

The Teutonic Order's inspiration has been mistakenly seen as German nationalism by Slav, Balt and German historians alike. If Latin or German were used exclusively in administration, it was because the Baltic languages were unwritten. Prussians were forbidden to live in German villages because they were bad farmers who did not use the heavy German plough. Inter-marriage was prohibited because too many natives remained pagan, not in order to avoid diluting German blood. In Samland, Christianized

* Oddly enough, Hitler's *Wolfschanz*, from where he directed his own *Drang nach Osten*, was near the site of the Teutonic Order's *Komturei* of Rastenburg.

Prussian chiefs were thoroughly assimilated, becoming indistinguishable from the German nobles whose daughters they married, building manor houses and adopting coats of arms. By the end of the thirteenth century, Prussians and Pomeranian Slavs were being admitted into the Order, some becoming komturs. The brethren's prejudices were religious and economic, not racial. They were Catholic Christians first and Germans second. The *Ordensstaat's* primary purpose was the extirpation of paganism. The Knights could be ruthless enough when their interests were at stake. In 1331 King Władysław the Dwarf of Poland called them in to repress a rebellion at Danzig, whereupon they kept the town for themselves. The Poles routed the Knights at Płowce the following year, but proved unable to defeat them decisively. Casimir III abandoned the struggle in 1343, ceding Danzig and Pomerania to the Order by the Treaty of Kalisz.

The paganism of Lithuania was the Teutonic Order's *raison d'être*. Under Grand Duke Gediminas (1315-41), secure in his forests, the Lithuanians absorbed the Ukraine as far as Kiev, creating the largest state in Europe. Their Ruthenian neighbours began to civilize them, some becoming Orthodox Christians,⁸ while Gediminas encouraged Polish merchants and artisans to settle in Lithuania. He began to build a more centralized government and his warriors acquired cannon. Nevertheless, as high priest of such deities as Percunos the Fire God, Potrempa the Water God and, most sinister of all, Dverkos the Hare God, the Grand Duke continued to serve the sacred green snakes and the holy fire of sweet-smelling amber in the magic oak-grove next to his palace at Vilnius.

There was unending war between the Order and the subjects of Lithuanian Grand Dukes. Its terrain was the '*Wiltnisse*' or Wilderness: primeval forest, heath and scrubland with innumerable lakes and marshes. The Knights attacked from the sea, sailing up the rivers; their clinker-built cogs were bigger than any Lithuanian boat and could carry 500 troops. Alternatively they raided through the dense woods and fens after being trained in woodcraft by Prussian trackers. They took their armour and

provisions with them on pack-horses; the armour, heavier now with plates for limbs and shoulders, could be worn only when they reached the banks of the Niemen. Besides all the hazards of ambush, they sometimes lost their way beneath the pine trees which hid the sun and the stars, and died from starvation; it was not unknown for brethren to go mad from forest '*cafard*'. If taken prisoner, they were sacrificed to the Lithuanian gods, captured komturs being invariably burnt alive in the sacred oak-groves – like Markward von Raschau in 1389. Seventy expeditions were launched from Prussia between 1345 and 1377, and another thirty from Livland.⁹

The most important were in the summer, the '*sommer-reysa*', waged jointly by the Hochmeister from Prussia and the Landmeister from Livland, synchronized by the Ordensmarschall's careful staffwork – which included scouting, establishing supply depots and assembling ships. The '*winter-reysa*' in December and January was a much smaller affair, seldom involving more than 2,000 horsemen who made quick raids from a makeshift camp in enemy territory; there was always the danger of blizzards, which could be even more dangerous than Lithuanians. Summer or winter, if successful, the Knights would return with cattle and prisoners.

The brethren were dreaded by their adversaries. When in 1336 they besieged and stormed a fort at Pilenai on the Niemen, rather than be captured the Lithuanians burnt all their goods in a great funeral pyre, killed their women and children, and then beheaded each other. An old priestess decapitated more than 100 warriors with an axe before splitting her own head as the Knights broke into the stockade.

Samaiten, the Lithuanian seaboard, was inhabited by a ferocious tribe who prevented the union of Prussia and Livland. The Knights had a man equal to the task, Winrich von Kniprode, who had joined them as a boy of ten and was Hochmeister from 1351 to 1382.¹⁰ A jovial Rhinelander, he was elected after an already brilliant military career and soon introduced reforms which revitalized the entire Order. Imposing as Marienburg was,

