



Ports for whom? Harbors in the early thirteenth-century Eastern Baltic

Marika Mägi

Foundation Osiliana, Tallinn University, Tallinn, Estonia

ABSTRACT

The thirteenth-century crusades to Estonia and Livonia have traditionally been seen from the conquerors' perspective, considering the local actors only as passive subjects of these processes. Recent archeological research has challenged this. Various centers, such as hillforts or harbors, were controlled by locals and functioned as more or less neutral places. This article examines three harbors, which may have possessed a central importance in the region: Daugavgrīva (Dünamünde) in the lower reaches of the Daugava River, *portus novus* (the New Harbor) in Saaremaa, and the port of Tallinn. The discussion treats local magnates as active participants in these places, thus creating a more nuanced picture of how different foreigners were treated in the ports of the Eastern Baltic.

KEYWORDS Northern crusades; medieval harbors; medieval society; Chronicle of Henry of Livonia

Introduction

In the first decades of the thirteenth century, the Eastern Baltic turned into a major battlefield of the Northern Crusades led by kings and magnates from different shores of the Baltic Sea. These events have been described in a number of written sources, primarily in the Livonian Chronicle of Henry (Henricus Lettus 2003). Presumably, the crusaders and other conquerors were met with hostility in all harbors and hubs along the coasts of present-day Estonia and Latvia. Written sources, however, also suggest that some harbors, although controlled by the locals, acted as somewhat neutral havens where visitors could find shelter and safety, so as long as they did not cause trouble.

The social environment and harbors in Estonia and Livonia in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries

Interpretations of the thirteenth century Northern Crusades depends a lot on scholars' perceptions of local societies. Until the end of the twentieth century, Estonian society around AD 1200 was often depicted as having relatively little social stratification and as technologically backward. Such attitudes were rooted in the nineteenth-century research of Baltic German scholars, which was conducted in political conditions where Estonians and Latvians formed the lower socioeconomic classes and were

CONTACT Marika Mägi  marika.magi@osiliana.eu  Foundation Osiliana, Tallinn University, Uus-Sadama 5, Tallinn 10130, Estonia

considered to be culturally backward ethnic groups (Mägi 2018, 9–12). Archaeological sites and more peculiar finds were connected entirely with German ‘culture carriers,’ while Estonians and Latvians were believed to have arrived in their present territory only a few centuries before the Crusades (Hausmann 1910). Estonians in particular were believed by some scholars to have remained at the Stone Age level even in the thirteenth century (Grewingk 1884). This ‘Gothic theory’ continued, albeit in a somewhat modified form, in local academic discussions through the first independence period in the 1920s and 1930s (Moora 1926, 200; Radiņš 2007; Schmiedehelm 1923, 1931; Šnē 1999; Tallgren 1922, 79), and disappeared only in the 1950s, when it was replaced by theories about the strong Russian impact in the late prehistory (Tvauri 2003; Vasks 1999). The comparatively passive role played by the local inhabitants during the Crusades and the quick Europeanization that ensued thereafter, remained the cornerstone of these interpretations.

In recent years, the subject of the thirteenth century Northern Crusades has inspired a lively discussion among historians and archeologists in several countries. In Estonia, postcolonial approaches are used in publications of several archeologists, historians, and literary scholars dealing with the thirteenth century and the Baltic German colonial attitudes that shaped interpretations of this period (Annus 2007; Kaljundi 2008; Kaljundi and Kļaviņš 2011; Laul and Valk 2007; Mägi 2011, 2020; Raudkivi 2011; Undusk 2000; Valk 2014). The change in paradigm is, to a certain extent, shaped by archeological findings of the last two decades, which do not fit into the previous views on Estonian society before and after the Crusades (Lang and Valk 2011; Mägi 2011, 2020).

One contribution of this new research is to spotlight the relations between the crusaders and local elites. The fact that local culture endured through the thirteenth century and also through most of the fourteenth century indicates the significant role of local agents in the crucial events of the thirteenth century. In the light of these contemporary archeological findings, previous ideas that stressed the wide technological gap between local inhabitants and the crusaders, which took root during the national segregation period of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, do not seem plausible anymore. Increasingly, the focus of the discussion has shifted to the political games among the crusaders and rival local elites that eventually led to the birth of medieval Livonia.

The natives of the territories of present-day Estonia and Latvia represented various political formations, each with their own agendas that often collided with others. Likewise, the crusaders were not always united in their goals, even though they served the same Christian Crusade ideology. Quarrels between Danish and German crusaders are well documented in the Livonian Chronicle of Henry. In an atmosphere of political instability and fragmentation of interests, harbors often play a vital role as neutral grounds that were able to host diverse parties. Their key role also made them the focus of power struggles.

