

### Chapter 3

#### Segmented memory. The (Anti-)Heroizations of Grand Master Heinrich von Plauen (1410–1413) from the 15<sup>th</sup> to the 21<sup>st</sup> Centuries

Heinrich von Plauen (1370–1429) is a fascinating example of the fluidity of heroes and their antagonists, and of the social conflicts in which their image is created. The Grand Master of the Teutonic Order (1410–1413), disposed of by a faction within the Order, was defamed as a superstitious heretic and brutal tyrant in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> century. He became a hero only in the long 19<sup>th</sup> century. According to the national-liberal and conservative historical images of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, he was the saviour of the Order's state in Prussia and a visionary statesman born too soon. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century he was gradually forgotten. Our chapter explores the genesis and ambivalence of this (anti-)heroic figure. It examines the location and layers of his (anti-)heroization and the narrative logics developed in stories written about him.

Heroes cannot be separated from the discursive construction of conflicts. We draw on heroes as indicators for societal problems with discursive value for the analysis of narratives and the framing of social crises and conflicts.<sup>1</sup> With the example of the Grand Master we will show that the same (anti-)heroes could be adopted and used as indicators for different conflicts. This requires a focus on the situational appropriation of discourse motifs and on shifts in narratives. By connecting the ›genealogy‹ of the layers of the (anti-)heroization with concrete micropolitical conflicts, we seek to understand the complexity in the constant reinterpretations of Heinrich von Plauen.<sup>2</sup>

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1 Ulrich Bröckling: *Postheroische Helden. Ein Zeitbild*, Frankfurt am Main 2020, p. 17; examples from Gdańsk are presented in Philipp Höhn: *Taken objects and the formation of social groups in Hamburg, Gdańsk and Lübeck*, in: Lars Kjær/Gustavs Strenga (eds.): *Gift-giving and materiality in Europe, 1300–1600. Gifts as objects*, London 2022, pp. 219–248. Already Hans Prutz: *Die Katastrophe des Danziger Bürgermeisters Conrad Letzkau*, in: *Altpreußische Monatsschrift* 3 (1866), pp. 617–618 showed that the historical narratives about Heinrich consisted of several layers.

2 In the sense of Michel Foucault: *Archäologie des Wissens*, in: Michel Foucault: *Die Hauptwerke*, Frankfurt am Main 2008, pp. 471–699, here pp. 617–684. This method is used by Volker Weiß: *Die autoritäre Revolte. Die neue Rechte und der Untergang des Abendlandes*, Hamburg 2017, p. 12.

To anticipate the result: What at first glance appears to be a clear line in the reception of history in the context of the national ›invention of tradition‹ of the 19<sup>th</sup> century is, at second glance, a network of situational daily political interventions in which Heinrich was used to legitimize the respective conflict positions of different actors with different interests at different times. These instrumentalizations of alleged heroes and antiheroes build on the situational uses of history in the pre-modern era, but shift them into new arenas of conflict in the respective time in which the stories about them were retold. In line with this, we focus on narratives that should not only to be seen as expressions of a ›Zeitgeist‹ (such as ›nationalism‹), but also as an expression of conflicting interpretations and situational conflict.

## The Plot

Heinrich von Plauen was elected Grand Master of the Teutonic Order in 1410, following the disastrous defeat of the Order's forces by the Polish-Lithuanian army at the Battle of Tannenberg/Grunwald, in which the Grand Master Ulrich von Jungingen (1360–1410) was killed. As Commander of Schwetz, Heinrich organized the defence of Marienburg Castle, stabilized the Order's rule and concluded the First Peace of Toruń (1411), which was accompanied by heavy financial burdens due to the obligation to pay high ransoms to the Polish King Jagiełło. In 1413, he was deposed by a faction within the Order led by the Supreme Marshal (*Ordensmarschall*) Michael Küchmeister. Heinrich was appointed Commander (*Komtur*) of Engelsburg and in 1414 imprisoned as an alleged traitor, as was his brother, the former Commander of Gdansk, who played a crucial role in the historical narratives about the former Grand Master. In 1422, after Küchmeister's deposition, the Grand Master was appointed as Procurator (*Pfleger*) in Lochstädt, where he died in 1429.<sup>3</sup>

Heinrich von Plauen was ascribed a crucial role in accounts of the history of the Teutonic Order; as most authors from the 16<sup>th</sup> century onwards drew a line between the immediate consequences of the Battle of Tannenberg and the decline of the Order's rule. This decline culminated in open war between the Order and the Prussian Confederation (*Preußischer Bund*), which had united in 1440 around the larger towns of the Order's lands and the noblemen from

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3 For his biography see Markian Pelech: Heinrich von Plauen. (9. XI. 1410 – 9. X. 1413), in: Udo Arnold (ed.): Die Hochmeister des Deutschen Ordens 1190–2012, 2nd Edition, Weimar 2014, pp. 118–122.

Kulm region, and paid homage to the Polish king in 1454 after declaring the lordship of the Order void. Since the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the stories of Heinrich von Plauen correlated with the historical narrative of the fate of the state of the Teutonic Order,<sup>4</sup> in which the defeat at Tannenberg appeared as the turning point that bore decline and disintegration. Some later stories saw Heinrich as a tragic hero, who could at best slow the decline, while others saw him as an anti-hero who turned the rule of the Order into a tyranny, causing the open rebellion of the estates.

Three points from Heinrich's reign illustrate his rise, height, and decline and its fatality for the history of the Order's state. These events were prioritized differently in the various texts from different periods. However, they are the basic elements around which the respective appropriation of the subject matter took place:

- (1) Heinrich von Plauen's investiture, the defence of Marienburg Castle and his election as Grand Master;
- (2) the internal conflicts in the Order's territory, focussing in particular on the violent conflicts with alleged rebels or traitors (depending on the interpretation);
- (3) Heinrich's deposition in 1413.

It is above all the second aspect that became crucial for the authors to negotiate their respective contemporary conflicts and problems. It is also the most controversial point regarding the evaluation of Heinrich von Plauen as hero or anti-hero. This chapter concentrates on this aspect, even though many of the texts we examine also deal with his investiture and deposition.

Our focus lies in particular on three murders in Gdańsk. In 1411, shortly after the Order had taken back control over the city, which had paid homage to the Polish king in 1410, the Gdańsk mayors Conrad Letzkau, Arnd Hecht, and Letzkau's son-in-law Bartholomäus Groß, a councillor, were killed at the Teutonic Order's castle in the city. The murder was most likely carried out at the instigation of the Grand Master's brother Heinrich, the local commander. These events were probably the result of conflicts which had arisen because of the town's submission to the Polish king in 1410 before submitting once again to the Order at the beginning of 1411.<sup>5</sup> The role of the commander in the

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4 Paradigmatic in Michael Burleigh: *Prussian Society and the German Order. An aristocratic corporation in crisis c. 1410–1466*, Cambridge 1984.

5 Hans Prutz: *Die Katastrophe des Danziger Bürgermeisters Conrad Letzkau*, in: *Altpreußische Monatsschrift* 3 (1866), pp. 597–629.

texts is ambivalent. Sometimes he appears as an adjunct and executive arm of his brother, sometimes as a depraved, violent brute, sometimes as a demonic counterpart to him.

The stories about the murder are thus associated with the heroisation, discrediting, and demonisation of other actors. In the 600 years of making the Grand Master a hero or anti-hero, Conrad Letzkau gains particular importance. Compared to Arnd Hecht, who was often described as a fierce protagonist of commercial and republican urban freedom, Letzkau was attributed modesty in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century. From the 16<sup>th</sup> century onwards, Letzkau was also seen as a martyr for the unity of the fatherland. Thus, he became the bourgeois counterpart of Heinrich von Plauen.

