

Castles, towns and villages – different landscapes of power in territory of Latvia from the 11th to 16th century

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Power as social network

A lot of definitions of power were passed in sociological as well as anthropological literature. Actually the discussion about the power in the modern discourse started with the studies of T. Hobbes and N. Machiavelli, but the re-establishment of power as one of the central themes in social theory can be ascribed to both M. Foucault and E. Giddens. For the most of power theoreticians power means either capacity and ability or action and realisation of power. For Foucault (Foucault 1980; Fuko 2000) power means a technique that helps to realise strategic goals; power is neither institution nor structure, it characterises strategic situation in particular society. So power is connected to the social relations, it is everywhere as it is created by everything. Similarly, E. Giddens (Giddens 1979; Giddens 1999) looks at power as a means to achieve intentionally postulated aims, and as such power is mutually connected with the actions of agents.

M. Mann (Mann 1986) had put forward the interpretation of societies as organised networks of power. Societies are formed by four kinds of power in their mutual interrelations which he called sources of social power: these are ideological, economical, military and political relations what at the same time are also organised and institutionalised means of action. Ideological power is based on rituals, knowledge and norms functioning within a society while economic power rests on satisfaction of subsistence needs via collection, transformation and redistribution of goods. Necessity for military power is based on organisation of physical defence or realisation of aggress-

sion, but political power is centralised regulations issued at the centre for the particular territory where they are realised (so political power is expressed in the power of state and limited by borders of the state, therefore it is absent in pre-industrial societies). For Mann, history of power is based on the development of socio-spatial capacity and organisation. Thus, power is related to the control of space and resources which influences social transformations and perception of the social world. The sources of power outlined by Mann have been employed by different archaeologists mostly concerning the emergence of inequality and the character of power of the chiefs. But as Mann himself had exemplified, they can be applied to any society of different chronological periods, including also the Middle Ages.

Power in chiefdoms of late pre-historic Latvia (11th–12th century)

Socio-political development in the territory of present day Latvia was and still is topic for discussions among archaeologists and historians. It seems to be the most politicised question of prehistoric studies during the last centuries. For different reasons since the 1930s there exists the myth of states in some areas of later prehistoric Latvia (like Jersika, Koknese). Only recently some re-examination of evidences was started, and that allows us to support the chiefdom social and political organisation until the 13th century all over the territory of present-day Latvia. It is just necessary to accept that chiefdoms are alternative to state foundation, that every society up to some de-

gree is self-satisfied and the formation of a state is a very short process that did not last for hundreds of years.

In chiefdoms, as in any other pre-state society power was not based on land ownership but it rather took form in family and personal ties. Power is both individual and collective at the same time, and its nature is very fluctuating; there are neither political nor geographical borders. Of main importance were interests of community/kin which for example were realised also in hillforts. It was the first centuries of the second millennium AD when large number of new hillforts were established as well as large rebuilding works were done on the previously inhabited sites. Hillforts' sites were selected under particular strategies and signified by the special meaning as they were manifestations of power and ideology – these were the sites which ruled over the landscape. At the same time, they could serve as anti-stress means to maintain social order via ritualisation of power and warfare. Ideology of equality was strong enough to prevent the realisation of ambitions of some agents to concentrate power (although such cases can be distinguished during the later prehistory). So power in society and space was based on internal relations of agents, while the state was based on new structural principles – territory encompassing also new contradictions like relationships between towns and rural areas. Although sometimes assumed, there was no transition from the villages to towns during the later prehistory in Latvia. The agglomeration of settlement and hillfort or settlement and some cemeteries is not enough to suggest a town. As early towns in the territory of Latvia craft and trade (so they were commercial) centres involved in international trade networks emerged, but their number was quite low.

Century of changes: crusades of the 13th century

It was due to the Crusades, that the political situation in Latvia (as well as in other parts of the eastern Baltic) was dramatically changed. The Europeanisation of the territories of Latvia and Estonia during the 13th century took the form of expressed confrontation, when these regions were violently integrated into the area of Western culture and Christianity (although

this granted benefits in the future). It was already since the middle of the 12th century, that northern German towns and the Hanseatic League appeared as the new power in the Baltic Rim. Directed by both ideological and economical reasons, in the lower reaches of Daugava and Gauja the first documented Christian missionaries arrived in 1186.

The foundation for the forthcoming Livonia confederation was laid by the bishop of Riga, Albert in the first quarter of the 13th century. Already in 1206 the Daugava Livs were subjected, the main part of the Letgallians was converted during the first decade of the 13th century. In 1267 the Couronians were subjected but 5 years later the Semigallians also accepted the new order. The following uprising of the latter lasted until 1290, which marks the end of one hundred years of Crusades in Livonia (HC 1993; LR 1998). Among the first steps in converted areas were appointments of judges and priests to obtain ideological and legal control. But also later in villages there were local authorities which functioned as judges and chiefs so in some ways continuing pre-Crusade traditions.

