Chapter Three

"Who Holds the Right to the Land?" Narratives of Colonization in Baltic-German and Estonian Literatures[1]

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> Ein Land finden, wo es Honig gab, den man gegen Kleinigkeiten tauschte, war zu der Zeit, da unsre Vorfahren nicht Zucker, Thee, Kaffe kannten […] eine Entdeckung, die mehr werth war als Martinike, Domingo und Jamaika mit allen ihren Kaffebäumen und Zuckerpflanzen. (Findeisen 14)[2]

Thus wrote Friedrich Gotthilf Findeisen in his "Lesebuch für Ehst- und Livland" in 1787 about his new homeland in Livonia (Livland), where he moved from Leipzig. Findeisen's exemplary passage takes us right into the German colonial discourse of the late eighteenth century which regarded Old Livonia ("Alt-Livland"), the territory constituting today's Estonia and Latvia, as "the only – if not transoceanic, nevertheless transmarine – colony Germany has ever had" (Kohl 20).

European postcolonial studies do not always recognize the history of the Baltic countries as a significant part of European colonial history. In fact, Old Livonia was the oldest European colony – and it was also a German one. Over time, the colonial situation altered its form in response to the changing political situation in the region. In the end, this colonialism, at least in a political sense, proved to be a colonial fantasy or a wishful dream of those who saw themselves as colonialists. Nevertheless, the colonial experience formed the national and cultural identities of the area. And this colonial experience, real or imaginary, is articulated in literary texts – specifically, the historical novel – both in German and in the Estonian/Latvian languages. On the other hand, the texts not only react, they also act, helping to form reality, playing a crucial role in the processes of nation building.

1 The research for and writing of this article was supported by the Estonian Science Foundation grant ETF9178.

2 "Encountering a land where honey existed which could be traded for small amenities was – at a time when our forefathers did not know of sugar, tea and coffee – a discovery worth more Martinique, Saint Domingue and Jamaica with all their plants of coffee and sugar." This and all other translations are, if not indicated otherwise, by the author.

The comparative examination of Estonian and/or Latvian literatures and Baltic-German literature[3] has so far remained more of a whim of a few researchers exploring the margins of their discipline than an approach that is considered valid and commonly accepted. But conducting such a joint examination proves to be especially productive in the light of postcolonial theories that proceed from the understanding that there is no clear-cut opposition between the colonizer and the colonized, but rather that they are interdependent, comprising two sides of the same coin of colonialism.

My contribution examines the ways in which the colonizing of Livonia is represented in Baltic-German and Estonian historical novels in the late nineteenth century. The colonizing act (in the aftermath of the Second Crusade) is a key occurrence in the cultural memory of both nations – for the Baltic-Germans, the colonizers, it is the moment of the establishment of their existence; in the Estonian collective memory, it means the battles for and the loss of the 'ancient freedom,' i.e., their independence from outside forces. It is no wonder that both the Estonian and Baltic-German historical novel start with the depiction of this crucial event. While substantively different in their ideologies, both national narratives actually have the same roots. Before specifying them, I will take a look at German colonialism in the Baltic region more particularly.

"Das ist ja ganz wie in Amerika": The Beginnings of German Colonialism

> Kouflute waren gesezzen
> Riche und vormezzen
> An eren und an gute.
> Den quam in ir gemute,
> als noch vil mancher tut.
> Got der wisete sie dar an,
> daz sie gewunnen einen man,
> dem vremde lant waren kunt.
> Der brachte sie zu einer stunt
> Mit schiffen uf die Osterse.

3 "Baltic-German literature" refers to literature written in German by German authors who lived in Livonia (Livland), Estonia (Estland), or Couronia (Kurland), the territory of today's Estonia and Latvia. Baltic-Germans never made up more than 6% of the total but they dominated the political, cultural, and economic life of this region until 1918 when the nation-states of Estonia and Latvia were proclaimed. German was the official and cultural language until 1918; subsequently, it remained one of the minority languages in the new sovereignties. In 1939 the Baltic Germans, following the signing of the Hitler-Stalin Pact, were resettled by the German government in the Warthegau (a territory in occupied Poland) under the 'Heim ins Reich' program. In 1945 most of those residents were moved to a locality in what is today's Germany.