Research on the history of northern Europe over the past decades has examined a large number of prehistoric and early medieval harbor sites (Hodges 1989, 47–65; Lebedev 2005; Ulriksen 1998; Skre 2007). Several of the harbors that can be archeologically detected and presumably had a greater significance in their time of use also functioned as trading hubs (Callmer 2002; Mägi 2004; Sindbæk 2009). Trade networks needed trade stations that were principally accessible for all interested actors and where foreigners could count on safe passage (Hodges 1989, 56–65, 162–184; Sindbæk 2009). The emergence of trading places in northern Europe – called

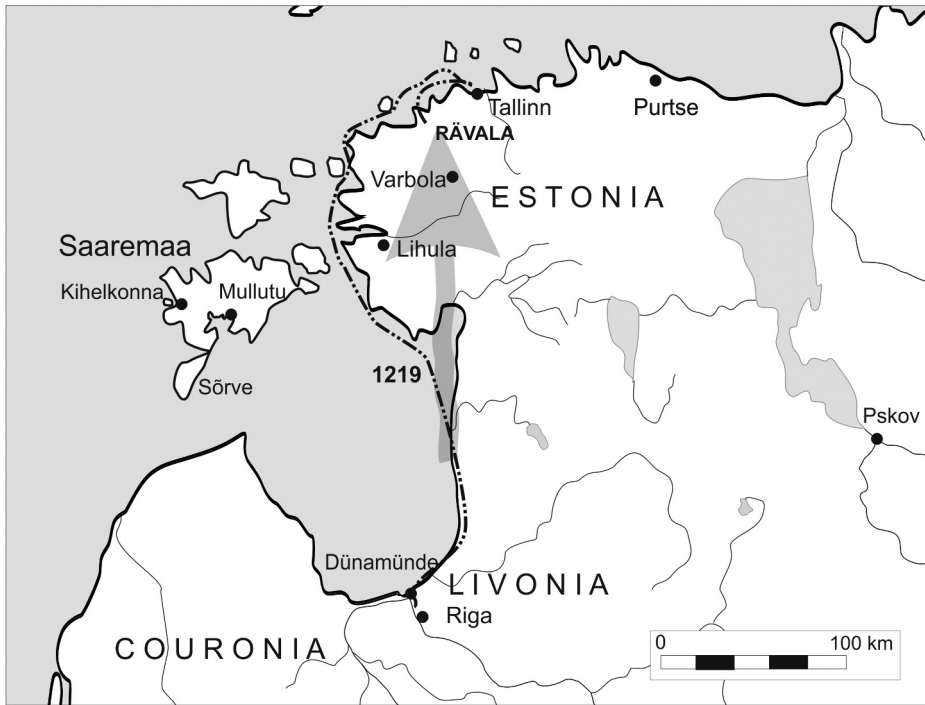


Figure 1. Map of Estonia and Latvia showing the campaign in 1219. Drawn by Author.

emporium, *vic's*, or nodal points by different authors – have garnered attention from scholars since the 1980s (for example, Callmer 1994; Clarke and Ambrosiani 1993; Hodges 1989; Lebedev 2005; Sindbæk 2005; Skre 2007). In the literature there exists slightly different classifications of such places and their development, but most theories emphasize that harbors functioning as regional or international trading places were frequently established in neutral areas, somewhat away from political centers, especially where a topographical barrier caused a break in traffic (Lebedev 2005, 230–233; Sindbæk 2009). Similar processes in the emergence of trading harbors were also present in the eastern coasts of the Baltic Sea (Mägi 2004; 2015, Figure 1).

The lower reaches of the Daugava River

The first seat of the crusaders on the eastern coast of the Baltic Sea was at the lower reaches of the Daugava River. Their efforts to control the entrance to the river make perfect sense, the Daugava being part of one of the most important trading routes connecting the Baltic Sea region with Kyivan Rus' principalities. The downstream of the river is surrounded by alternating waterlogged and sandy soils that lack the conditions necessary for agricultural settlement (Figure 2). The southern bank of the Daugava was also covered with forested lands unsuitable for agriculture. On the northern bank, toward the eastern barren zone, however, the landscape gave way to good arable soil in an area that was populated by the Livs at the start of the thirteenth century. It was

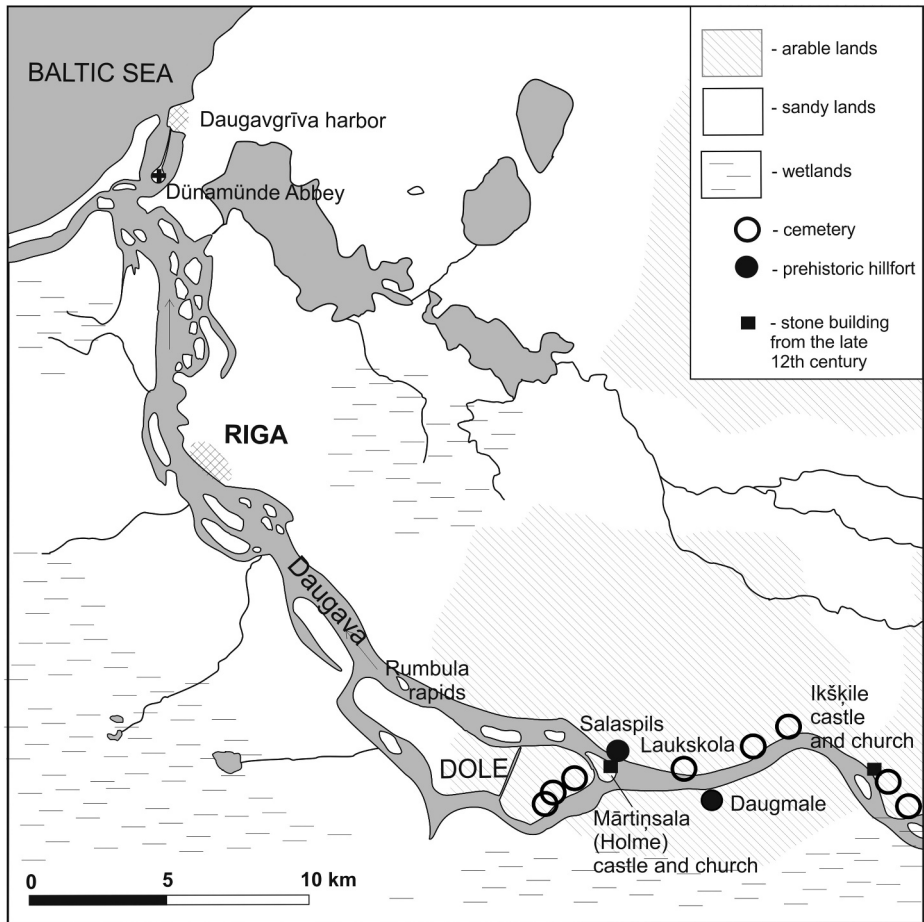


Figure 2. Map of the lower reaches of the Daugava River around 1200 AD. Drawn by Author.

there among the old Livic settlements that the missionaries established their first outpost at the end of the twelfth century.