### Medieval and Early Modern Texts

If we investigate medieval sources, the events, which became so important in the historiography on Prussia and the state of the Teutonic Order in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century, are not very well documented. What appears as a story of treason and tyranny in the texts around and after 1800 can only be reconstructed vaguely based on a patchwork of sources, which contain situational arguments of conflicting factions.<sup>6</sup>

#### Sources from the 1420s

There are three traditions of the sources dealing with the events of 1411 from the 1420s and 1440s:

- (1) The earliest historiographical account is found in a continuation of the chronicle of Johann von Posilge (in research often entitled as *Fortsetzung*). These annals were based on intimate knowledge of the sources in the archive and chancery of the Grand Master.<sup>7</sup> The continuation gives a detailed account of the events in Gdańsk, in which the murder of the magistrates is legitimated as a punishment for an alleged rebellion of the

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6 Günter Ketterer: Die Hanse und der Deutsche Orden unter den Hochmeistern Heinrich von Plauen und Michael Küchmeister (1410–1420), in: *Hansische Geschichtsblätter* 90 (1972), pp. 19–20, footnote 17.

7 Chronike des Landes von Prussin, in: *Repertorium Fontium* 6, 395 ([www.geschichtsquellen.de/werk/3112](http://www.geschichtsquellen.de/werk/3112) (31.5.2024)); Arno Mentzel-Reuters: *Deutschordenshistoriographie*, in: Gerhard Wolf/Norbert H. Ott (eds.): *Handbuch Chroniken des Mittelalters*, Berlin 2016, pp. 301–336.

burghers.<sup>8</sup> It also recounts the reign of Heinrich as a whole and his deposition in 1413. Here, we see the first traces of a defamation of Heinrich as a superstitious character who broke the principle of consensus of the Order and waged war with Poland.<sup>9</sup> These defamations, however, do not focus on the events from Gdańsk.

- (2) Sources that were written in the context of the conflicts between the Polish King and the Order at the Council of Constance (1414–1418) likewise avoid these events from Gdańsk. Several letters written by members of the family von Plauen and their friends to participants of the Council complain about the deposition of Heinrich and did also not mention the murders. The line of justification used by the Teutonic Order was that Heinrich and his younger brother had allied themselves with the Polish king and were thus traitors.<sup>10</sup> In the conflicts at the council, the party around Kuchmeister also referred to unlawful murders committed by the former Grand Master and his partisans. They did not thematize the events from Gdańsk in 1411, but concentrate on the murder of the Livonian nobleman Johann von Dolen.<sup>11</sup>
- (3) A few sources exist that refer to individual conflicts in which the events of 1411 were mentioned; for example the *diffidatio* of the Spitler of the Elisabethenspital, who accused members of the council of Gdańsk (among them Letzkau and Hecht) of having him robbed and accused him of being a church robber.<sup>12</sup> In the 1420s, Johann Westfal, the second husband of Letzkau's daughter and Groß's wife Anna, sued for compensation on

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8 Erich Strehlke (ed.): *Scriptores Rerum Prussicarum* (hereafter SRP), vol. 3, Leipzig 1866, pp. 277–399, here pp. 326–327. See also the letter of Heinrich von Plauen to the counts of Hoya from 1412 (Ludwig von Baczko: *Geschichte Preußens*, vol. 3, Königsberg 1794, p. 151). There might have been a grain of salt in the accusations that at least Letzkau and Hecht were involved into secret negotiations with the Polish king. See Toeppen, Max (ed.), *Acten der Ständetage Preußens unter der Herrschaft des Deutschen Ordens* (hereafter ASP), vol. 1, Leipzig 1878, p. 157.

9 SRP 3, 334–335.

10 Erich Weise (ed.): *Die Staatsverträge des Deutschen Ordens in Preußen im 15. Jahrhundert*, vol. 1, Königsberg 1939, pp. 88–91; Jürgen Sarnowsky (ed.): *Virtuelles Preußisches Urkundenbuch* ([www.spaetmittelalter.uni-hamburg.de/Urkundenbuch/](http://www.spaetmittelalter.uni-hamburg.de/Urkundenbuch/)) (31.5.2024; hereafter PrUB)) 1415.05.12.a (1415); PrUB, JH I 2251 (1415); PrUB 1415.09.21 (1415); PrUB, JH I 2272 (1415); PrUB, JS 100 (1416–1418); PrUB, JH I 2304 (1416).

11 PrUB, JH I 2290 (1416); PrUB 1416.02.07 (1416); PrUB 1416.02.07.a (1416).

12 SRP 4, 391–392, footnote 4, 399.

behalf of their children for money that the two Heinrichs had allegedly taken from them. In 1425, this dispute was settled.<sup>13</sup>

In the sources from the 1410s, the events of 1411 and the reign of Heinrich play a part in how different parties communicated their conflicts. The sources can only vaguely be used to reconstruct these conflicts. For our question it is relevant that we don't find any traces of a heroization or antiheroization, or even a coherent narrative account on the person of Heinrich. Neither Heinrich von Plauen, nor his later counterpart Conrad Letzkau, are described as antiheroes or heroes. Great deeds are seen as episodal histories (the defense of the Marienburg is sometimes attributed to saints, e.g.<sup>14</sup>), but they are not depicted as part of a heroic biography.

#### Sources from the 1440s and 1450s

In the 1440s, the commemoration of the murders came back as part of the list of grievances, the gravamina of the forming estates against the Order. The estates provided the rising tensions between the Prussian Confederation and the Order with a longer history by framing local conflicts as part of a macro-conflict and by delegitimizing the Order's rule as tyranny. In the immediate context of the escalations which led to the outbreak of open war in 1454, the Prussian Estates and its members wrote several gravamina that included the murder of 1411.<sup>15</sup> In these texts, the murder was seen as a tyrannical and unchristian act, by which Heinrich von Plauen the Younger, the commander of Gdańsk, acted in tacit agreement with his eponymous older brother. Confronted with these complaints, the Order collected historical memories, such as the testimony of a member of the Order, who had allegedly lived in the city as a young schoolboy. He described the murder as a legitimate punishment for the three magistrates who had not only feuded against a bailiff of the Order in Dirschau but also acted against the will of the urban council.<sup>16</sup>

The conflicting parties were likely not sure on how to integrate the vague commemoration of the murders from 1411 into a coherent narrative of the

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13 SRP 4, 394–395, footnote 3; Geheimes Staatsarchiv Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz (hereafter GSTA SPK) XX. HA, OBA, no. 4231, 4506.

14 SRP 3, 316–317.

15 SRP 4, 473; 486–487. For the process at Friedrich III's court see Maximiliane Berger: *Der opake Herrscher. Politisches Entscheiden am Hof Friedrichs III. (1440–1486)*, Ostfildern 2020, pp. 107–177.

16 SRP 3, 486–488, footnote.

conflict. In negotiated between 1452–1454 before Emperor Frederik III., Hans von Baysen, later leader (*gubernator*) of the Prussian Confederation, proposed in 1452 that the Grand Master should come to an agreement with the towns. On the diets, he said, they debated about old conflicts and murders, about which the Grand Master knew as little as the burghers.<sup>17</sup> This was probably a hint at the estates' complaints about the murders of 1411 mentioned in the gravamina of the estates – and, furthermore, a more or less ironic hint, since these old stories were not the crucial point in the disputes between both sides. It indicates also that the knowledge of the parties concerning the prehistory of the formation of the *Preußischer Bund* was fragile.