Waz sal ich da von sagen me.[4]
(*Livländische Reimchronik*, 1291–98)

German colonial history began with the conquest of Livonia at the beginning of the thirteenth century in the aftermath of the Livonian Crusade (1198–1227),[5] proclaimed by Innocentius III and initiated by the archbishop of Hamburg-Bremen. The German crusaders and the colonists who followed them, met with the resistance of the inhabitants of these territories: first from the Livs, after whom they named the land, then the Latgalians and Curonians in the southern part of the region, which formed the nucleus of modern Latvia, and, finally, the Estonians in the north. As we can read in the old Livonian Chronicles, this occupation had more than just a religious purpose. Some recent papers on medieval studies in Estonia have drawn on the writings of James Brundage, who compared the Spanish colonization of the Americas with the subjugation of Livonia, mainly because the policies and practices were first tested in Livonia. The colonization of Livonia thus provided a structural model for European overseas colonialism, an important facet of the argument in favor of a postcolonial approach to Baltic history.

Another reason to review colonialism in the Baltic region is its colonial self-consciousness. Since the eighteenth century, Baltic German culture recognized itself as a colonial one. Even in the twentieth century, Arthur Behrsing begins his *Grundriss einer Geschichte der baltischen Dichtung* (1928) by identifying Livonia as "the only real colony of the Holy Roman Empire" (Behrsing 3).

The period of coloniality persisted for over seven hundred years, altering its form over the course of time due to the changing political background and Germany's diminishing political authority in the region. Colonial situations are typically characterized by the dependency on the 'mother country'; and since the mid-sixteenth century, and after the collapse of the authority of the Livonian branch of the Teutonic Order, Estonia and Livonia had only Germany as an ideological model: German was the language of education, and cultural patterns were borrowed from Germany. And although Germany had no explicit political or economic interests in the Baltic, which in the seventeenth century was a Swedish colony and in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries a colony of the Russian Empire, thanks to a special political status negotiated by the Baltic-Germans with Peter I, these areas were able to maintain their remarkable municipal autonomy and economic independence under the local authority of the Baltic-German nobility. Hence, German colonialism in the Baltic countries was in most respects cultural, limited to ambitions of imitating and holding on to a German culture and way of life.

4 Established merchants, rich and prominent in honor and wealth, had decided to seek profit from trade, as many still do today. God led them to employ a man who knew of foreign lands and straight away he brought them by ship to the Baltic Sea. What more should I say?

5 Concerning the Livonian Crusades, see Tamm/Kaljundi/Selchjensen; Brundage, *The Crusades;* Fonnesberg-Schmidt.

In the mid-nineteenth century, Germany's interest in German *Ostsiedlung* began to grow, a development considered to be a direct result of German colonial experiences in the Baltic region (see Plath 280, 283). In the political sense, however, German colonialism in the Baltic remained wishful thinking: As soon as political aspirations related to the mother country were revealed, e.g., at the end of WWI, the hope of creating a Baltic Duchy with Germany's help, this form of colonialism met with opposition because of Germany's indifference. However, this does not mean that we should not investigate the colonial situation particular to the Baltic.

Without elaborating too much on the specific features of the Baltic case compared with other colonial situations (e.g., in Africa), I want to stress that until the early twentieth century Baltic society lived under a form of domination in which the demarcation between social strata was a national one: the dominant, privileged group consisted of Baltic-Germans, and the subordinate class consisted of Estonians and Latvians, who experienced their plight as 'seven centuries of slavery.'

The establishment of nation states in 1918 gave Estonians – who had been labeled *Undeutsche* by the Germans – agency in both a political and a cultural sense: it granted them not only the right to vote, but also the right to their own history, which up to this point had been written by others. The voice of these others was more audible not only because of the political influence of the ruling social group, but also because of the range the German language exercised, both politically and academically. This inequality was further emphasized by the dominance of German in the written sphere, which also reinforced the dominant group's views of history.

The written sources originating from this area reflected very little of the Estonian position. Although the Estonian written language had already begun to materialize in the mid-sixteenth century, it was initially created by German pastors to foster the colonial enterprise and to enforce subordination. The Estonians passed on their subaltern perspectives from generation to generation in the form of oral traditions. This oral culture became a part of the written culture in the nineteenth century when ethnologists, linguists, and folklorists started to record it, in an attempt to reconstruct the lost voices. Its authenticity, however, could only be a matter of speculations – or fiction. Yet, this fiction was loaded with ideological (and political) significance: as a 'public transcript' (a term coined by James C. Scott), Estonian voices and perspectives on Estonian history became official with the birth of the Estonian Republic in the second and third decades of the twentieth century, when historians began to consider more seriously archaeological, ethnographic, and folkloristic sources. During the short twenty-year existence of the Estonian Republic in the early twentieth century, Estonian historiography and self-representation were established, which also sustained Estonian national identity during the fifty years of Soviet colonialism that followed.[6]

