

## **Baltic Crusades and Societal Innovation in Medieval Livonia, 1200–1350**

**Edited by Anti Selart. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2022. Pp. xii + 403. Paperback \$166.00. ISBN: 978-9004428324.**

Joseph Sproule

University of Toronto

This wide-ranging collection, edited by Anti Selart, makes a valuable contribution to the study of medieval Livonia in the era of the Baltic Crusades and their aftermath. Eleven chapters by ten authors (eight of them based in Tartu, Estonia) explore such diverse topics as the changing status of Livonian women, money and coinage, the formation of Livonian cathedral chapters, local responses to the Crusades, and princely patronage of the Livonian church and military orders. These contributions find thematic unity in problematizing older conceptions of pre-Crusade Baltic societies as primitive and isolated, as well as by questioning long-standing assumptions about social, economic, and institutional change in the period that followed the region's conquest by German and Danish crusaders.

Selart's introduction is an eloquent synopsis of a complex historiography: that pertaining to the fate of the native population of the eastern Baltic littoral during the Crusades and the subsequent reshaping of Livonian society under a politically, socially, and economically privileged foreign elite. Traditionally, whether justified by (largely Baltic German) apologists as the fruits of a Christianizing and civilizing mission or castigated by Latvian and Estonian commentators as a tyrannical imposition upon formerly free peoples, relations between the conquerors and the native majority were conceptualized as antagonistic. In recent decades, however, conflict-oriented perspectives have given way to a greater emphasis on compromise between locals and foreigners. Selart declares the book's intention to eschew both "extremes"—"deep antagonism" and "smooth adoption"—in favor of discussing developments in thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Livonia not in "terms of 'import', 'subjugation', or 'resistance', but as a process of multilateral negotiations and adaptations" (15). While embracing a variety of approaches to their respective subjects, the essays collected in this volume together present a strong case for such a reassessment.

Tõnno Jonuks complicates the prevailing perception of the Crusades as a stark ideological horizon between the eastern Baltic's pagan prehistory and the Christian order that emerged in the wake of the region's conquest. He makes a convincing case that Christian and pagan identities could be more fluid than is often imagined, arguing that some members of the pre-Crusades elite had already incorporated features of Christianity into their existing cultural practices. Jonuks suggests that this "successful domestication of foreign concepts" (49) only ended with the defeat of the native nobility during the Crusades, after which syncretic practices were less tolerated by the new ecclesiastical authorities. Kristjan Kaljusaar also examines the experiences of local elites during and after the Crusades. Drawing on Michael Mann's theory of power networks ("networks" are a recurring theme throughout this volume), he describes how Estonian elites responded to the pressures of Danish and German rule by negotiating to protect their status. Some of their "survival strategies" involved resistance or acquiescence, but others led to the creation of "new, intertwined communities" (59). Arvi Haak is also interested in the formation of new communities: the Livonian towns founded in the thirteenth century. While acknowledging that urbanism was a novel development of the post-Crusade period and that new towns were planned along German lines, he identifies a number of local architectural peculiarities. Some of these distinctly Livonian characteristics reflected native influences on urban construction techniques, while

others were dictated by climatic conditions or the local availability of particular resources. Haak paints a nuanced picture of multiethnic urban spaces that combined regional and international elements.

The urban-rural divide is a recurring theme in several contributions. Vija Stikāne's exploration of the changing status of Livonian women highlights the intersection of different legal traditions, both imported and native. She finds that the latter persisted far longer in rural communities, where certain non-Christian matrimonial practices were only suppressed in the early fifteenth century. Her overall conclusion that women's rights in the public sphere were "obviously broader" (223) in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries than in the period that followed illustrates the gradual nature of societal change after the region's conquest. In his discussion of craftsmanship and technologies of production, Andres Tvauri finds that Livonian urban centres were broadly similar to towns elsewhere in the Baltic Sea area, identifying guilds as significant conduits promoting the "harmonisation of craftsmanship" (306). Like Stikāne, he proposes that rural change was considerably slower, with traditional blacksmithing and smelting practices persisting until the early fourteenth century. Cautioning against ascribing all of the innovations of the post-Crusade period to the impact of foreign conquest, he argues that, while some new technologies like stone architecture and the use of waterpower were imported "ready-made" (306) from Germany, other technical innovations of the thirteenth century simply kept pace with broader European developments. Ivar Leimus charts the sporadic development of minting in post-Crusade Livonia, beginning in Riga in the early thirteenth century. Again, we learn that innovations introduced by the crusaders were often adopted quite slowly and continued to coexist alongside older practices for centuries.