The respective gravamina of the *Bund* and the Order consist of a patchwork of different conflict episodes, which were woven into a general narration of the conflict either as just resistance against a lord who had turned into a tyrant, or as unjust rebellion. The arguments brought up by different conflicting actors could be taken up and modified by other actors. The same can be seen concerning the accusation that Heinrich von Plauen had been involved in several murders in 1410 and 1411. At the Council of Constance 1414–1418, the Order adopted the claims of the archbishop of Riga regarding the murder of the Livonian nobleman Johann von Dolen. By delegitimizing Heinrich as a cruel murderer, this could strengthen the Order's position in its conflicts with the relatives of the deposed Grand Master. In the 1450s, however, this claim was brought up by the estates, which included the murder of Johann von Dolen in their lists of grievances.<sup>18</sup> The grievances turned this claim now against the Order by depicting the Grandmaster as a prototype for the members of the corporation.

#### Sources from the 16<sup>th</sup> Century

A coherent narrative about the events of 1411 is only to be found in later texts. Authors from the 19<sup>th</sup> century primarily used these texts, probably because they contained many of the details these authors missed in the medieval sources.

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17 ASP 3, no. 252, p. 502. For comparable arguments brought up by the representatives of the Order see ASP 4, 112–188. For a closer look onto the sources from the 15<sup>th</sup> century see Philipp Höhn/Georg Jostkleigrewe: Anti-heroes in the making. War and urban identity in 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> century Gdańsk, in: Jesus A. Solorzano Telechea/Jelle Haemers/Philipp Höhn (eds.): War and City in Medieval Atlantic Europe (and beyond). Consequences, Resilience and Collective Memory (forthcoming).

18 SRP 3, pp. 486–488, no. 3.

In general, the historiographical tradition from Gdańsk can only be dated back to the early 16<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>19</sup>

- The compiled manuscript by the Gdańsk burgher Bernd Stegmann (of whom little is known) dates back to the 1520s, but in part draws on older sources that are difficult to date and to reconstruct. Some of the text passages relevant for this article might date to the 1490s.<sup>20</sup> They give an insight into the ways in which the elites of Gdańsk memorized and interpreted their urban history and framed new conflicts with the Order, which had never accepted the belonging of Gdańsk to the Polish Kingdom.
- The same is true for the often-discussed chronicle of Prussia, written at the same time by the Dominican Simon Grunau (ca. 1470-1533/1537); this chronicle draws on the Gdańsk tradition, but has a clear focus on Prussian *Landesgeschichte*.<sup>21</sup>
- The account of the events in Caspar Schütz's (ca. 1540–1594) *Historia rerum Prussicarum*, published in 1592, is based on both texts. Schütz started working in the service of Duke Albrecht of Brandenburg (1490–1568) and later as a scribe in Gdańsk. He followed the narrative of the former texts but added many details on which the authors from 19<sup>th</sup> century relied.<sup>22</sup>

In the 1520's, when Grunau's and Stegmann's texts were written, Gdańsk's elites were confronted with internal conflict in the context of the Reformation and involved into new conflicts with the Order, whose last Grand Master introduced the Reformation in Prussia in 1525. The Catholic authors probably wrote the story of a strong urban community, Catholic and under the rule of the Polish king, that had fought its autonomy against the Order, which was portrayed as tyrannical but also as heretical.<sup>23</sup> Again, the murder was seen as

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19 Cordelia Heß: Nigra crux mala crux. A comparative perspective on urban conflict in Gdan-sk in 1411 und 1416, in: Urban History 41 (2014), pp. 566–567.

20 SRP 4, pp. 366–383; Julia Moździeń: Gdańska kronika Bernta Stegmanna (1528). Die Danziger Chronik Bernt Stegmanna (1528), Toruń 2019, pp. 13–40; see also id.: ›Merke auff lieber leser wy woltadt gelonet wirt mit arge‹. Die Danziger Chronik Bernt Stegmanna (1528) als Beispiel bürgerlicher Moralliteratur, in: Jahrbuch des Wissenschaftlichen Zentrums der Polnischen Akademie der Wissenschaften in Wien 8 (2017), pp. 110–111; Mentzel-Reuters: Stadt und Welt, pp. 99–107; Udo Arnold: Geschichtsschreibung im Preußenland bis zum Ausgang des 16. Jahrhunderts, in: Jahrbuch für die Geschichte Mittel- und Ostdeutschlands 19 (1970), pp. 94–95.

21 Marlon Bäumer: Verräter, Ketzler und Tyrannen. Der ständische Widerstand in der Preußischen Chronik von Simon Grunau, in: Preußenland NF 11 (2020), pp. 64–104.

22 Caspar Schütz: Historia rerum Prussicarum, Zerbst 1592, pp. 112–118.

23 Mentzel-Reuters: Stadt und Welt, pp. 113–114; Bäumer: Verräter, Ketzler und Tyrannen pp. 71–73; for the Reformation in Danzig see Slawomir Kościelak: Religion in Gdańsk in the



part of a long conflict; its historiographic treatment, however, was a reaction to more recent conflicts of the early 16<sup>th</sup> century, which had little to do with the conflicts from the 1410s.

Many of the elements of the story on which the texts of the 19<sup>th</sup> century built were not part of the earliest accounts, or were only later brought into a coherent narrative form. The Order's gravamina against Heinrich von Plauen included the complaint that he asked »false prophets« for advice while he ignored the consent of the important local officials (*Gebietiger*) of the Order – a narrative that legitimized his deposition. Later sources (among them especially Grunau) adapted this accusation by suggesting that Heinrich was not only superstitious but even held sympathies for heretics, especially with the Hussites.<sup>24</sup> Grunau's method is typical for re-narration of the same episodes and biblical motives from the 1410s to the 1520s, which were adapted to very different conflicts and problems.

Even in the 1450s accounts from the urban side, which were based on the accusations against the Grand Master and his brother brought up first by the Order, neither was depicted as an anti-heroic character. Stegmann's, and to an even greater degree Grunau's, texts demonized von Plauen as heretic, unchristian, treacherous, tyrannical and arrogant. Still, they didn't depict him and his brother as individuals but – following the gravamina of the 1450s – as prototypical members of the Order who transformed the rule of the Order into a tyranny. In this light, one must state that, while the texts deal with heroic transgressions and even more with anti-heroic episodes that illustrate conflict, there are no (anti-)heroes.

Some historians of the 19<sup>th</sup> century lamented the missing interest of medieval authors for their own time's extraordinary men and their character.<sup>25</sup> The premodern authors selected however specific parts of a history that allowed them to narrate conflicts in a particular way with reference to the political discourses of the time concerning unrest, rebellion, and resistance against tyranny.<sup>26</sup> In this setting, these sources followed a narrative structure in which characters appeared as types. They were not interested in biographical sketches. The conflicts narrated in the premodern sources are conflicts

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Middle Ages and Early Modern Times. From St. Adalbert's Mission to the Reformation Victory, in: Beata Możejko (ed.): *New Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Poland and Prussia*, London 2017, pp. 93–96.

24 Mentzel-Reuters: *Stadt und Welt*, p. 114; Bäumer: *Verräter, Ketzler und Tyrannen*, pp. 91–92.

25 e.g. Heinrich von Treitschke: *Das deutsche Ordensland Preußen*, Leipzig 1862, p. 6.

26 Heß: *Nigra crux mala crux*.

between collectives and corporations, between a religious order, an urban community, and the emerging estates. As Ahasver von Brandt has noted, the urban sources tended to see the urban councils acting as collectives, not as individual actors.<sup>27</sup> If the sources name individual positive deeds such as those done by Conrad Letzkau, who according to Grunau snuck through enemy territory to recruit support for the endangered Order from the princes of the Empire,<sup>28</sup> they do not present these as extraordinary heroic actions but as examples for good practice as a member of the council (loyalty and courage). If they mention actions such as the murders, these episodes function to demonstrate the evil of the antagonist – the Order – and its representatives. The texts teach moral-didactic lessons, such as how to act in conflict. Stegmann explains that Letzkau's example would illustrate that noblemen in general should not be trusted: the reader should learn how good deeds would be rewarded with malice. If there are villains in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup>-century documents, they represent types: the von Plauen family, e. g., stands for the tyranny of the Order's rule, but also for falsehood, bad Christian faith and treachery.