6 For a postcolonial analysis of the Soviet and post-Soviet era in Estonia, see Annus.

A Story of Settlement or Conquest? Estonian and Baltic-German Paradigms in Historiography and Literature

Problems of Estonian historiography need to be considered against the background of the country's postcoloniality: it has until now used two paradigms – the Estonian and the Baltic-German – which are marked by rhetorical (metaphorical, poetical) or narratological means as "metahistorical gestures above history," as described by the Estonian historian and literary scholar Jaan Undusk. Distinctions between historiographies of one and the same country written in different languages underline the metaphorical character of all historical writing: Clio is a poet, too![7] Even for a historian, history is not simply factual; it is always related to the narrative means of the current historiographical discourse, as well as those of the individual, familial, cultural, and ethnic memory of the historian, which taken together form the basis of his or her interpretation of history. Or, quoting Undusk again, "History is always a moral summary of the present" (Undusk 116).

One of the cardinal elements in Baltic history, whose interpretation always, unerringly, shows the paradigm of the historiographer, is the colonization of Old Livonia in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The question is whether during this period the land was settled and civilized or colonized and enslaved. Baltic historiography has not yet been able to treat these events without metahistorical gestures.[8] And I am afraid that such gestures cannot be avoided even in this article.

The historical novel is a genre that allows Clio, history's muse, to engage in flights of imagination without fear of being reprimanded. Historical novels tend to instrumentalize history in the interest of creating a national identity. The genre was born in the nineteenth century to meet the need for national identity narratives; it is the symbolic form of the idea of the nation state (Moretti 17). Regarding relations with the land, intense identification with a particular territory is the cornerstone of the very idea of a nation state, and the history of the settlement of that territory is an essential part of the historical narrative.

However, what is presented as a settlement story in Baltic-German literature is one of subjection in Estonian literature. The victorious history of conquest in Baltic-German literature – the triumph of culture, religion, and German morals, the salvation of the land from savagery and paganism – is in Estonian literature portrayed as a heroic fight against foreign conquerors (first set out in the novels of Eduard Bornhöhe and Andres Saal). The tensions between conquerors and conquered are, however, not clear-cut: Estonian literature at the end of the nineteenth

7 I here refer to the German translation of White's influential study *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism*, which in German reads *Auch Klio dichtet oder die Fiktion des Faktischen. Studien zur Tropologie des historischen Diskurses* (Stuttgart 1991).

8 However, the recently published volume on the medieval history of Estonia, *Eesti ajalugu II. Eesti keskaeg* (2012) moves toward uniting these two paradigms and has thus earned much criticism from the Estonian public.

century props its historical narrative up against the very first Baltic-German historical short story, "Wannem Imanta" (1802), written by the Baltic-German journalist and Enlightenment writer Garlieb Merkel (1769–1850). Since Baltic-German historical fiction flourished – along with the boom of the German historical novel in the 1880s – the historical story told by Merkel was pushed aside, forced to the periphery of cultural memory.

The Estonian historical novel was revived in the 1930s (for example, by Enn Kippel and Mait Metsanurk) together with the establishment of the Estonian paradigm of the Baltic historiography which do not tell the story of the territory's settlement but rather of its conquest.

Henry's Story: The First Chronicle of the Livonian Colonization

The story of Livonia's colonization was first narrated in *The Chronicle of Henry of Livonia*, which is the earliest known text from this region, written between 1224 and 1227 by a missionary and priest called Henricus, whose origins lay in the vicinity of Magdeburg. His text is a recounting of the usurping of the land, sacralized as *terra mariana,* Marienland or Mary's Land, thereby legitimating the events as a 'Holy War', which included "leading […] Estonians, Livonians and Latvians under the yoke of the Lord" – words used by Henry in several chapters of these annals (IX 13, X 13). The *Chronicle* also represents the first occasion in which missionary activities are directly linked to territorial conquest (Brundage, "Livonian Crusade" 8, see also Tyerman): "Certainly, through the many wars that followed, the pagans were to be converted and, through the doctrine of the Old and New Testament, they were to be told how they might attain to the true Peacemaker and eternal life" (IX, 14).

This is a model of thought common to Christian imperialism – the conviction that Europeans (read: Christians) are in possession of the absolute and ultimate religious truth to which all people have to submit and for which they must instantly abandon their own religion.

The aim of this conquest was to plant a new vineyard for the Lord even if its accomplishment was at the cost of brandishing fire and sword.[9] Henry's descriptions of the battles displays a passion for fighting and cruelty worthy of the Old Testament:

> When we arrived there, we divided our army among all the roads, villages, and provinces of that land. We burned and devastated everything, killed all the males, captured the women and children, and drove off their horses and many flocks. We assembled at last at the big village of Loal, which is a stream in the midst of the land. Resting there for three

9 Concerning the rhetoric and ideology developed to legitimate and justify a crusade to a region lacking a prior Christian history, see Tamm.