Archaeological research has uncovered evidence of human activity in the area of what later became the old town of Riga as early as in the twelfth century (Caune 2007, 37–51).¹ Even though Andris Caune has suggested that this was most likely an agricultural settlement where various ethnic groups lived together, this seems unlikely considering the aforementioned natural conditions. The cult site unearthed below the Riga Cathedral suggests that Riga was a sacramental center and gathering point that was gradually evolving into a trading center (Mägi 2018, 403–404). The widely recognized foundation of the city by the Crusaders in 1201 is thus inaccurate, as a trading place is known to have existed in Riga before this date. The place as such was mentioned in the late twelfth century context by both the Livonian Chronicle of Henry, and the Chronicle of Arnold of Lübeck (Kolk 2004; Henricus Lettus II: 4: 2003, 32).

Unsurprisingly, the missionaries who initially resided in the old settlements next to arable lands decided to establish a town around Riga. Viewed from the sea, the first

rapids of the river that were near impossible to navigate safely, especially with larger vessels, run right next to the arable lands. The recently launched Crusade needed a safe passage to the sea, both to receive the arriving crusaders and to provide for those who were already present. Moreover, the developing town required enough suitable land for future expansion. The location of the Livic settlement in Riga fit into this plan exceptionally well.

According to the Livonian Chronicle, Riga was not the sole harbor of importance at the lower reaches of the Daugava. An account of the events in April of 1195 or 1196 mentions a harbor used as a base by merchants preparing to sail to Gotland. Bishop Meinhard is said to have arrived with the same intention (Henricus Lettus I: 11: 2003, 28). The chronicler possibly had in mind Riga, but it is more likely that the reference is to the seaside settlement of Daugavgrīva, which was later revealed as a location where sailors waited for a fair wind (Henricus Lettus XI: 8, XIV: 5: 2003, 76–78, 96–99; Poelchau 2004, 68–69). Conspicuously, according to the same text, the Livs of Ikšķile had no control of the harbor or resident merchants – the Bishop had to be lured back to Mārtiņšala and Ikšķile where he was subjected to hostile treatment.

The enterprise of Theoderich, later Bishop of Estonia, could be a continuation of these events. Theoderich had arrived in Livonia at the very start of the mission and must have known the local situation well. In the aforementioned episode, he was the one who finally, after a cunning maneuver, escaped the Livs and traveled to the Pope to gain his blessing for the Baltic Crusades. During the rule of Bishop Albert, around AD 1200, Theoderich visited the Pope for the second time. The Livs had only recently given Bishop Albert permission to establish a city in the location of Riga, by which they probably meant a mere outpost for the crusaders and missionaries (Henricus Lettus IV: 5: 2003, 37). It is surely no coincidence that in addition to the papal authorization for a crusade, Theoderich secured a ban from the pontiff on using ‘Their harbor’ for sailing to Semigallia for trade (Henricus Lettus IV: 6–7: 2003, 37–38). As the text indicates, ‘Their harbor’ was located downstream of Riga.

Some Latvian researchers suggest that by Semigallian, or ‘Their harbor,’ the chronicler meant an old port near the Livic hillfort of Daugmale across the first rapids (Radiņš 1998, 2001). This stems from an understanding shared among Latvian archeologists that the downstream of the Daugava was populated by the Semigallians until the middle of the tenth century when they were ousted by the Livs (Spirģis 2008, 495; on the development of this idea, see; Ciglis, Zirne, and Žeiere 2001, 6–10; for an overview, see; Mägi 2018, 52–61). There is, however, no sign of the abundance of finds characteristic of the Semigallians, or at least no published research that could support this theory. Moreover, the few finds thought to be Semigallian that have been published from Daugmale seem to represent widespread artifact types that were also characteristic of, for example, Saaremaa. Besides, the surroundings of Daugmale abounded in burial sites dating from the end of the tenth century onward that demonstrate wide ethnic diversity among the women buried there. These women, and probably also men, originated from Gotland, Saaremaa, Couronia, and Estonia (Mägi 2018, 132–398; Spirģis 2008, 347–75), while the graves yielded only a few Semigallian burials.

Furthermore, the theory describing Daugmale as the center of the Semigallians overlooks the landscape situation (Radiņš 2001; Zemītis 2007; Mägi 2018, 310–303). Between the Daugava and the putative Semigallian center lies a 35–40 km wide forested and unpopulated zone, which must have been difficult to traverse in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries (Apals et al. 1974, maps 59 and 90). Even from the

Livic lands, or further down the Daugava basin, the main entrance to Semigallia must have been the Lielupe River with its many tributaries. The lower reaches of the Daugava and Lielupe rivers have both changed since. The wide estuary of the Daugava formed in 1567 when during the spring floods the river burst a new outlet to the sea (Bērtiņa et al. 2015). The previous and considerably narrower one was located 4 km east at Vecāķi. The downstream of the Daugava was formed by the present-day tributary of Vecdaugava.