By the Crusades a new element was introduced into the landscape, stone castles that became centres of power for an area. In the late 12th century, the first stone castles (Ikskile and Martinsala) were built in the lower reaches of the Daugava, in the area of the Livs. Local population quite soon recognised the advantages of stone fortifications. So the Livs of Martinsala only promised to be baptised if the stone castle were to be built at their settlement. In the settlements around the castles local inhabitants coexisted with the Crusaders throughout the medieval period. Some settlements of the local population were used also during the 13th century. Asote hillfort, for example, was inhabited at least until the end of the 13th century and probably also later, in the first half of the 14th century (Shnore 1961). Inhabitation continued also in Talsi and Jersika which could be called early towns of the pre-Crusade centuries.

It was quite common practise to build stone castles at the same site where before the local population fortifications and hillforts had stood. Stone castles were erected in Selpils, Rezekne etc. in such a way. Some castles were established already during the Crusades on the recently used local fortifications (e. g., Turaida

in 1214; Koknese in 1209). In western Latvia the pattern was different, there castles usually were not built on the hillforts while sometimes Crusaders' castles were erected opposite from the local fortifications (Tervete, Dundaga). Actually the stone castles were not the only ones established by the Crusaders, there are indications about several wooden fortifications (Babotten, Heilegenberg etc.) which probably were not supposed to be used in longer perspective. So territorially it was the same space that was used but now a different meaning signified it. The 13th century was a beginning of restructuring of power and social relations when previous networks were replaced by imported structures and cultural system of space.

Power in medieval Latvia: coexistence and confrontation of different powers

The realisation of power is closely connected with its legitimisation and recognition, support to power is achieved by involving the whole society in power institutions which are controlled by particular parts of society (Mann 1986, 6 f.). The existence of sources of power does not mean the realisation of power; for power relations of the highest importance are power strategies used by the elite as a means to achieve their goals.

As very simple but at the same time very expressive form of the power, violence is the most effective form to limit the freedom of individuals in the direct and physical way. But violence also needs large expenses and if performed too often, it loses its meaning and significance. As symbol of warfare and power stone castles stood in Livonia. There were about 100 castles established in Latvia during the Middle Ages (Löwis of Menar 1922; Ose 2001; Tuulse 1942) but only around 30 castles were built in the 13th century. There were areas where stone castles appeared as late as the 15th century, as was the case in eastern Latvia, where the castle in Rezekne is mentioned in 1324, in Ludza – in 1433, but in Vilaka only in 1483; so there still were some local centres of power in existence in first centuries after the Crusades. But of the primeval importance for the Crusaders was the control over the water routes Daugava and Gauja as these were the only regions where the castles were built during

the first half of the 13th century. Of course, castles were built throughout the Middle Ages – Bauska castle was established in 1443 – but the most active period of castle building was the 14th century when around 50 castles were erected which could be related to the establishment of fief structures. Generally, landscape and power on the central level were replaced quite soon while on the local level different forms and structures coexisted; the break was not total. Both power strategies of coexistence and confrontation were used for organising social networks during the restructuring of space.

According to the results of archaeological excavations, there were settlements including also hillforts close to the stone castles where the local population still lived after the Crusades. Thus, in Jersika fortifications with settlement are mentioned as late as 1375, also Talsi, Cesvaine, Tanisakalns etc. were inhabited during the 13th–15th centuries. At the same time, natives lived also in castles or around them (e.g. Martinsala, Lokstene, see Mugurevics 1977). Influence of the local traditions can be recognised in different ways. About one third of the Livonian castles took their names from native settlements, thereby inheriting the local traditions. As an indication of the local traditions the heating system of castles, which was the same as before the Crusades, can be considered (Mugurevics 1973). The introduction of a fief system in the beginnings mostly was based on the local individuals, as during the 13th century the largest part of vassals were natives while in the 14th century there were 28 manors of natives. Only in the 15th century was the number of the manors of the descendants of the Crusaders higher than that of the natives (there were 41 German manors as well as 61 vassals without land, and 17 native vassals in the second half of the 15th century; see Sterns 1997).