> days, we laid waste to all the land round about and got up to the villages of the Revalians. […] The Rigans returned with joy to Livonia and in brotherly love divided everything that they brought back. (*Chronicle* XX 2)

Violence was justified in the name of Jesus Christ. However, while Henry still called things by their true name, in the later Baltic-German historiography, which was often based on his work, Christians (Germans) never ravaged and looted, burned or killed – these horrible deeds were only ascribed to the pagan Estonians or Livonians. Christians simply defended their castles or repelled attacks. This wording constitutes the historiographer's metahistorical gesture above history. As far as Henry understood it, the conquered land belonged to the Virgin Mary. Its conquerors were simply carrying out God's will and were nothing more than His tools.

But Henry also differentiated among the Christians – the instrument of God's will in Livonia was a German bishop, who had more extensive rights to the land than, for example, the Christian Danes, Swedes, or Russians who had come to the country with similar intentions. By casting lots, Estonia was divided into three parts: two-thirds were shared between two bishops, and the remaining third went to the warrior brothers of the Order, lured to Livonia by promises from the bishop of Livonia of land, privileges, and the plenary remission of sins. Benefices were in fact granted even before the land had been conquered – for "just as their numbers and labors increased, so ought their possessions and goods increase" (XI 3).

Thus, the Christianization of territory inevitably led to confiscation of property. Only Christians could own land and pagans were not recognized as legal subjects. Henry quoted Estonians who had asked that the land be left to them, but he refused to acknowledge that Estonians had such rights. The arrogation of Livonian landholdings by Christians was symbolically emphasized through denomination: the subjugated villages and strongholds were endowed with either new – Christian – names, or else old forms were changed to comply with German spelling and usage. The newly converted Estonians were themselves also given new names. The founding action of Christian imperialism is a christening, *la cérémonie de nomination* (see Greenblatt 83; Todorov 35). Thereby, the conquest of the land was coupled with the conversion of souls using renaming or baptizing as its rhetorical device.

According to the Christian order of the world, local people and their customs and practices were treated as hostile, pagan curiosities that had to be reshaped according to the Christian model. Pagans were not different from Christians *within* that cultural system – they were not part of the cultural system at all. Morals and values could appertain only to Christians since the pagans, according to Henry, were immoral. Throughout the *Chronicle*, Henry used such expressions as deceitful, sly, treacherous, stupid, evil-thinking, tricky, perfidious, sanguinary,

bland, rebels, and brood of vipers to describe the locals. He took particular pains to point out their mendacity as well as their pride, one of the deadly sins.

Henry shows the Estonians, who were the fiercest opponents of the Christian crusaders in the Baltic region, in an especially unfavorable light, calling them "apostate peoples" (XXVII 2), who refused to retreat. Battles with the Estonians continue until the last pages of his *Chronicle*, where he complains that they "still held up their heads and would obey neither the Germans nor other nations" (XVI 8). "But the sons of pride should become sons of obedience," he pontificates (XXX 5), because newly baptized people must be humble, patient, and poor (XXIX 3). "The Lord thus quieted their pride and humbled the arrogance of the strong" (XV 3).

Kaupo, Elder of the Livs, having accepted the Christian faith along with the values and moral convictions of the Germans, is the only character in the *Chronicle* painted in a positive and favorable light. He is "the very faithful Caupo, who never neglected the Lord's battles and expeditions" (XXI 2), and who "gave up the spirit in a sincere confession of the Christian religion" (XXI 2) after dividing all his goods and possessions among the (Christian) churches established in Livonia (XXI 4).

The Colonization Narrative in Baltic-German Historical Fiction

The act of colonizing Old Livonia is the bedrock of Baltic-German identity. This act needs to be constantly confirmed and consolidated. Initially this confirmation was provided by the idea of the Christian mission, and then by fortifying Lutheran protestantism. Later, it developed into a secularized form, namely the intention of civilizing the land, of bringing 'culture' to it. In the colonial discourse created in the eighteenth century, the pagan warriors of Henry's *Chronicle* became exotic savages (see Plath 274). At the end of the nineteenth century, this sentiment ultimately transitioned into the national struggle for preserving and maintaining the German outpost in the East, which was not only an outgrowth of the pressure of Russification, but was also a component of the imperial ambitions of Emperor Wilhelm II's Germany. The question "Who holds the right to the land?" became the fundamental issue for national self-determination (Lukas, *Baltisaksa kirjandusväli*, 234ff). Manor owner Ernst Kasimir von Dohlen, a character in the 1907 novel *Elkesragge* by Max Alexander von der Ropp (1876–1940), drives this point home by declaring, "These forests, they have to be mine and they have to remain there for my descendants" (4). But the characters in the novel fight not only for ownership of the manor. The struggle for territory is also a struggle to preserve culture – "the battle for 700 years of history, for our German culture" (180). This was the mission of the Baltic nobility after the end of the era of chivalry. The motto of this struggle was borrowed from the much admired Wilhelm II, who had declared: "We, the Germans are the salt of the earth"