Until the spring flood of 1697, the Lielupe was another tributary of the Daugava whose only outlet to the sea was by the current Bulļupe and Vecdaugava tributaries. The passage that opened in 1697 was filled again a century later and the current mouth of the Lielupe was formed as late as 1755–1757 (Bērtiņa et al. 2015). There could have been more of such incidents of the Lielupe breaking away toward the sea in prehistoric or medieval times, of which we have no knowledge. Even though the only mention of the route to Semigallia in the Livonian Chronicle of Henry is the aforementioned ‘Their harbor,’ it makes sense that the only, or at least the most important, passage to the Lielupe that runs toward Semigallia was through the mouth of the Daugava and thus through the harbor of Daugavgrīva.

The harbor of Daugavgrīva

‘Their harbor’ referred to in the Livonian Chronicle of Henry probably pointed to Daugavgrīva, the only harbor downstream of Riga that also guaranteed direct access to Semigallia. No other suitable landing site can be detected topographically. The description given by Henry indicates that the crusaders and missionaries did not have full control over this harbor, possibly not even during the 1220s when the chronicle was written – the nearest fortified site controlled by the missionaries was the Daugavgrīva Abbey over 2 km from the presumed harbor site at the river mouth. The ban issued by the Pope that excommunicated everyone who ventured to use this harbor for trading was exceptionally harsh. The rivalry between ‘Their harbor’ and Riga was further emphasized by its addendum, probably appended by the Riga merchants of Livic, Germans, and other extractions. ‘According to the merchants themselves,’ anyone using ‘Their harbor’ must say farewell to their property and life. As the Chronicle tells us, there were those who did not think much of it and indeed lost their lives as a result (Henricus Lettus IV: 7: 2003, 38).

Considering the shared narrow outlet of the Daugava and Lielupe rivers, the harbor that was situated in their common basin must have controlled the better part of water traffic in central Latvia. A gateway to the sea was vital for the mission center and Theoderich must have known that. It seems plausible that he was the one initiating the papal ban. Seeing that the ban was less effective than expected, another measure was taken, possibly as early as in 1202, to gain control over the entrance of the Daugava River by building Daugavgrīva Abbey at the river mouth, with an additional function of a fort for the missionaries. This, too, may have been Theoderich’s initiative. At any rate, he became its first abbot and, according to Henry, established the ‘certain Brothers of the Militia of Christ’ (Henricus Lettus VI: 3-4: 2003, 40). Other sources, for example, the Chronicler Arnold of Lübeck, attribute the founding to the order of the Livonian Brothers of the Sword to Bishop Albert (Kolk 2004).

While the crusader center in Riga was still in its early stages, Osilians (the inhabitants of Saaremaa) and Couronians made repeated attempts to conquer, or at least subjugate it. Both of these ethnic groups were also well represented in the

burials that surrounded the Daugmale trade center in the tenth to twelfth centuries (Mägi 2018, 389–402; Spirģis 2008, 347–375). In addition to international merchants, the local ethnic groups using the harbor must have been Livs and Semigallians. Their settlements were, however, situated dozens of kilometers inland, and consequently they never feature in any sources as a military power on the sea. Saaremaa and Couronia, on the other hand, had plenty of warships able to control the Gulf of Riga and its northern section, the Vāinameri Sea, thus posing a real threat to the entrance to the Daugava. This is probably why, at the beginning of the Crusade as the position of the crusaders and missionaries was still uncertain, Bishop Albert tried to avoid any confrontation with the Osilians (Henricus Lettus VII: 2: 2003, 42). Henry recounts several episodes of atrocities carried out by the Osilians in the Daugava estuary and speaks about the Couronians' attacks on Riga. Their interest in Riga implies that these two groups had their base near the river mouth and they felt threatened by the rapidly evolving Riga.

In view of the topographical setting and the Livonian Chronicle of Henry, the base in question must have been the harbor of Daugavgrīva. Like several other medieval harbors, it was probably located in no man's land and available for use to all who had entered into mutual agreements. Crusaders and merchants from western and northern Europe were allowed to use the Daugavgrīva harbor, as will be demonstrated later. By way of an example of such spaces and their usage rights, we learn from Henry the Chronicler that in 1205 the inhabitants of Visby refused to attack the boats of Osilians moored at their port (Henricus Lettus VII: 1: 2003, 41–42). Henry references several failed attempts by various political players to gain authority over the Daugavgrīva harbor (Henricus Lettus XIX: 2, 10: 2003, 142–143, 154).

The clearest indication of the possible location of this harbor can be gleaned from the descriptions of the events of 1210 and 1215 in the Livonian Chronicle. In the 1210 raid mounted by a force of Couronians against Riga, the harbor was mentioned in relation to a group of crusaders setting out for Germany (Henricus Lettus XIV: 5: 2003, 97). Most of them spent the night at the abbey, leaving just a handful of men to look after the ships. The following morning, the sky looked 'as if covered with a dark cloud' from the Couronian ships approaching. Some crusaders stayed put to protect their ships, while others fled toward the safety of the abbey.

Daugavgrīva Abbey had been erected on what was actually an islet in the lower reaches of the river, connected with the bank through a narrow ridge and perhaps a bridge in the north, or possibly by some other thoroughfare in the east. The wider part of the river was to the west of the building. It meant that all ships that sailed into the Daugava estuary must have been visible from the abbey, whereas the sea view was restricted.² The episode retold above reveals that the harbor must have been located right on the coast, most likely at the later site of the Vecāķi fishing village.