A major strength of this collection is its methodological blend of archaeological and historical approaches. Because the region's pre-conquest societies left no written records, historians have tended to see the Crusades as a temporal watershed between the pre-historic past and the literate world of medieval Livonia. As Selart points out, however, the question of "how the life of the native majority really changed" (90) during this pivotal era is less clear than the political and ecclesiastical transformations that are the focus of the medieval source material. In the rural communities that were home to a large majority of the region's inhabitants—whose lived experiences are comparatively undocumented in the historical record—archaeologists have observed a high degree of material continuity from the pre-conquest period. The focus of many of the volume's contributions on the social and economic, the rural and agricultural, and on material culture provides a welcome addition to the study of a period more often examined in terms of the political and religious changes brought about by conquest and Christianization.

As Christian Lübke notes in his thoughtful conclusion, this is, above all, a book about change; and one of the collection's most consequential interventions is the questioning of longstanding assumptions about the nature of that change. We learn that some of the innovations ascribed to the period were rapid, but others were far slower; some were forced upon the region by the victorious crusaders, but others were born of negotiation between native and newcomer; and some were imported wholesale from abroad while others arose locally through processes of syncretism and adaptation. As described in the illuminating contributions of Mihkel Mäesalu and Madis Maasing, it took a century or more for many of medieval Livonia's most important institutions and relational networks to become firmly established. All of this raises the question of causality. It has often been assumed that explanations for the subsequent trajectory of medieval Livonian society must be found in its violent origins during the Crusades; or, to borrow Michel Foucault's formulation, the "elliptical and dark god of battles must explain the long days of order, work, and peace. Fury must explain harmonies. The beginnings of history are traced back to a series of brute facts" (*Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975–1976* [2003], 269). This collection demonstrates that, while some of the transformations that took place in the thirteenth-century eastern Baltic are indeed directly ascribable to the region's conquest, the situation is often far

less clear. The fact that many of the period's "innovations" were gradual and followed the same general developmental path as in other parts of Northern Europe suggests that not all of the changes that took place in the wake of the Crusades were necessarily a *result* of the Crusades. Historically, there has been a scholarly tendency to focus on the initial phase of violent culture clash, conquest, and conversion; but this volume's nuanced exploration of how ordinary Livonians experienced a century and a half of quotidian change serves as a potent reminder of Johan Huizinga's observation that "history creates comprehensibility primarily by arranging facts meaningfully and only in a very limited sense by establishing strict causal connections" (*Men and Ideas: History, the Middle Ages, the Renaissance* [1984], 55). I found this collection to be a thought-provoking contribution to the rich scholarship on medieval Livonia and a strong addition to Brill's *The Northern World* series.

doi:10.1017/S0008938923001516

## **Bestialische Praktiken. Tiere, Sexualität und Justiz im frühneuzeitlichen Zürich**

**By Jose Cáceres Mardones. Vienna and Cologne: Böhlau, 2022. Pp. 343. Cloth €60.00. ISBN: 978-3412524906.**

Mireille J. Pardon

Berea College

Jose Cáceres Mardones brings us into the world of seventeenth-century Zurich to confront the animal-human relationships that structured everyday rural life through the lens of bestiality prosecutions. The judicial treatment of bestiality in medieval and early modern Europe is an understudied phenomenon that is often subsumed into studies of sodomy, where it becomes an asterisk to research primarily focused on sex with humans. The so-called animal turn has encouraged scholars to look more closely at the prosecution of bestiality, and Cáceres Mardones follows this tradition by drawing on theoretical frameworks from animal studies to pursue his analysis. Though he specifies that the focus of this book is not the animals themselves, he cites concepts such as "co-history" in his analysis of bestiality, so that "both the animals and the people are understood as co-creators of bestiality and its historical appearance" (12, reviewer's translation).

In the first chapter, Cáceres Mardones anchors his work at the intersection of several fields of study: legal history related to the persecution of sodomy, heresy, and witchcraft; cultural history related to gender, masculinity, and sexuality; and social history related to early modern everyday life and the perception of time and space. Though anchored by broad historical questions, his study is still microhistorical through its concentration on the eighty-one cases of bestiality documented in Zurich between 1600 and 1700. Cáceres Mardones situates the prosecution of bestiality in this local context, where burgeoning state power allied with religious authorities tightened moral mandates as a bulwark against the divine punishment read in natural phenomena, from comets to crop failure. Chapter 2 examines the judicial processes at play, outlining the involvement of both state and church officials, with special attention paid to the role of the animals themselves. Despite being a capital offense in name, an analysis of the sentences recorded reveals a wide range of outcomes in addition to execution, including hospital stays and moral instruction for younger