(180–182); the Baltic version became, "My aim is to show the people that we are the lords of this land" (Ropp 200)! In German-Baltic novels the region's history prior to German settlement is often depicted as a steady decline of the ethnic people, presented by an intellectual of either Latvian or Estonian descent to lend credence to this claim. In the novel *Licht, mehr Licht!* (1885) by Elfriede Jaksch (1847–1897), it is a Germanized Latvian, Erwin Schmidt, who narrates the story of the downfall of the Latvian people, due to endless quarrels with their neighbors. Their enslavement by the Germans is the logical cause of this ruin. Despite his feelings toward his grandmother's kin, Erwin considers himself a German and cannot see a national future for the Latvians, who, as he puts it, are a perishing nation with no possibilities of progress.

The German conquest of the land is rationalized in the novel by portraying the Estonians and the Latvians as themselves colonizers of the territory, having earlier dislodged the Goths, who were of German origin. That Baltic-German culture is consistent with Gothic culture becomes the literary justification for German colonization. The 1911 short story "Darthe Semmit" by Frances Külpe (1863–1936) attempts to convince its readers of the truth of this assertion by describing archaeological excavations that prove the presence of Gothic settlements some twelve hundred years ago (Külpe 189–280). *Elkesragge*, von der Ropp's novel, presents the settlement myth in the following terms:

> Seven hundred years ago, when the Germans came to the land, the Kure people lived here, a Finnish tribe that was gradually pushed out and assimilated. Latvians lived further south. It was Germans alone that brought Latvian peasants to the territory, and you can be sure there would not be a single Latvian here if we, the Germans, had not invited them. (Ropp 197– 198)

Lotta Girgensohn's (1869–1941) settlement novel *Ylo, Kaupos Sohn und Hans von Tiesenhusen. Erzählungen aus der Zeit von Rigas Gründung* (1901) positions the idealized Kaupo in opposition to his son Ylo, who is torn between his pagan mother and the father he secretly admires. Kaupo achieved his high position in the social hierarchy of the narrative because he adopted Christianity and its moral codes. He became an educated and respected knight who traveled extensively in Germany, where he admired the country's well-organized life:

> He was surprised by the sublime splendor of the churches and monasteries […]. He contemplated the wealth of the prudent merchants in the cities, the grandeur of tournaments in noble castles, the safely closed guilds of craftsmen. Everything was well organized, a mighty whole. His spirit longed more and more for a similar state for his own people, and for that, he believed, he needed the help, education and religion of Germans. (Girgensohn 145)

Kaupo's tribesman Viezo, having likewise received the sacrament of baptism, also reveres the German mindset, religion, and manner, acknowledging their superiority. And he is grateful for the German presence: "Just come, ye Germans, come to our Livonia, you deserve to be made room for" (135). The fidelity and humility of Germans is contrasted with the meanness and slyness of the Livs, and only the influence of the Germans can instill morality in the local population. The novel illustrates this tale of moral education with a Livs girl, Tiiu, who lives in the German castle, and there develops into an exemplary German mistress, worthy of becoming engaged to a knight. Facing each other in a decisive battle, both Kaupo the father and Ylo the son fall, symbolically leaving neither subjection nor resistance as the winner. The novel concludes with the baptism of Ylo's son, Anno, and it is through the underlying rhetoric of the act of christening Anno, the new elder of the Livs, that ownership of and rights to the land are decided.

Girgensohn's novel was written to celebrate the seven hundredth anniversary of the establishment of the city of Riga (1201) and contained a message to its contemporaries: Bishop Albert's[10] wish had been to erect the city of Riga as "a stronghold of German customs, religion and our economy," (64) and the citizens were to continue Albert's mission, "Fighting the wild aborigines and the hard nature of Livonia, my children should be gladly aware of their German mission and disseminate German customs and ways" (65).

As the twentieth century progressed, the instrumental significance of the Baltic-German novel in nationalistic ideology increased.