In several instances it appears that the Osilians had greater ambitions and played a bigger role in 'Their harbor' than many others. In 1215, they began building underwater barriers at the harbor and at the mouth of the Daugava to block access to Riga (Henricus Lettus XIX: 2: 2003, 142–144). According to Henry, the Osilians came with a large fleet, which also included ships meant for sinking, and built wooden structures to be filled with stones. In most ports, the entrance (or entrances) was artificially narrowed so it could be rapidly closed against the enemy (Crumlin-Pedersen 2010; Rieck 1991). The idea to plug the whole Daugava estuary was ambitious yet entirely feasible, considering the terrain back then. It seems likely

that, rather than close the river entirely, the Osilians aimed to narrow the river to prevent larger vessels from sailing through and to render them highly vulnerable to attacks.

The Rigans immediately realized the severity of the situation and headed with all their forces to Daugavgrīva, most of them by land, the Chronicle reports. Since the town sat on the northeastern bank of the river, the harbor must have been situated on the eastern side. Warned about the advancing enemy, the Osilians decided to fall back to the opposite bank, thus thwarting any attack by the Rigan forces approaching by land. For the Rigans, the day was saved by the arrival of a band of crusaders on two cogs. Following initial confusion over who was standing where, they turned their cogs against the Osilians after the Rigans had revealed their identity by waving their flags. At the same time, another group of Rigans arrived with their ships. Provided the terrain in those days was similar to what it is now, the Osilians' army was positioned on the island of Mangaļsala, then a peninsula, most probably at its protruding tip, which was easily accessible from both the sea and the river. For this reason, they decided to sail away rather than stay between two enemy lines.

In 1216 the Osilians threatened to close the harbor again, this time in alliance with the Prince of Polotsk (Henricus Lettus XIX: 10: 2003, 154). According to Henry, the Osilians had managed to block the entrance the year prior, so there was reason enough to believe that they could do it again. Therefore, a cog was bought, fortified, manned, and sent to the mouth of the Daugava to guard the entrance (Henricus Lettus XIX: 11: 2003, 154–155). This episode once again demonstrates the crusaders' modest maritime strength and strong dependence on connections with the rest of the world through harbors.

The thirteenth century harbor of Daugavgrīva was hardly just a place to await fair winds. The aforementioned confrontations and operations aimed at gaining control of the port suggest it may have served as an important trading locus. Furthermore, the Osilians must have had considerable say in what came to pass, as can be deduced from the latter part of Henry's Chronicle in the episode describing the attempt of the papal legate to leave Livonia. While waiting for fair winds, he saw a band of Osilians returning from Sweden with their spoils and captives (Henricus Lettus XXX: 1: 2003, 238). The Chronicle repeatedly cites Daugavgrīva as the place to wait out the adverse winds, and Daugavgrīva was probably also the place where the Osilians returned to sell their loot. Although Henry never says it explicitly, his wording suggests that the legate had heard about the carnage committed by the Osilians and most likely also saw the captives, whom he pitied. In the context of this story, Henry censures the Osilians for their practice of selling captured Christian women to the Couronians and other heathens. Slaves were almost certainly sold and bought in trading sites or markets.

During Viking-style raids, the plunderers normally tried to sell off their loot as soon as possible, especially its more troublesome components such as prisoners. Likewise, the crusaders were known to take prisoners, and must have been keen to sell the captured women (or children and men), animals, and other haul at the local trading centers. The legate in Henry's story pitied the women not because of their exceptionally dramatic fate, but because they were his fellow Christians. Henry never mentions whether the crusaders in the 1220s had any capability or even ambition to clamp down on the local trading sites. The attempts to establish control over Daugavgrīva harbor were likely prompted by the location that made the harbor a serious rival to Riga, rather than its function as a trading hub.

Similarly, the events of 1228, which saw the Semigallians and Couronians burn down Daugavgrīva Abbey and kill all its residents, may have had indirect connections with the Osilians. The timing of the episode could well be put down to the changing political landscape (Poelchau 2004, 41). A campaign to Saaremaa a year before, in 1227, resulted in the Christianization of the Osilians and their alliance with the city of Riga, the Bishop, and the Order. Gottfried, the abbot of Daugavgrīva, was consecrated the first Bishop of Saaremaa. As a result, the Daugavgrīva harbor lost much of its neutrality and was now controlled by the allied parties. The alliance between the Rigans, Germans, and Osilians gave the rulers of Riga free rein over the harbor, to the discontent of other groups, especially Semigallians, for whom this was the only outlet to the sea. The destruction of the fortified abbey of Daugavgrīva was, therefore, a rather logical step aimed at weakening this newly formed union. The abbey was soon rebuilt but the harbor of Daugavgrīva was left in the shadow of Riga. In 1305, the Livonian Order bought the abbey and raised a fort to guard the entrance to the Daugava.

Portus novus

The location of Daugavgrīva at the crossing point of major trade routes is by itself a compelling argument that speaks on its behalf. Only Tallinn, and to some extent Lihula, can compete with Daugavgrīva and Riga in terms of international trading routes on the eastern coast of the Baltic Sea. Saaremaa, while boasting a vigorous maritime culture, was a collection of islands close to the mainland and at a distance from the crossings of the main trade routes, a position that hardly favored the emergence of trading centers. Although vessels from other areas certainly landed at some of its harbors, their hinterland was limited merely to Saaremaa (on harbor sites and their hinterlands in Saaremaa, see Mägi 2004).