Concerning the positively-connoted antagonists of the evil protagonist in Grunau's and Stegmann's texts, neither Conrad Letzkau, nor his daughter Anna who confronts the commander with his brutal murder, appear as heroes; they are martyrs instead.<sup>29</sup> The sources written since the 1450s describe in detail the wounds of the murdered and their defaced bodies. Grunau and Stegmann illustrate how badly the commander treated Anna. Grunau even suggests that Anna was murdered (which can hardly be concluded from the other sources).<sup>30</sup> According to Stegmann, the victims were martyrs who died for the urban community. Because their community was protected by God, the murder was followed by divine punishment. Just as the crucifixion of Christ happened during the Holy Week, so did the mayors'; just as the crucifixion was followed by the destruction of Jerusalem, so was the Plaue's'

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27 Ahasver von Brandt: *Geist und Politik in der lübeckischen Geschichte*. Acht Kapitel von den Grundlagen historischer Größe, Lübeck 1954, p. 56.

28 Max Perlach et al. (eds.): *Simon Grunau's Preussische Chronik*, vol. 2, Leipzig 1889, pp. 9–13; SRP 4, pp. 374–378.

29 Ronald G. Asch: *Märtyrer (Christentum, Frühe Neuzeit)*, in: Ronald G. Asch et al. (eds.): *Compendium heroicum*, Freiburg 3. Mai 2018. DOI:10.6094/heroicum/maertyrer-chr-finz (31.5.2024).

30 Perlach: *Grunau's Preussische Chronik*, p. 13.

crime followed by the destruction of the Orders' castle in Gdansk 43 years after the murder.<sup>31</sup>

What we see here are thus not heroes or antiheroes, but exempla for good and bad behavior, prototypes for specific social groups. This changes around 1800.

### Texts from the Enlightenment and National Romantic

Around 1800, the first texts were written that featured a biographical heroisation of Heinrich von Plauen and Conrad Letzkau. This coincided with changes in literature and historiography. After 1800, the individual and his fate gained more and more prominence in literature. Extraordinary men, heroes, made history, thus fulfilling the *Weltgeist's* commands (though often not intentionally). Tacit understandings of heroes which come close to Hegel's idea appear in mostly all texts from the ›long 19<sup>th</sup> century‹.<sup>32</sup> Seen as a Hegelian hero, von Plauen appears as an extraordinary, misunderstood man and a visionary who cannot be judged by the same moral norms that count for normal men.

### Texts around 1800

The texts dealing with the von Plauen brothers around 1800 were at the intersection between literature and the first forms of institutionalized academic history writing. This makes it difficult to ascribe them to one field – more so as the authors wrote both tragedies and historical works. There are four important authors to have named here:

- Ludwig von Baczko (1756–1823), was born, lived, and died in Königsberg. He wrote a history of Prussia (between 1793 and 1800), as well as a »patriotic tragedy« about Conrad Letzkau (1791).<sup>33</sup>
- August von Kotzebue (1761–1819) was one of the most prominent dramatists and writers of his era. Seen as a symbolic figure of the restoration by

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31 so only in Stegmann's text (SRP 4, p. 377).

32 Georg W. F. Hegel: Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte, Frankfurt am Main 2014 (14th edition), pp. 45–48.

33 von Baczko: Preußische Geschichte; id.: Conrad Letzkau, Bürgermeister zu Danzig. Ein Trauerspiel in fünf Akten, Königsberg 1791.

the German National movement, he was murdered by Karl Ludwig Sand in 1819.<sup>34</sup> While living in Estonia, a province of the Russian Empire, he also wrote a history of Prussia (1808) and a tragedy about Heinrich von Plauen (1805).

- The Romanticist Joseph von Eichendorff (1788–1857) also wrote a tragedy about Heinrich von Plauen (1830) and a book about the reconstruction of the Marienburg (1844), which had started shortly after 1800 on behalf of the Prussian kings Friedrich Wilhelm III and Friedrich Wilhelm IV.<sup>35</sup>
- Johannes Voigt (1786–1863), professor for Medieval History at the University of Königsberg since 1823 and head archivist of the University, also wrote a history of Prussia in which he gave a detailed account of the events of 1411.<sup>36</sup> Voigt became a doyen for the regional history of Prussia in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which explains why his works were widely discussed.

Most authors follow the plots from Grunau, Stegmann and Schütz. They discuss the texts from the 15<sup>th</sup> century, with which at least Bacsko, Kotzebue and Voigt were familiar, only to fill the gaps.<sup>37</sup> Many of the additions that the authors from the 16<sup>th</sup> century made are further elaborated and newly contextualized. Caspar Schütz, for example, had invented the figure of the commander's jester – a person telling the truth by office, who had warned the urban magistrates coming to the castle of the coming murder (which caused a third mayor, not mentioned in the earlier sources to return, so that he escaped).<sup>38</sup> Bacsko and Kotzebue adopted the jester and his warning into their histories of Prussia.<sup>39</sup> In Bacsko's tragedy, this jerk, Milidewo, even becomes the ambivalent antagonist of the commander Heinrich. He is a Lithuanian or old Prussian magnate who has been taken prisoner and whose wife, also a prisoner, is the commander's mistress. Together they arrange the murder of the magistrates by poisoning a violent faction within the Order, which slaughters the magistrate. The knights are characterised by their excessive and

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34 August von Kotzebue: *Preußens ältere Geschichte*, 4 vols., Riga 1808; id.: *Heinrich Reuß von Plauen oder die Belagerung von Marienburg*, Leipzig 1805.

35 Joseph von Eichendorff: *Der letzte Held von Marienburg*. Trauerspiel, Berlin 2015 (first published 1830); id.: *Die Wiederherstellung des Schlosses der deutschen Ordensritter zu Marienburg*, Berlin 1844.

36 Johannes Voigt: *Geschichte Preussens, von der ältesten Zeit bis zum Untergange der Herrschaft des Deutschen Ordens*, 9 vols., Königsberg 1827–1839.

37 e.g. Bacsko: *Preußische Geschichte*. vol. 3, p. 46.

38 Schütz: *Historia rerum Prussicarum*, p. 117.

39 Bacsko: *Preußische Geschichte*. vol. 3, p. 44; Kotzebue: *Preußens ältere Geschichte*. vol. 3, p. 142.

aggressive sexuality (this is probably an adaptation of the Prussian complaints about assaults on women by the Order). Though portrayed as a ›noble savage‹, Milidewo takes his revenge for his enslavement and that of his wife: he thus provokes »civil war« – i.e., the conflict between the townspeople and the lord of the land.<sup>40</sup>

While the depiction is very much based on the sources from the 16<sup>th</sup> century marked by the views and preferences of a Gdańsk elite, there are fundamental differences between the earlier texts and those of the period around 1800. One involves scope: in his tragedy, Baczek focusses on the events of 1411 and on Conrad Letzkau, whom he portrays as a modest man, looking for a moderation in the escalating tensions between the Order and the bourgeois town. Conrad's antagonist is the wild, excessive, and sexually deviant rapist commander. Baczek doesn't even mention the eponymous Grand Master but sees the commander as a symbolic figure for tyranny. In contrast, Kotzebue and Eichendorff don't mention Letzkau in their tragedies; instead, they focus on the Grand Master as their tragic hero, highlighting the successful defense of the Marienburg and his deposition in 1413. For them, it is rather the Polish king and the disloyal factions within the Order who are the hero's antagonists.