Winrich built a new palace, the superb *Mittelschloss* with its beautiful gardens. Here he presided with true south German gaiety over a splendid court, welcoming a never-ending stream of foreign visitors for whom he provided sumptuous banquets and entertainments, with music and jugglers. Among those who came were Knights of Rhodes, from their own Order's German commanderies.¹¹ Tournaments (in which, as religious, the brethren did not take part) were frequently arranged. However, there was wisdom in the Hochmeister's extravagant hospitality, for the papacy had promised the full spiritual privileges of a crusader to those who assisted the Order, and throughout the fourteenth century the princes and noblemen of Europe flocked to fight the Lithuanians. The blind king, John of Bohemia, who died at Crécy, had lost his eye in Samaiten; he was accompanied in Prussia by his secretary, the composer Guillaume de Machaut. Marshal Boucicault, the French paladin, fought at the brethren's side,¹² while Henry of Derby, later Henry IV of England, paid two visits to the Hochmeister's court, though this was after Winrich's day.¹³ No doubt he was enrolled as a *halbruder*, a confrère knight. A young Yorkshireman, the twenty-year-old Sir Geoffrey Scrope – brother of a future Archbishop of York – fell fighting at Winrich's side in 1362 and was buried in Königsberg cathedral, where for centuries a window commemorated him.¹⁴ Many English and Scots took part in the wars of 'the High Master of the Dutch Knights', while Chaucer's reference to such an episode in the career of his knight is well known:

Ful ofte time he hadde the bord bigonne
 aboven alle naciouns in Pruce
 In Lettow hadde he reysed and in Ruce
 No Cristen man so ofte of his degree.

The Ordensland's campaigns had the attraction of big-game hunting in the nineteenth century. The courtly, charming Hochmeister understood how to make the best use of such enthusiasm.

Winrich tried to raise the spiritual and educational level of the Order. There were to be two learned brethren in every *komturei*, a

theologian and a lawyer. A law school was set up at Marienburg, and the Hochmeister at one time contemplated founding a University of Kulm. So many recruits joined the brethren that there were not enough posts for them; there were probably 700 knights in Prussia by the end of Winrich's reign. He solved the problem by setting up convent houses as well as commanderies. These consisted of twelve knights and six priest-brethren, emphasis being put on the Office and spiritual life. There were four such houses in Marienburg alone.

More junkers were employed in official posts and their levies organized into a formidable militia. However, Winrich protected the peasantry against them, and indeed earned the title of the peasants' friend.¹⁵ He was equally jealous of his burghers' privileges, defending them from foreign competition and issuing an excellent new coinage.

Winrich was determined to exterminate 'the skin-clad Samogitians' of Samaiten and their deities, to whom human sacrifice was far from unknown. Two extremely able grand dukes, Algirdas and Kestutis, led the enemy during thirty years of unbroken warfare, but the crisis came in 1370 when a vast army marched on Königsberg and was beaten back by the Hochmeister himself at Rhudav (Rudawa). He lost his Marshal¹⁶ with 26 komturs and 200 other brethren, but the Lithuanians, who had lost their standard, never dared face him again. He played off one grand duke against another and kept on friendly terms with Poland. Always an innovator, he introduced ship-borne cannon for the *winter-reysa* of 1381. By the time Winrich died in 1382 he had secured Samaiten and seized Trakai, a mere fourteen miles from Vilnius. It was the Ordensland's zenith.

But in 1386 Grand Duke Jogaila became a Catholic, married the Polish Queen Jadwiga, and was crowned King Władysław II of Poland and Lithuania. The holy fire at Vilnius was extinguished for ever, and next year Jogaila set about converting his subjects. However, the Order claimed, with some justice, that many were still heathen or Orthodox schismatics. Only recently, in 1377, Grand Duke Algirdas had been cremated with his horses

in the forest. As late as 1413 a French visitor, Guillebert de Lanoy, noted that some tribesmen still burnt their dead, splendidly dressed, on oak pyres within the sacred groves.¹⁷

The *Ordensstaat* was strong enough to defy Iogaila's vast empire, as his viceroy in Lithuania, Grand Duke Vitautas, took an independent line and even allied with the brethren, abandoning Samaiten, though the natives still held out in their swamps and forests. Konrad von Juningen, Hochmeister from 1394 to 1407, was an able statesman. He saw clearly that the Polish-Lithuanian Empire would only be united by opposition from the Order, and encouraged Vitautas to expand eastwards. In 1399 the grand duke rode against the Golden Horde, over the Russian plains, with a great army of Lithuanian and Ruthenian boyars. Amongst them, oddly assorted, were the exiled Tartar Khan, Toktamish, and a detachment of 500 men from the Teutonic Order. Tamberlane's lieutenant, Edegey Khan, met them on the river Vorskla, a tributary of the Dnieper. He used the tactics employed at Liegnitz and slaughtered two-thirds of Vitautas's army, pursuing him mercilessly over the steppes. This ended 'Mad Witold's' hopes of conquering the lands of the Golden Horde. He turned on the *Ordensstaat*. Desperately Konrad tried to keep the peace, besides attempting to secure an alliance with the Khan of Kazan. The brethren possessed fifty-five towns and forty-eight fortresses, and their subjects were prosperous and contented. The *Ordenstaat* could triumph, so long as it avoided a general conflict with all its enemies. But the peace-loving Konrad died in 1407, his death from gall-stones supposedly hastened by spurning his doctor's remedy - to sleep with a woman.