Several harbor sites have been archeologically identified and even excavated in Saaremaa, revealing that at least two of them – Mullutu and Pälla – were in use in the thirteenth century (Figure 3). The larger strongholds of Saaremaa were connected to the maritime routes through rivers. The recently researched Mullutu harbor site, near what later became Kuressaare on the southern coast of Saaremaa, was situated at a distance from any settlement but in a location well protected from the winds. It was certainly in international use and predominantly functioned as a shelter for vessels that sailed along the island's southern coast toward the Gulf of Finland and needed a place to overnight or take cover from the storm. Plentiful finds from the twelfth to thirteenth centuries indicate that it must also have been a place for trading and as a neutral lay-by for all who complied with the agreements.

An example, and description, of a neutral harbor site in Saaremaa can be found in Henry's Chronicle, namely *portus novus*, or New Harbor (Henricus Lettus XIX: 5-6: 2003, 147–151). It is a very detailed story about nine cogs full of crusaders returning to their homeland. On board one of these cogs was the aforementioned Theoderich, now Bishop of Estonia, and Philipp, the Bishop of Ratzeburg, who, as some researchers suggest, may have been the patron of the Chronicle (Jensen 2019b, 61–64). One of the main objectives of the elaborate narrative was certainly to portray Philipp's bravery and piety in the ordeals through which they only survived thanks to his prayers and God's mercy. The emotional tone of the story and the use of first-person plural seem to indicate that the chronicler himself was among the traveling party.



Figure 3. Archaeological finds from Mullutu from the thirteenth to fourteenth centuries. SM 10863: 36, 251, 80, 17, 20, 7, 11, 6, 247. Photo by Jaana Ratas.

The crusaders were on their way to Gotland, the cogs being unfreighted, and there was every hope of a fast arrival. As is later revealed, one cog could accommodate at least 50 men in full armor (Henricus Lettus XIX: 11: 2003, 154–155). Seeing that the cogs were carrying returning warriors, the actual number of men on board each vessel was probably higher (which also explains the lack of cargo), totaling at least 600–700 fully armed men, or an entire small army. A sudden storm forced the cogs to seek shelter in the New Harbor in Saaremaa. Although the chronicler does not hide his enmity toward the Osilians, who supposedly threatened the intruders with violence and started to assemble their fleet, the narrative, as it progresses, suggests something else. Seemingly oblivious of the gathering forces and the locals' efforts to block the harbor, the crusaders took to raiding the fields nearby. Crop plundering and other looting lasted several days before the Osilians finally captured one group of marauders. It appears from the following sentence, however, that it was only then that the Osilians started to gather their army and scuttle old boats and

wooden structures to stop up the passage. It seems as if Henry, or some later copyist, sought to justify the behavior of the Germans by making the aggression of the Osilians and the looting of their fields look like two completely unrelated incidents.

Looting and plundering of nearby villages was to be expected under the circumstances, with the presence of a hungry army without provisions. Hunger being the traveling crusaders' worst enemy is also brought up at the end of the story. Having survived the military threat by the Osilians, the Germans still had to linger in (or right outside) the harbor for another three weeks, ending up 'barely half alive' (Henricus Lettus XIX: 6: 2003, 150). At the very last moment, the wind turned and carried them to Gotland within one day. Instead of the intended one- or two-day sail, they spent four to five weeks at sea.

This episode in the *portus novus* also offers a good explanation of why it was essential, especially for cogs, to wait for fair wind at the harbor of Daugavgrīva. Cogs were large and cumbersome vessels that completely depended on the wind (Ilves 2001). This is particularly evident in comparison with the locals' smaller and better maneuverable ships. Even when the New Harbor was still unbarred, the cogs were unable to sail away, whereas the Osilians' vessels could move freely in and out.

Certain details in the account of the episode imply that the New Harbor must have been located on the western coast of Saaremaa: wind from the east pushed the burning rafts sent against the cogs away from the shore to the open sea. The rafts were launched from somewhere south of the landing place. The hithe had, however, two banks and two entrances. It must have been sufficiently spacious to accommodate nine cogs and, presumably, other vessels, and deep enough for cogs to sail close to land, even though small boats were required to get ashore.

The Chronicle has the crusaders plundering the surrounding fields, hinting that the harbor must have been located in proximity to settlement areas. Seeing as Henry calls it New Harbor without any toponymic specification, the site was most likely well known and commonly used. Another hint is provided by a seaman or pilot on board the cogs who was familiar with the locale and knew that the shallow exit of the port might be passable for unfreighted cogs if pulled through with ropes (see also Ilves 2015). This type of harbor would have only existed in the vicinity of well-cultivated fields and densely populated settlement to guarantee the availability of sufficient quantities of food for the ships' crews. Even with productive fields all around, however, the described number of people would have been overwhelming for any harbor in the Eastern Baltic.

Like the medieval ports in Scandinavia and the landing site in Daugavgrīva, the New Harbor was most probably partly fortified, allowing access only through narrow entryways (for parallels in Scandinavia, see, for example, Crumlin-Pedersen 2010; Rieck 1991). This made it possible, in case of danger, to quickly seal the harbor by scuttling old vessels in the entrances. Had the Osilians been hostile from the outset, they could have left the nine cogs out on the rough sea. Therefore, it seems more plausible that they were unaware of the number of warriors coming in. After all, the harbor functioned as a neutral haven that welcomed peaceful vessels. The conflict arose because the crusaders overstayed their welcome and resorted to plundering the neighborhood for food. That Henry avoids directly depicting the crusaders' exploits as looting is probably due to his awareness that what they did was an explicit violation of the harbor peace.