In their historical writings, the interpretations of Heinrich von Plauen and of the events of 1411 differ fundamentally between an enlightened urban-republican (Baczek) and a ›Borussian‹ interpretation (Kotzebue and Voigt). A common theme, however, is their concern with what they see as the fatal division of the ›fatherland‹ – be it ›German‹ Prussia or later Germany tout court.<sup>41</sup> In this respect, the events of 1411 become a field of negotiation for the formation of national ›imagined communities‹.<sup>42</sup>

Baczek interprets the killing of the three mayors as the result of a confrontation between the reign of the Order, which was increasingly developing into a despotic monarchy, and the free, economically ambitious city republic, in which there were factional conflicts between a party loyal to the Order and a party around Letzkau, who insisted on urban autonomy.<sup>43</sup> In both of his texts, Baczek adopts from Schütz that the hangman of Elbing was

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40 id.: Conrad Letzkau, preface.

41 ibid.: preface: Baczek sees his work following the national interest. What he means is however Prussia, not Germany.

42 Benedict Anderson: *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London 1991.

43 Baczek: *Preußische Geschichte*. vol. 3, pp. 41–42.

present, but refused to kill the mayors without a judgement, which was later done by the drunken knights of the Order.<sup>44</sup> With this anecdote, Baccko underlines that the Order had become a tyranny. His heroes – Letzkau and the moderate knight Huldrich, who tries to prevent the Komtur's excesses of violence<sup>45</sup> – appear as reflected and cautious actors.<sup>46</sup> Baccko invokes a *contrat social*. For him, the main opposition is between slavery and freedom. With these key concepts, he connects the accusations from the older sources with concepts from the Enlightenment and the French Revolution. His play ends with an appeal from Groß's widow to her son to uphold the memory of the ›martyrs‹ and to avenge the ›fatherland‹ when the time has come.<sup>47</sup>

In Kotzebue's history, the bourgeoisie does not appear as a historical factor. Kotzebue sees Heinrich von Plauen as a visionary predecessor of the Hohenzollern kings,<sup>48</sup> a brilliant statesman, misunderstood by his contemporaries, as a courageous representative of religious tolerance, herein reinterpreting Grunau's discrediting accusations. He sees the opposition from within the Order as motivated by envy, the Gdańsk burgher as traitors.<sup>49</sup> Voigt follows this line. He sees Heinrich as a man of ›tremendous strength of spirit‹, ›unshakeable firmness of will‹, restless and ›most manly‹, who failed due to the internal decline and fatigue of the Order as a visionary and tragic hero.<sup>50</sup> The events of Gdańsk in 1411 appear under the heading of the *Frevel*, whereby Voigt combines the source documents from the 1410s into a coherent narrative of betrayal.<sup>51</sup> The serious difference to Baccko is that Kotzebue disavows the political actions of the bourgeoisie, but does not see this as the primary reason for the failure of Plauen and thus the state of the Order. For Kotzebue, the reason for decline is the failure of the Order to create a monarchical state reigned by a dynasty.<sup>52</sup>

The heroic figures of the *Sattelzeit* point to the inner conflicts and the decline of the Order. Prussia under the rule of the Order, which preceded Hohenzollern Prussia, functions as its counterpart. In a way, it mirrors the conflicts about how to organize the state in the period between the French

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44 *ibid.*, p. 44; *id.*: Conrad Letzkau, p. 91.

45 *ibid.*, preface.

46 *ibid.*, pp. 91–95.

47 *ibid.*, p. 113.

48 Eichendorff: *Der letzte Held von Marienburg*, p. 114.

49 Kotzebue: *Preußens ältere Geschichte*. vol. 3, pp. 137–138.

50 Voigt: *Geschichte Preussens*. vol. 7, pp. 219–220.

51 *ibid.*, pp. 139–143.

52 Kotzebue: *Preußens ältere Geschichte*. vol. 3, p. 135.

Revolution, the Napoleonic Wars and the Restoration. The failure of the Teutonic Order, the fact that East Prussia became Polish, had to be prevented for the future and the bonds that keep the state together had to be strengthened. The authors' political goals differ: Baczkowski stands for an enlightened monarchy; Kotzebue for the strict exercise of power within the state based on a *Beamten* aristocracy, although he does not approve the murders.

Following Hayden White we see not only Klio writing poetry,<sup>53</sup> but poets (and historians) who literally write history (and poetry). In some cases, the authors incorporate literary figures and elements into their stories. Although (or because) the authors display a critical use of the sources, they repeatedly override the sources' *Vetorecht* in order to formulate a harmonizing narrative. This produces a plurality of interpretations related to similar conflicts, namely the political participation of particular social groups – between, for instance, a noble warrior elite and the economically-rising bourgeoisie.

#### Texts from the aftermath of 1871

One might call the last decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the second heyday and the culmination of the heroization of Heinrich von Plauen. This has much to do with the crucial conflicts in the prelude to the foundation of the German Empire in 1871, and the conflict constellations within the newly founded, Prussian-dominated State. These conflicts were not so different from those addressed by the authors around and after 1800. They deal with the participation of the bourgeoisie in the political society, the reasons for the rise, the decline and the collapse of a state, and increasingly with the colonial position of Germans in Eastern Europe, its legitimation, and the modes of governing a multiethnic empire. We will focus here on two texts, which discuss these issues – one from a scholar, another from a writer of historical novels.

- Heinrich von Treitschke (1834–1896) wrote an influential short book in 1862 entitled *Das deutsche Ordensland Preußen*.<sup>54</sup> Treitschke, at that time professor at Leipzig, after 1873 in Berlin, became the doyen of the national-liberal, later national-conservative historical research in the newly founded Empire and a protagonist of ›Borussian‹ historiography.
- The law and judge Ernst Wichert (1831–1902), who was born in Pillau (now Baltiysk) in Eastern Prussia, and later judge in Königsberg and Berlin,

53 Hayden White: *Tropics of Discourse. Essays in Cultural Criticism*, Baltimore 1978.

54 Treitschke: *Das deutsche Ordensland Preußen*.

wrote several novels, plays, but also reportages. He published a comprehensive novel of three volumes entitled *Heinrich von Plauen* in 1881.

Both texts differ greatly, not only because they belong to different genres. Treitschke frames the history of the Order nationally. He sees the Teutonic Order as the predecessor and model of the emerging Prussian kingdom. Referring to the coat of arms of the Teutonic Order state and the Hohenzollern state, he develops a theory of translation that legitimizes the unification of the German Empire under Prussian leadership.<sup>55</sup> Consequently, Treitschke's focus is on statesmen. His heroes are belligerent *Realpolitiker*. The Teutonic Order's state appears as a model for a tight state organization; he sees the subordination of the church and the subordination of the citizens as a central objective for the future.