The untameable Samogitians overran Memel in 1397, occupying the fortress-town which linked the *Ordensstaat's* two halves, but the brethren recaptured it in 1406. This was the limit of their territorial expansion. They had purchased the Neumark of Brandenburg from Emperor Sigismund in 1402, and their control of the Baltic coastline was not to be equalled until the Swedish empire of the seventeenth century. In 1398 the brethren had landed an army on the island of Gotland, occupied by Swedish

pirates, the 'Sea Victuallers', who preyed on the Hansa ships. These were driven out and the seas patrolled. The island was then seized by the Danes, and so the knights returned in 1404 with 15,000 troops and retook it, as well as 200 Danish ships, installing the Hansa in Visby, the capital. Finally, in 1407, the new Hochmeister, Ulrich von Juningen, gave it back to Margaret of Denmark in return for a guarantee to protect the Hansa.

King Władysław did his best to provoke the Order. Polish merchants were forbidden to trade with the burghers of Prussia and Livland, who were already made restive by the Hansa's decline and resented the Order's private trading ventures. At Władysław's request, the Duke of Pomerania blockaded the roads from Germany. Władysław also fanned discontent among the Prussian junkers, resentful of komturs most of whom came from the Rhineland, besides persuading the Samogitians to rebel. Konrad's dying words had been a plea not to elect his brother in his place, since Ulrich was notoriously proud and foolhardy. In 1409 the smouldering border disputes broke into open war. Władysław and Vitautas assembled 150,000 troops, every man they could muster, together with large contingents of Tartars and Cossacks, and also of Czech, Vlach and Hungarian mercenaries under Jan Zizka (the future military genius of the Hussite wars). The Order's entire force - Knights, mercenaries and volunteers - totalled 80,000. Apart from his Polish chivalry, Władysław's army consisted chiefly of light horse, while the Order's was mainly heavy cavalry save for a few arbalestiers with the new steel crossbows and some artillery brought from Tannenberg. The Livland brethren could not come in time, but the Knights seem to have been confident of victory.

The two armies met at Tannenberg in Prussia, among the Mazurian marshes, on 15 July 1410. True to his role as God's champion, the Hochmeister scorned the suggestion of a surprise attack. The Poles sang the battle-hymn of St Adalbert, whereupon the brethren replied with the Easter song, 'Crist ist enstandin',¹⁸ the guns spoke briefly, then the heavy Ordensland cavalry, in plate armour and hounskull helmets, attacked, roaring the old



7. Hochmeister Ulrich von Juningen, killed at Tannenberg, 1410

war cry, 'Gott mit uns', a hammer-like mass of gleaming steel. It shattered the left wing of Czechs and Lithuanians, nearly smashing the right. However, the Poles held stubbornly in the centre and their allies rallied. His left wing had not yet reformed, but Ulrich charged with the entire reserve, weakened by the treacherous desertion of Kulmerland junkers. The Poles still held. After many more charges, at the end of a long day, the knights were outflanked, and the battle degenerated into a sword and axe mêlée while Tartars surrounded the brethren. Their grim and

stubborn Hochmeister refused to leave the 'Götterdämmerung' he had brought about, fighting on in his gilt armour and white cloak beneath the great battle banner, white and gold with its black cross and eagle,¹⁹ till he was cut down (when found, his body had been mutilated almost beyond recognition).²⁰ 18,000 of the Ordensland's army were said to have been killed, including the Grosskomtur, the Ordensmarschall and many komturs, 205 Knights in all. It was claimed that 14,000 of their host were taken prisoner, including a large number of Knights – most of whom were tortured or beheaded – while fifty of their standards were hung up as trophies in Cracow cathedral. Whatever the exact figures for casualties, the battle of Tannenberg was indisputably the Teutonic Order's Hattin.

Heinrich von Plauen, Komtur of Schwetz, galloped from Pomerania to Marienburg with 3,000 men, and, to prevent it affording cover, burnt the beautiful town to the ground. A vast army surrounded him, the captured guns of Marienburg battered the walls and, worst of all, the Order's subjects, even the bishops, gave the Poles a triumphant welcome while Kulmerland gentry sent him insulting messages.²¹ Yet Plauen held on with cold courage. His brethren's morale had collapsed but was miraculously restored by a vision of Our Lady. After two months Władysław raised the siege and at the First Peace of Thorn in 1411 the Order lost only the Dobrzyń land (south-east of the Kulmerland) to Poland and Samaiten to Lithuania. But it was the end of the Baltic crusade.