The escape of the crusaders can indeed be considered a miracle. The cogs' regular entryway was blocked, and landing with boats, already a risky pursuit, was severely obstructed. Henry certainly exaggerated the size of the locals' army, and his claim that

the Osilians received assistance from the mainland in the shape of 200 ships, taking the total number of warriors to 6,000 is, similarly, a major overstatement. The actual clash likely saw the Osilians first trying to burn the cogs and then seeking to foil the crusaders' efforts to pull their vessels through the shallow entrance. The crusaders were saved from starving to death by the lucky presence of a seafarer well versed in local circumstances. As shown above, the same situation almost came to pass during their long wait for fair wind after escaping the blockade. Henry claims the crusaders continued their wait on open seas, a stretch still considered part of the harbor, albeit beyond the port facilities.

So, where was this New Harbor of Henry's narrative? All the above suggests a location either in the bay between the then island of Sörve and Saaremaa, or in the Bay of Kihelkonna (Figure 1). The former can, however, hardly be seen as having two entrances. Moreover, Kihelkonna is the only harbor on Saaremaa mentioned by name in thirteenth-century documents. It was probably one of the island's most convenient harbors operating on shared right of use (mentioned in 1254, Bunge 1873, 2735). Quite possibly, back in 1215, it was simply called the New Harbor.

The Lyndanise harbor

Tallinn is situated right by the sea at the most favorable harbor site in northern Estonia in the lough of Tallinn Bay. Similar to Riga, the location is marked by a presumed cult site – the imposing hill of Toompea rises above the surrounding landscape and in many ways resembles Arkona of the Wends (Mägi 2018, 276–279). Akin to Riga, the city's founding is traditionally linked with the arrival of crusaders, notably the army of King of Denmark, and the building of a stronghold in 1219, although the site was in existence and already in use long before that time (Mägi 2019; Markus 2019).

Danish sources reveal that in 1206 Danes crusaded Reval (the former name of Tallinn), with some mentioning the appointment of a bishop to the city (*in civitate*) (Markus 2020, 261). Other versions claim that Tallinn was founded by Andreas Sunesen, the Bishop of Lund, in 1206 (Bunge 1873, 3115a; Lindström 2015; Markus 2020, 261–262). Henry the Chronicler only speaks about Saaremaa in the context of the same campaign, which is why the Baltic German history tradition largely ignores Tallinn's role. Possibly, Danes busied themselves in many locations in Estonia that year. Moreover, the Chronicle seems to bring up the episode mainly in connection with Archbishop Andreas and his subsequent wintering in Riga.

The recent archeological excavations next to the old town of Tallinn have unearthed imported pottery dating from around the year 1200, as well as cultural layers from several prehistoric periods (Bernotas et al. 2018; Randoja et al. 2022; Russow 2016; Russow et al. 2017). The Chronicle of Henry refers to the site, which dates to before the Danish 1219 campaign. Lyndanise is described as an ancient stronghold of Estonians pulled down by the Danes (Henricus Lettus XXIII: 2: 2003, 173). Doubtless the reference is to what is now Tallinn.

Much more confusing, however, is Henry's description of a looting expedition to the surrounding county called Rävåla early in 1219, that is, before the start of the Danish summer campaign (Figure 1). After plundering many villages in Harjumaa, several of which are mentioned by name in the Chronicle, the looters took the captives, stolen cattle, and other spoils to the iced-over sea and from there proceeded 'to where the Danes have now built their fortress in the area,' that is, Tallinn (Henricus Lettus XXII: 9:

2003, 171–172; Mägi 2015, 141–143). This must have been a 50–60 km detour, the reason for which remains unclear. During the icy trek they stopped several times, held back by the captives and booty, and a fear of being chased by the Osilians or other Estonians.

As noted above, it was common practice to exchange any loot that was difficult to transport for something easier to handle, like silver. Domestic animals move slowly and tire easily, so taking them from northern Estonia to Riga must have been an extremely complicated and all but impossible undertaking in that exceptionally cold winter (Edberg 2003). The presumed trading site at the location of the future Tallinn offered a chance to sell off the troublesome spoils and was thus worthy of a multi-day detour. Moreover, moving along the ice makes perfect sense if the sheer amount of loot was creating logistical problems. Without plans for further raids, the ice route was faster and safer than the forest paths between the villages.

Noteworthy is Henry's fear of a possible attack against the looting party by the Osilians. Assuming the harbor or trading site in Tallinn (Lyndanise) took after Daugavgrīva, it may have been a neutral zone protected by agreements and peace of harbor. Yet, the arrangement did not extend beyond the harbor boundaries. As in Daugavgrīva, in Tallinn the Osilians probably had an outpost to assert their interest in this international trading hub.

The Osilians are mentioned in this context in several other instances. In 1221, they laid siege to the Danish stronghold in Tallinn, which was nearly successful. In Henry's narrative, after the failed siege the Danes hanged the northern Estonian nobles complicit in the Osilians' 'sinister plot' (Henricus Lettus XXIV: 7: 2003, 195–196). Though far less interested in what was going on in northern Estonia than he was in the situation in and around Riga, Henry seems to acknowledge the pursuits of Osilians in Tallinn and Riga to an equal measure.