Treitschke portrays Heinrich von Plauen as a merciless genius. Alongside Winrich von Kniprode, he is the second »great man of the Order«, gruff and imperious, »with a cold eye for what is necessary«.<sup>56</sup> He appears as a restless but – alas! – unsuccessful fighter against the decline of the order, for example by attempting to introduce new forms of district administration. Heinrich has no other way of stopping the Order's decline but to rule in a dictatorial manner, whereupon he is overthrown. Treitschke furthermore relates the alleged sympathies of the »daring innovator« with the Hussites, which had initially been used by the estates to discredit the Grand Master in order to establish a link to the religious tolerance of the later Hohenzollerns. The country appears as »dishonourless« and »disrespectful«, seduced by Polish »libertinism«. The »betrayal« of Gdańsk also bears witness to this.<sup>57</sup>

Ernst Wichert's novel is entitled after the Grand Master, but the protagonists are two fictitious young noblemen: Heinz von Waldheim, a native of the Empire related to Heinrich von Plauen, and Hans von der Buche, the son of a knight from the Kulmer Land belonging to the traitorous *Eidechsenbund* and a student of Jan Hus (1369–1415). Both are thrown into the turbulent conflicts of 1410–1413. Wicherts Heinrich appears to be a *Realpolitiker*, but not a political genius in the sense of Treitschke. He is a tough man, but also empathetic and hesitant: at first he wants to punish his brother after the murder of the mayors, but then spares him. A long time ago, he was in a relationship with the daughter of the forest master of the family of von der

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55 *ibid.*, pp. 3–6.

56 *ibid.*, p. 66.

57 *ibid.*, pp. 66–73.



Buche, whom the forest master had killed in anger. Heinz turns out to be Heinrich's son from this relationship.

Treitschke sees Prussia as a place of violent German appropriation of space in ›racial struggles‹, ›fertilised‹ by the ›noblest German blood‹. His benchmark to evaluate the stability of a state such as Prussia is nation and ethnicity. He propagates a united *Staatsvolk*, united by common cultural and ethnic bonds and strengthened through the assimilation of the Slavic population.<sup>58</sup> He thereby identifies the ›theocracy‹, especially the celibacy and the segregation between the Order's knights and the local German elites, and the relationship between rulers and the population, as crucial for the decline. To emphasize the problem of the theocracy, Treitschke takes up the complaints of the 1450s about the Knights of the Order being abusive towards women.<sup>59</sup> Furthermore, the Teutonic Order was not able to transform itself into a dynastic monarchy and was not viable in the long term because it could not recruit from the country's biological reservoir. This excluded the regional German nobility and the urban elites and created an immoral form of colonial rule (over Germans), against which the settlers gradually developed a »Prussian fatherland feeling«.<sup>60</sup>

The issue of an ethnic *Volk* and ›assimilation‹ can also be seen as one of the most prominent topics of Wichert's novel. Family and marriage play a key role in explaining the decline of the Order. The Grand Master appears as a ›father figure‹ from a bygone era. The future belongs to Heinz and Hans. Both are involved in conflicting love affairs.<sup>61</sup> Heinz is in love with the daughter of the Gdańsk mayor Huxer, who wants to marry his daughter off to a rich merchant; Hans is in love with a ward of Heinrich, whom the latter has

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58 *ibid.*, p. 4: »Und wer mag das innerste Wesen von Preußens Volk und Staat verstehen, der sich nicht versenkt hat in jene schonungslosen Rassenkämpfe, deren Spuren, bewußt und unbewußt, noch in den Lebensgewohnheiten des Volkes geheimnisvoll fortleben? Es weht ein Zauber über jenem Boden, den das edelste deutsche Blut gedüngt hat im Kampfe für den deutschen Namen und die reinsten Güter der Menschheit«. See also pp. 64–67.

59 *ibid.*, pp. 57–59, p. 64, p. 67; Kotzebue: *Preußens ältere Geschichte*. vol. 3, p. 136 had already suggested that Heinrich von Plauen had the plan that the mercenaries he had brought into the country to fight against the Polish king should marry local women to create a biological base for the rule of the Order.

60 Treitschke: *Das deutsche Ordensland Preußen*, pp. 58–60: »Eine furchtbare Kluft tat sich auf zwischen der Landesherrschaft und ihrem Volke, seit in den Enkeln der ersten Ansiedler allmählich ein preußisches Vaterlandsgefühl erwuchs und das Volk murrend erkannte, daß eine schroff abgeschlossene Kaste von Fremden und Heimatlosen Preußens Geschicke lenkte.«

61 Ernst Wichert: *Heinrich von Plauen*. vol. 3, 3rd ed. Leipzig 1886, pp. 326–336.

promised to a Polish prince.<sup>62</sup> Both succeed in overcoming ›realpolitik‹ and the conventions of class and marry their lovers from the urban elites. In both cases these noble-bourgeois marriages are accompanied by rejections of German-Polish marriages (the father of Hans, a member of the rebellious *Eidechsenbund* is the only important figure in the novel who is married to a Polish woman).<sup>63</sup>

The crucial topic with which Wichert is concerned is the reconciliation of bourgeoisie and nobility, which can be read as a plea for the harmonisation of these two groups in the German Empire, founded in 1871.<sup>64</sup> This problem offers an interpretive frame for Wichert's detailed depiction of the murders from 1411. The younger brother of the Grand Master, an impulsive man who wants to defend the order's rule, appears as the representative of the noble elite, while his antagonist Arnd Hecht is portrayed as rigorous and impulsive, aiming for civic independence and capitalistic commerce.<sup>65</sup> Wichert sees the events of 1411 as tragic, but also as a call for unity, for the involvement of the bourgeoisie in politics. In Gdańsk, the forces around Hecht prevail in an unintended chain of violence and escalation against the appeasing forces around Letzkau; on the side of the Order, the commander acts impulsively out of rage and anger by citing the mayors on his castle. Unlike in the other 19th century texts, however, the younger Heinrich and his knights are not able to kill the magistrates. He asks several pirates, Victual Brothers (*Vitalienbrüder*), whom Heinz and Hans had caught on their voyage to Gdańsk, to murder the three. This depiction emphasises unity and harmony. Wichert externalises the murders: ›pirates‹, supposedly patriotless fellows, murder the magistrates.<sup>66</sup>

The texts from the 1860s to 1880s document a slight shift in conflicts dominating societal discourses. They deal with comparable structural conflicts within the process of *Reichseinigung* and the *Kaiserreich* as the earlier texts. Both heroize Heinrich (Treitschke) or depict him (Wichert) in regard to particular political and social problems and can be read as interventions in the discussion of these problems: Firstly, the relation between the church and the state, secondly, the relation between the commerce-oriented bourgeoisie and the military, and politically very present nobility and the question of

62 *ibid.*, pp. 143–160, 304–325.

63 *ibid.*, vol. 1, pp. 199–215.

64 Hans-Ulrich Wehler: *Deutsche Gesellschaftsgeschichte*. Vol. 3: 1849–1914, München 2008, pp. 355–376, pp. 848–999.

65 Wichert: *Heinrich von Plauen* vol. 2, 3rd ed. pp. 311–378.

66 *ibid.*, p. 373.

governing multi-ethnic spaces. Both texts also show, thirdly, a tendency to see Heinrich as a projection for the imperial ambitions of the German Empire over Eastern Europe and the way to govern such an imperial space.<sup>67</sup>

### The Age of Extremes (1918–1945)

If one asks about »caesuras« of the Teutonic Order as »lieu de mémoire«, the most prominent is the First World War and the consequences of the war – the territorial losses and the revolution of 1918. There are only a few texts after 1918 that deal with Heinrich and some of these texts contributed – maybe surprisingly – to historicisation of the Grand Master by not analyzing him as a hero, but as a historical figure that has to be seen in the contexts of his time.