The Story of the Ancient Fight for Freedom

Let us return to Henry's *Chronicle*. Rereading the text against its grain in order to find possibilities for giving voice to the colonized subaltern subjects, a slightly different point of view can be found, hidden among the author's ideology and rhetoric. For example, when Henry muses, "But to the extent that the joy of the Christians was increased, so the multitude of the pagans was made sorrowful and confused" (VIII 3), he seems to have felt empathy toward the conquered people. To a certain degree, he even admired them, admitting that the pagans fought courageously against their enemies (XV 3). He compared them with the Philistines by using the biblical reference, "Take courage and fight, ye Philistines, lest you come to be servants to the Hebrews" (X 10). Updating the sentiment, he urges them on in both direct speech – "'Take heart and fight, Livonians, lest you be slaves to the Germans'" (XVI 4) – and indirect observation: "They would never hereafter accept the Christian faith so long as a boy a year old or a cubit high remained in the land" (XXVI 9).

10 Albert (von Buxhoeveden), the Canon of Bremen, was Livonian Bishop from 1199 to 1229.

Thus, Henry's *Chronicle* made it possible to interpret the conquest of Livonia from the viewpoint of the conquered – as the local peoples' fight for freedom, a fight drowned in blood. Such an interpretation emerged with the Reformation (in the context of the critical discourse on the Catholic Church and its atrocities) and assumed a secularized form during the Enlightenment, thus starting to question the moral legitimacy of Livonia's colonization.

"None of the ecclesiastical orders brought Enlightenment to Europe or favored its spread," avowed Johann Gottfried Herder in his *Outlines of a Philosophy of the History of Man* (593–94). In the chapter that deals with the history and nature of the nations around the Baltic Sea, Herder states:

> Humanity shudders at the blood that was here spilled in long and savage wars, until the ancient Prussians were nearly extirpated, and the Courlanders and Latvians reduced to a state of slavery, under the yoke of which they still languish. Perhaps centuries will pass before it is removed, and these peaceful people are recompensed for the barbarities, with which they were deprived of land and liberty, by being humanely formed anew to the use and enjoyment of an improved freedom. (*Outlines* 338–39)

The notion that the history of the land be considered from the perspective of its 'savage' inhabitants might be attributable to Herder, who regarded empathizing with the Other's viewpoint as a precondition for understanding history: in the words of Herderian hermeneutics, "Feel your way into everything – only then will you be on your way to understanding the world" (*Another Philosophy* 24). In order to understand the past or other nations one has to become accustomed to their way of thinking. Only by empathizing with others can the gulf separating us from the past be crossed.

One of the architects of the Herderian criticism of the conquest of Baltic countries was the parson of the parish of Laiuse, Heinrich Johann von Jannau (1753–1821), whose historiographical work, *Geschichte der Sklaverey und Charakter der Bauern in Lief- und Ehstland* (Riga 1786), refers to the Christianization of the Baltic region as its "conversion by the sword" (15): "So the knights of the order, priests as they were in fact, obliged to preach and save souls, turned into tormentors, taking the land from the people they were to instruct, and barbarians those coming to Livonia to preach their faith in Jesus" (35).

Throughout the age of Enlightenment, the history of the Baltic countries was increasingly interpreted as a colonial history that evidenced the mercantile spirit of the conquerors and brought the practice of slaveholding to the populations they subdued (e.g., in Findeisen; see also, Plath 274).

The Herderian view of the Christian colonization finds an ardent supporter in the person of Garlieb Merkel, the Baltic-German writer not only considered the inaugurator of Baltic-German historical fiction, but who also demanded the abolition of serfdom in Russia:

> At a time when even the proud Briton struggles to give freedom and civil rights to his Negro slaves, there exist whole nations in Europe – declared to be incapable of dealing with personal freedom and the pursuit of happiness – that bend their backs under the harshest form of despotism, that rattle around the graves of their free forefathers in the chains of slavery, that plough the fields of a race foreign to their own, while themselves almost stricken to death by hunger. And who is it that pushes them to the ground? Dukes? No, my fellow citizens. Sacrificed by the greed of a few noble-men, the Latvians and Estonians come out last in the line of nations […] until one day they declare their rights by fire and sword and with the blood of their despots. (Merkel, *Die Letten* 3–4)

Merkel's book, *Die Letten, vorzüglich in Liefland am Ende des philosophischen Jahrhunderts* (1797), opens a new epoch in the interpretation of the history of the Baltic countries because for the first time that history is presented directly from the subaltern point of view. It is Merkel who calls the history of the Estonians, Livs, and Latvians that began with the invasion of crusaders "the 600-year-period of slavery." Merkel praises the glorious past of the Estonians and Livs before the arrival of the German militants, their ancient fight for freedom, and their brave resistance against forced Christianization:

> With a sword in his hand he [the Estonian] moved toward the invading bandits facing their insidiousness with his hard and tenacious consistency. And as soon as he had a favorable opportunity, he rebelled powerfully against the yoke imposed on him and wrecked it. (Merkel, *Die Vorzeit* 259)

In Merkel's treatment the crusaders become "the fanatic foreign horde," (Merkel, *Wannem,* foreword n.p.) who robbed the local population of their land and freedom. Starting with Merkel, the history of this region could no longer be read as the story of settlement – it had turned into a story of conquest.

Merkel's attitude toward the colonization of Marienland is evident in the bold metaphoric language of his 1802 historical novel *Wannem Ymanta* (*Elder Ymanta*):

> Iron monsters rose from the sea […] like poisonous fog decomposing and killing everything on its way they spread all over the land. Fooling us with their wicked hypocrisy and bigotry they creep into our strongholds and villages. […] Like predators […] they smash our altars, plunder our fields of its crop, abuse our wives and daughters, take our children across the sea. […] Like a fire kindled from a tiny spark and growing into a flame, then into a bright blaze swallowing one tree after another until the sea of fire is surging over the forest, scorching and killing even its last oak […] so the sword of the foreigners is raging to abase its victim to serfdom. (25–27)

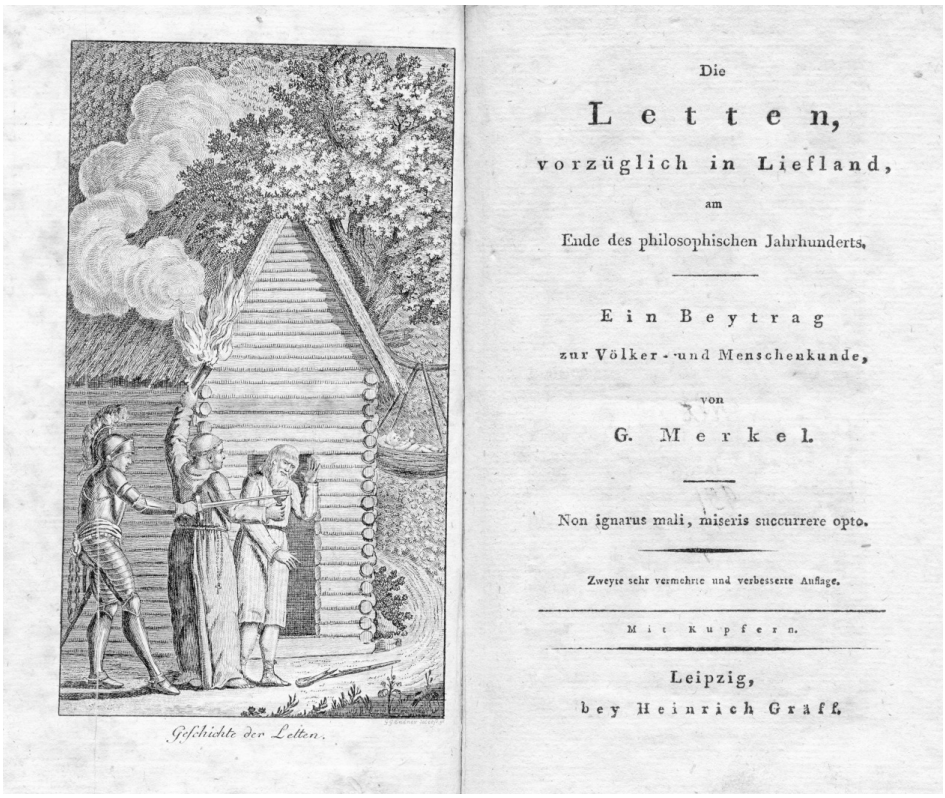

Fig. 3: Frontispiece of Merkel, Garlieb. *Die Letten, vorzüglich in Liefland, am Ende des philosophischen Jahrhunderts. Ein Beytrag zur Völker- und Menschenkunde.*

Merkel's novel, rich in Ossianic sentiments, narrates the story of a campaign of the pagan Letgals and Livs – led by their respective elders Ymanta and Aazo – against the German knights. During the siege of Riga, knights cunningly plot to lure Ymanta into a deadly battle with his turncoat brother Kaupo, who is depicted here, contrary to Henry's *Chronicle*, as a traitor. Both brothers are killed, plunging their lands and people into long centuries of serfdom. Thus, Merkel's Livonian tale ends not in victory but in enslavement: "In despair the Livonian people fled, and the sword of the aliens raged among their fleeing throng" (*Wannem* 182). Merkel empathizes (in Herder's sense) with the defeated and calls these events a historical injustice, demanding that the Livonian nobility guarantee dignity and independence to individuals as well as the nation as a whole.