An absolutely new element in the landscape of Latvia was the town – phenomena of medieval times introduced into the eastern Baltic only during the Crusades. There were 11 towns in the present day Latvian part of Livonia. There is almost no continuity between previous craft and trade centres of local people and medieval towns that were based on absolutely different regulations. The oldest town in Livonia was Riga, which possessed privileges since 1225 while the castle was established here already

in 1201 close to two settlements of the Livs. Until the second half of the 13th century there were almost only wooden buildings in Riga, whereas the building regulations of Riga town from 1293 allowed only the building of stone houses (Caune 1978). Of course, some stone houses were erected already in the early 13th century so they were sometimes used as territory and border- signs in documents from that time. Although broad scale stone house building started in the early 14th century, for a long time these very reasonable rules were not followed, as also in later regulations the demand for stone houses was expressed regularly. Also archaeological excavations carried out on sites in the territory of Old Riga support this dating of the first stone buildings in the late 13th century, coexisting alongside wooden houses during the medieval period. First stone houses were used for both living, but mainly for storage purposes as the only fire safe sites in the town. In the 14th–16th centuries Riga covered an area of 28 hectares, and around 1272 the town was enclosed by the wall which was both a geographical and symbolic border of the town and its rules. Towns, especially Riga, actively participated in confrontations between Riga archbishopric and Livonia Order to obtain more benefits; twice it ended with military conflicts against the Order (1297–1330, 1481–1491). Riga became a free city for two decades after the collapse of Livonia. Towns and their ideology were not used for the local people, so they did not play an important role in towns. Thus, there are clearly marked differences between town and village which at the same time also were ethnic borders.

The maintenance of power is expensive; it takes time, material resources as well as services. The control over the economics, over trade, production, and subsistence resources is direct and material control over lives of people. The production of material values was mostly in the hands of local people with the exception of towns where the Germans solely represented different crafts. There were differences between the lands of the Order and lands of the archbishopric of Riga as well as other bishoprics. In the former, there was no highly developed fief system and social strata of the vassals, so agriculture did not see important changes until the 15th–16th centuries in these areas (for example, the same type of plough-

shares were used there as before the Crusades, Mugurevics 1973). Agricultural structures of landscape changed very slowly, and remained almost the same until the establishment of serfdom in the 15th century.

Control of ritual and aesthetic actions can give legitimisation and intentional support, and actually form the ideology of society (Mann 1986, 22 f.). The most important interest of ruling social groups is the maintaining of already existing social order (Giddens 1979, 189 f.). And for that they need ideological power which is more important than other sources in order to maintain power. It is ideology that serves as a symbolic system orientating people in the relation to the social world (Gircs 1999, 220). Particularly burial rites, as one of the forms of symbolic actions, legitimise the social interests and order. Medieval and early modern cemeteries (without excavations it is not so easy to determine the difference of chronologically different sites) are recognised in more than 400 sites. The majority of the medieval burials are organised according to the Christian traditions, while some third of the burials during the Livonia period still reflects old beliefs and traditions. The latter more commonly is the case of village cemeteries. In some cemeteries (for example, Jaunpiebalga) it is possible to observe the transition from burial mounds of the 12th–13th centuries to the flat graves of the 13th–14th centuries. In western Latvia the Couronians had used cremations also during the 14th century while the Livs still buried their dead in barrows. Pagan burial customs were practised also in cemeteries established in the 14th–15th centuries but in the 16th century this custom decreases. Records of church visitations show that as late as in the 17th century a lot of burials were organised in unofficial cemeteries not recognised and prohibited by the Church (Bregzo 1933). Sometimes, rather episodically there were laid secondary burials in Stone, Bronze and Iron Age grave mounds and fields. Also, the amount and quality of grave goods sharply decrease since the 13th century. The grave goods disappeared from burials only during the 16th–17th centuries, but some everyday utensils as well as coins were still put in the burials. Among the more widely excavated cemeteries is Martinsala cemetery (excavated area forms around 2/3 of the cemetery) which was used from the end of the 12th century

until the 17th century. There, around half of the burials had some grave goods (LA 1974). So during the medieval period there were two cultures as well as two societies in Livonia, which existed quite separately. Local people kept their heritage of late pagan (prehistoric) periods throughout the Middle Ages, the best example of what probably is the use of pendants – amulets and old burial rites. Worshipping of different natural forces and deities is recorded until the 19th century so it was some syncretism of religions where the elements of both paganism and Christianity were combined. Reformation and Counter-Reformation

of the 16th and 17th centuries (see Spekke 1995) also played some role. The 16th century saw also the emergence (or at least beginning of the formation) of new ethnicity – Latvians who mainly were based on the Letgallian people. The political (landlords and vassals vs. natives), economical (craft vs. agriculture), military (castle vs. town vs. village) and ideological (Christianity vs. paganism) borders reflected the creation of Self and the Other which probably was the basic principle of space structuration of different landscapes which, all at the same time coexisted, overlapped and confronted each other.

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