The importance of Tallinn as an internationally recognized harbor and trading site by the start of the thirteenth century at the latest is highlighted by King Valdemar II of Denmark picking this spot to land his army. Initially, he met with no resistance. The expedition had likely been in the making for a long time and involved previous agreements (Mägi 2015, 141–146; Jensen 2019a). The Danes were greeted by the local elite and, as Henry notes, the King came bearing gifts. As to why the episode ended in a battle is another topic that will not be addressed in this article.

“Our” centers and “their” centers

Archeological excavations in recent decades have called to attention the incompatibility of the conquest narrative presented by the Livonian Chronicle of Henry and the actual archeological picture. The discrepancy is highlighted by the international trading sites managed by the locals, possibly hinted at in the Chronicle but never discussed in detail. The obvious reason may be the Chronicle's single and unmistakable focus on the propagation of Christianity and the related military activities. Therefore, it is unrealistic to expect Henry to provide any all-round descriptions of local conditions or affairs; he was not a cultural anthropologist and never bothered to write about what he took for granted.

The survival of presumed trading sites at Estonian hillforts can also be detected inland, at least in places where the winter routes that ran on frozen ground met with water routes. Several of the larger strongholds, for example, Varbola, flourished after the wars of the first decades of the thirteenth century

rather than fading away as would seem reasonable to assume based on the conquest narrative. The extensive thirteenth century finds from these sites are mostly Estonian; presumably, any locally active individuals of German or Danish origin adapted to the local culture (Mägi 2020). The same applies to the thirteenth century finds from Tallinn, where foreign influences are primarily detected in pottery, and only modestly in other elements of material culture, for example, ornaments (see Russow 2020, especially 77–80, 89–91, for an overview of the finds). Similarly, Livic grave goods from the Christian burials around the Riga Cathedral and St. Peter's Church indicate the considerable role the locals must have played there (Spirģis 2006; Caune 2007).

Of the thirteenth century harbors of Estonia, another one that certainly deserves mention is Purtse in the northeastern part of the country, occupying the most favorable location in the geographical as well as cultural landscape. The stronghold situated near the Purtse harbor site was re-fortified in the thirteenth century. Henry of Livonia, however, makes no mention of Purtse in his narrative. The most important harbor in western Estonia must have been located near Lihula, taking advantage of the topographic conditions there. Fighting for Lihula is repeatedly mentioned in the Chronicle (for example, Henricus Lettus XXIV: 3: 2003, 191).

A flourishing of the local material culture after the thirteenth century Crusades implies a more extensive symbiosis between ethnicities during the formation of medieval Livonia and Estonia than hitherto recognized. While the presence of Germans and Danes during the said period is undisputed, as is their cultural influence, the overwhelming majority of the local society appears to have represented indigenous cultural traditions. This suggests a possibly extensive level of integration between the local and immigrant elites, a process that characterized most other medieval European regions conquered and colonized by a foreign ethnos (Bartlett 1993).

In the light of archeological findings, the course of the Crusades needs to be revised as well. The survival of the local culture through the campaigns speaks in favor of multitudinous agreements and alliances between various parties concluded during the wars. Some of the local elite who made deals with crusaders may have sought more personal power and perhaps a chance to plunder neighboring lands (Oad 2017). According to Henry, the crusading campaigns invariably involved the participation of locals hailing from other areas. Henry's regular portrayal of the crusaders as initiators, oftentimes just responding to violence against Christians, should not be taken at face value. In several episodes the self-serving interests of the local elites – who, according to Henry, were just accompanying the campaign – are blatantly obvious (Henricus Lettus XX: 2, 6, XXII: 9: 2003, 155–156, 158, 171–172).

That said, life continued in the face of the war, political fragmentation, and intrigues plaguing the early decades of the thirteenth century. International trade thrived and trading nodes continued to function. These centers were neutral to a certain extent, and successful in fending off attempts by various political players to assert their control. Some, such as Daugavgrīva, emerged as formidable rivals to crusader-controlled political and trading sites like Riga. Henry's rhetoric focusing on the conquest of political centers may lead to an offhand conclusion that these were indeed the only sites of importance in early thirteenth century Estonia and Livonia. Besides the abovementioned harbors, archeology clearly indicates the existence of other and certainly no less important centers that Henry's Chronicle either totally ignores, or merely hints at.

Conclusion

The sites analyzed as examples in this article feature as mere hints in the Livonian Chronicle of Henry and also lack solid archeological evidence. Available background information, however, points to their possible role as internationally acknowledged harbor sites and actual entry points into Estonia and Livonia. During the thirteenth century Crusades, rather than functioning under the direct control of crusaders and missionaries, these sites formed part of the everyday environment in which Germans, Danes, and representatives of other ethnic groups operated in Estonia and Livonia. They operated, with certain limitations, as neutral havens, whilst considerable efforts were made to gain hold over their affairs. Some of these attempts were apparently successful, albeit only partly, after 1227 – the last year covered by Henry's Chronicle.

Notes

1. Even though Caune (2007) has sometimes referred to eleventh and twelfth century layers as the oldest in Riga, there is yet no definitive publication about finds dating to the eleventh century.
2. The basin of the Daugava and the islands located there are a constant movement of sandy sediments. In addition, these areas have been modified throughout the centuries by construction works. Therefore, reconstructing the actual landscape situation in the thirteenth century is difficult.

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Notes on contributor

Marika Mägi is an Associated Professor at Tallinn University and Head of the Foundation Osiliana, a research center for Saaremaa archaeology and early history. She is an archaeologist and historian. Her main research interests are social archaeology and late prehistoric/early medieval communication in northern Europe.

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