The Herder-Merkel Romantic myth of a glorious past of subaltern people was widespread among Baltic-German intellectuals in the early nineteenth century, when it aligned itself with the Decembrist revolt in Russia. Later, it becomes associated with a critical, heretical opposition to a mainstream understanding of history, portraying, for example, the heroic fight of Aazo, an Estonian elder, against the German knights, in the novel *Aazo und Linda. Eine Geschichte aus*

Fig. 4: Rehren, Ludmilla von. *Aazo und Linda. Geſchichte aus Livlands Vergangenheit* n.p.

Livlands Vergangenheit (1902) by the Baltic-German author from Saaremaa, Ludmilla von Rehren (1875–1927). This is another novel that recounts the Estonians' ancient fight for freedom, also featuring Kaupo's brother, Aazo, as the protagonist who organizes the resistance against the Christian crusaders. While Lotta Girgensohn's 1901 novel, with Kaupo as the principle character, had used two opposing locations – a German castle and a Livonian stronghold – and presented Germans and Livonians as inveterate enemies, the plot of von Rehren's novel takes place entirely within the Estonian and Livonian communities, which are pictured as harmonious and idealized societies composed of 'children of nature', whose folk songs and epic tales testify to their nobility and bravery. Although the ideological tone of *Eine Geschichte aus Livlands Vergangenheit* is much different from that of Girgensohn's text, it ends with exactly the same scene: a baptismal ceremony, in this case, for Aazo. Beforehand, in the fight between Aazo and Kaupo, both are wounded. The dying Aazo is taken to his mother Linda, who has converted to Christianity, and as one of his last actions Aazo sends his priest to tell his followers that the foreigners should be allowed to stay because their god is stronger.

The Merkelian rebellion, led by the Baltic-German cultural elite at the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, had become superfluous a century later as they no longer had to act as the voice of the colonized cultures. However, the new elite of colonized people (Estonian and Latvian intellectuals) adapted Merkel's point of view, transforming it into a new historical narrative. The Estonian national epic *Kalevipoeg* (*Kalew's Son*, 1857–1861), written by Friedrich Reinhold Kreutzwald (1803–1882), depicts the Estonians' mythical era of freedom and Kalevipoeg's battles with the iron men who had come to conquer the land. Carl Robert Jakobson's (1841–1882) patriotic address *Light, Darkness and Dawn in the History of the Estonian People* (1870), the Latvian national epic *Lāčplēsis* by Andrejs Pumpers (1841–1902), the poetry of Miķelis Krogzemis (1850–1879), and the historical novels of Eduard Bornhöhe (1862–1923), Andres Saal (1861–1931), Anton Rupainis (1906–1977), Mait Metsanurk (1879–1957), and Enn Kippel (1901–1942) all rewrite Merkel's story of resistance. And both the colonizer and the colonized could trace their respective arguments back to Henry's *Chronicle*. Statements as, "We do not want foreign overlords, but elect our lords from amongst us" (Kippel 84), or "A free man will never want to bend his neck!" (Kippel 88) read like quotations from the *Chronicle*, modified for Estonian historical novels in the light of the modern idea of the democratic nation state. Proceeding from the idea of a representative democracy, it is not the Baltic pagans who prove to be the savages, but the homeless, brutal warriors who came to destroy the protodemocratic social order, their only goal that of gaining fame and fortune. The priests and warriors assembled under the cross do not represent higher moral and cultural values, rather "the warrior's armor and priest's robes hide a savage beast's spirit" (Metsanurk 93).

Conclusion

Merkel would not have dared to dream that his interpretation of Baltic history would ever be taken up in the Estonian and Latvian languages. The myth of the ancient fight for freedom not only became the fundament of Estonian and Latvian national consciousness in the mid-nineteenth century, but it grounded Estonian academic historiography (as a new 'public transcript') in the second and third decades of the twentieth century. In postcolonial terms, the myth of the ancient fight for freedom, part of one and the same colonial discourse, was the topos that enabled the colonized (the people often called *undeutsch*) to construct their historical subjectivity in both a political and cultural sense. The Merkelian myth of history paved the way to one's own history and the opportunity for self-representation as an independent nation: becoming Estonians instead of colonized *Undeutsche*.

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