- Among them are two works by Karl Hampe (1869–1936), professor in Heidelberg who retired in 1934. He wrote a biographical sketch for a volume aimed at a broader audience (1937) and a critical study of the sources relating to the deposition of Heinrich von Plauen (1935).<sup>68</sup> Hampe was one of the many intellectual war propagandists during the First World War. During the Weimar Republic he had adopted a conservative-republican orientation and was ambivalent or even critical towards National Socialism.
- Erich Maschke (1900–1982), *Privatdozent* in Königsberg and as of 1935 professor in Jena, published in 1935 a popular monograph with five portraits of »great« Grand Masters – among them Heinrich von Plauen.<sup>69</sup> Maschke, who had been engaged in the Youth Movement (*Bündische Jugend*), was one of the younger protagonists of the *Ostforschung* and *Volksgeschichte*, which focused on the study of settlement in Eastern Europe and tried to legitimate German hegemony over these spaces.<sup>70</sup>

Compared with one another, the biographical studies of both show the complexity and divergences in the reception of Heinrich von Plauen in the inter-

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67 Ulrike Jureit: Das Ordnen von Räumen. Territorium und Lebensraum im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert, Hamburg 2012, pp. 159–179.

68 Karl Hampe: Heinrich von Plauen 1365/70–1429, in: Willy Andreas/Wilhelm von Scholz (eds.): Die Großen Deutschen. Neue Deutsche Biographie, Berlin 1937, pp. 267–283; Karl Hampe: Der Sturz des Hochmeisters Heinrich von Plauen, Berlin 1935.

69 Erich Maschke: Der deutsche Ordensstaat. Gestalten seiner großen Meister, Hamburg 1935.

70 for Maschke see Barbara Schneider: Erich Maschke. Im Beziehungsgeflecht von Politik und Geschichtswissenschaft, Göttingen 2016.

war-period. Maschke's portrayal combines the interpretations of Treitschke with semantics and discourses within National-Socialist Germany. According to him, Heinrich is an exceptional, sometimes even demonic »Führer« who tries to overcome the theocracy of the Order and to transform the Order's government into a national state by expanding the basis of its power – not by introducing a parliamentary representation of the Estates, but through *Volksführung*. Aside from being an ethnically and culturally homogenous group, *Volk* is for Maschke also *Schicksalsgemeinschaft*, a community bound by a common historical mission and fate. Heinrich is again portrayed as a tragic hero who sees the necessity of transforming the Order's state into a secular principality.<sup>71</sup> Maschke follows an understanding of the Order as a young and elitist *Männerbund* – a notion that became important after 1918. For the generation of *Frontkämpfer* and *Freikorps*, groups of men brought together by commonly exercised and suffered violence, the Order became an important point of reference, but also for parts of the German Youth Movement (*bündische Jugend*) to which Maschke had belonged.<sup>72</sup> This stood in contrast to interpretations of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which saw the male character of the order and its denial of the bourgeois or noble family based on marriage as the cause of its decline.

Hampe also follows the language of the time and sometimes Treitschke, seeing Heinrich erratically in a few places as a *Führer* living in the wrong time.<sup>73</sup> It is not always clear whether this *herrische Führernatur* is assessed in a positive way. Hampe criticizes the murders of 1411 as judicial murder (*Justizmorde*) and accuses Heinrich also of having blown up the conservative structures of the Order, thus promoting its decline – an interpretation that is new compared to its predecessors. In what was perhaps an effort to make the ambivalence of his depiction less problematic, Hampe declared that the 15<sup>th</sup> century was in general a bad time for heroes.<sup>74</sup> In his article dealing with

71 Maschke: Der deutsche Ordensstaat, pp. 88–106.

72 see Klaus Theweleit: Männerphantasien, 3rd ed., Berlin 2020; for the example of the Jungdeutscher Orden see Dieter Tiemann: Der Jungdeutsche Orden und Frankreich, in: Francia 12 (1985), pp. 425–456.

73 see e.g. the inconsistent use of the concepts of »Staatsmann« and »Führer« in the conclusion of Hampe: Heinrich von Plauen 1365/70–1429, p. 283.

74 id.: Heinrich von Plauen 1365/70–1429, pp. 267–283. Formulations such as »judicial murder« (*Justizmorde*) for the events of 1411 (p. 274) are complicated to interpret, as they might suggest an indirect critique of the law system under National Socialism; for Hampes ambivalent position toward National Socialism after the »Machtergreifung« see Reichert, Folker: Gelehrtes Leben. Karl Hampe, das Mittelalter und die Geschichte der Deutschen, Göttingen 2009, pp. 261–286, who unfortunately does not tackle the question why Hampe,

Heinrich's deposition, Hampe uses extensive source criticism to understand the interests behind the respective sources from the 1410's and emphasizes that national distinctions were of secondary importance for contemporaries because they did not yet exist in modern forms. He distances himself from Treitschke's nationalistic interpretation.<sup>75</sup> Hampe avoids any moral judgement and does not go into the events in Gdańsk. This makes the text from 1935 one that has aged remarkably »well«.

General trends within German historical research in the 1920s–1940s might explain why Maschke and Hampe both dealt with Heinrich and why their depiction went in different directions.

The general shift towards *Volksgeschichte* after 1918 attempted to historically legitimise German rule over large parts of Central and Eastern Europe by focusing on *Volk* and not on the state, methodologically by researching migration movements, languages and identities and not in »great men« making history.<sup>76</sup> This might explain why Heinrich's role as the predecessor of Hohenzollern-Prussia, as well as the events of 1411, lost importance. The societal conflicts with which historians dealt shifted towards questions of rule and control over spaces that were lost after the treaty of Versailles. Heinrich was no longer needed as a predecessor of a monarch or a Bismarck-like statesman. He did not become a prominent *Führer* either, perhaps because he appeared too aristocratic. The interpretation of Heinrich as a proto-Protestant lost importance in the interwar period, because the religious conflicts lost much of their relevance. As a *Führer*-figure of the *Volk*, this made him potentially attractive for young historians like Maschke, working in the *Grenzland*, who tried to legitimate a revision of the treaty of Versailles and German control over Eastern Europe; for a historian like Hampe, he had lost significance.

What can be seen here are the ambivalences in the historical adaptation of the Teutonic Order in the »age of extremes«. In a context in which the Teutonic Order was seen as executing the historical mission of the *Volk*, as a collective historical agent of spatial claims, the extraordinary noble heroes as Heinrich lost their importance.

The narratives of the »long 19<sup>th</sup> century« were however not completely lost after 1945. They can be found, for example, in Erich Weise's (1895–1972) influ-

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who hadn't published about the history of the Teutonic Order before 1933, worked about this topic after 1933.

75 id.: *Der Sturz des Hochmeisters Heinrich von Plauen*, p. 4.

76 for »*Volksgeschichte*« see Ingo Haar: *Historiker im Nationalsozialismus. Deutsche Geschichtswissenschaft und der »Volkstumskampf« im Osten*, Göttingen 2000.

ential book *Das Widerstandsrecht im Ordenslande Preußen und das mittelalterliche Europa* from 1955, based on studies that Weise prepared as an archivist in Nazi-occupied Warsaw (1939–1942) and as head of the Reichsarchiv in Poznań (1942–1945). After the Second World War, Weise, now archivist in Stade, worked at the interface of regional historical research and the revanchist policy promoted by the *Vertriebenenverbände*.<sup>77</sup>

Weise sees Heinrich von Plauen as »unquestionably a political genius«.<sup>78</sup> Heinrich had to establish a dictatorship, which was his »tragic fault«.<sup>79</sup> Weise sees the conflicts in Gdańsk in 1411 as avoidable, but relies on the narration of treason and articulates sympathy for the Order and the Grand Master, even stating that the killings had reestablished peace in the land.<sup>80</sup> Here in 1955, Weise is much more in line with the *Führerkult* than Hampe. His book is – apart from its ›West-orientation‹ – a contribution to the discourses of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### Heinrich von Plauen and the New Right

References to Heinrich in the past decades are rare, even in the field in which one might expect them, namely the ›New Right‹. A portrait of Heinrich as part of a special volume ›German Heroes‹ of the far-right *Compact Magazine*<sup>81</sup> is an exception. The text, written by Jan von Flocken, a former writer of historical portraits for the conservative newspaper *Die Welt*, demonstrates the transformations of the historical images referred to by the German, as well as an increasingly international, right-wing movement.

Flocken builds on the narratives of the long 19<sup>th</sup> century. Flocken's Heinrich von Plauen is a mixture of the Eichendorffian romantic Heinrich, Treitschke's ›Realpolitiker‹ and an indefatigable East German. Flocken's texts follow an approach that is more national history of the Wilhelmine Empire than *Volksgeschichte*. His focus is abstract. He tries to provide evidence of

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77 see Stefan Lehr: Ein fast vergessener »Osteinsatz«, *Deutsche Archivare im Generalgouvernement und im Reichskommissariat Ukraine*, Düsseldorf 2007; Maximiliane Berger: ›Herrenklasse‹, Erich Weise und der Ordensritter, in: Maximiliane Berger/ Mirjam Hähnle/Anna Leyrer (eds.): *Männer über sich. Wissenschaft – Biografie – Geschlecht*, Göttingen 2024, pp. 125–146.

78 Weise: *Die Staatsverträge des Deutschen Ordens*, p. 65.

79 *ibid.*, p. 68.

80 *ibid.*, pp. 70–73.

81 Jan von Flocken: *Deutsche Helden. Unser Vermächtnis aus 2000 Jahren*, Werder 2017, pp. 27–32.

2000 years of German history to present a national historiography without the Holocaust and National Socialists, to overcome the ›post-heroic‹ historiography.<sup>82</sup> This is reflected in the selection of heroes in Flocken's volume, from Arminius (ca 17 BCE – AD 21) to Erwin Rommel (1891–1944), who is depicted as apolitical knightly warrior. Among the 14 heroes with which Flocken deals, five are from the Middle Ages;<sup>83</sup> all of them – whether medieval or not – were warriors or acquired their title deeds of heroism in wars. Flocken's heroes turn against invaders, or they create a nation. This is associated with ›daily political interventions‹: Arminius fights against ›foreign infiltration‹, Stilicho against ›open borders‹, Otto the Great (912–973) against ›foreign invaders‹. Flocken states that Heinrich was a determined Thuringian, which coincides with the idealizations of Eastern Germany in the publications of *Compact*.

The Teutonic Order is not particularly present in the New Right compared to the German Empire. The ›Identitarian Movement‹ organised a summer camp in 2022 under the title ›Order and State‹. In a promotional video, the Order is evoked in the tradition of the *Männerbünde* of the Weimar Republic and the Third Reich.<sup>84</sup> However, the references of the ›new‹ Teutonic Knights follow the logics of meme culture, in which the Order appears randomly aside of the Lambda sign on the front of the T-shirts worn by the participants of this summer camp, which alludes to the film *300* by Zack Snyder, dealing with the Battle of Thermopylae, a key reference for the Identitarians,<sup>85</sup> and a martial Tolkien quote.

This illustrates that right-wing references to the Teutonic Order have shifted. The main focus of the ›New Right‹ was and is Islamophobic. In recent years there has been an increasing focus on the supposedly effeminate elites of the West. The far-right and right-wing governments in Eastern Europe and Russia appear to them as role models.<sup>86</sup> The attitudes of the ›New Right‹ towards Eastern Europe thus differ greatly from that of Treitschke. Furthermore, the ›New Right‹ has become globalized. National references, which have lost relevance as lieu de mémoire like the Tannenberg battles, no longer work in a

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82 *ibid.*, p. 5.

83 Stilicho, Arminius, Kaiser Otto der Große, Graf Eberhard II. von Württemberg, Hochmeister Heinrich von Plauen, Paul Beneke, Georg von Frundsberg, Ernst Rüdiger von Starhemberg, Eugen von Savoyen, Friedrich Wilhelm von Seydlitz, Eleonore Procharska und Johanna Stegen, Carl Klinke, Manfred von Richthofen, Erwin Rommel.

84 Aktionsmelder: »Bundeslager 2022 der Identitären«, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8k0q3ijcS3E> (31.5.2024).

85 Weiß: Die autoritäre Revolte, pp. 106–112.

86 *ibid.*, pp. 187–240.

media world increasingly characterized by international discourses and references. Under the influence of the ›Alt-Right‹, motifs such as the *Reconquista*, the crusades or the anti-Ottoman ›bulwark‹ are presumably more important points of reference.<sup>87</sup> Post-national communities of ›nationalists‹ or ›Westerners‹ define themselves by their opposition against ›invading‹ Muslims; they no longer focus on national antagonisms inside Europe.

The German ›New Right‹ refers to reference points that were hardly predominant in the Wilhelmine Empire; for example, the defence of Vienna against the ›Turks‹, in a period in which close interactions between the *Kaiserreich* and the Ottoman Empire existed.<sup>88</sup> They make use of a postmodern, selective reference culture. At the same time, they are part of the social forgetting of the Middle Ages, compared to the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century. The historical references used by the ›New Right‹ are assertions of historical ›identity‹; at the same time, they are obviously arbitrary; they encourage people to imitate what they consider worth imitating – a ›lifestyle‹.

## Conclusion

The aim of this article was to understand how the historical images of Heinrich von Plauen developed. It was shown that the perception of von Plauen as hero or antihero was linked to specific conflicts or political discussions. While the contemporary sources were not at all interested in the question of whether or not Heinrich was a hero, they used his memory in order to legitimate their own conflictual actions. The medieval and early modern sources, whether they are historiographical or part of ›pragmatic writing‹, have to be seen as situational interventions in conflicts, in which episodes were narrated in a specific way to legitimize one's own position. By setting episodes into a context, the authors constructed conflicts.

Doing so, the premodern tradition created nevertheless the narrative material onto which the ›heroic‹ historiography of the long 19<sup>th</sup> century built. Since the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, the authors used the collapse of the rule of the Order to draw conclusions regarding the modern Prussian state and later the German empire and to discuss its inner political and societal tensions. After the German defeat of 1918, this coincided with a shift in the popular

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87 for several examples see Andrew B. R. Elliott: *Medievalism, politics and mass media: Appropriating in the Middle Ages in the twenty-first century*, Woodbrige 2017.

88 Weiß: *Die autoritäre Revolte*, p. 157.



perception of the history of the Teutonic Order as a ›bulwark‹ against the East. As the prominent Tannenberg myth established after the second battle of Tannenberg in 1914 illustrates, the focus on the state of the Order shifted from being the legal predecessor of the Hohenzollerns to an ethnic German group that occupied and held a space which German intellectuals conceptualized as a space of colonial rule.<sup>89</sup>

The narratives highlight conflicts over political participation, questions of the relationship between state and religion, but also over the family, the dynasty or gender roles. At the same time, there are diametrical differences in the interpretations. Looking into heroes and antiheroes as they are combined in one person in the historical imaginations of Heinrich von Plauen thus opens a broad view into the conflicts and contradictions within those societies that create(d) these (anti-)heroes.

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89 For the Tannenberg myth see Hans Jürgen Bömelburg: Vergessen neben Erinnern. Die brüchige Erinnerung an die Schlacht bei Tannenberg/Grunwald in der deutschen und polnischen Öffentlichkeit, in: Peter Oliver Loew/Christian Prunitsch (eds.): Polen. Jubiläen und Debatten. Beiträge zur Erinnerungskultur, Wiesbaden 2012, pp. 37–55; for the colonial perception Philipp Höhn: »Zeitenwende?« Fritz Rörig (1882–1952) und die Metamorphosen des Raums in der Hanseforschung, in: Tel Aviver Jahrbuch für Deutsche Geschichte 49 (2021), pp. 54–92.

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