

Chapter 5

The Depictions of Vytautas the Great as Hero, Counterhero, and Antihero in the Correspondence of the Grand Masters of the Teutonic Order from the 14th to the 15th Centuries

Introduction

The construction of ›heroes‹, ›counterheroes‹ (those who compete with heroic figures), and ›antiheroes‹ (those who defy heroic figures) was an extensive part of the crusade ideology of the Teutonic Knights in Prussia. This is most clearly expressed in the extensive written canon of texts produced in the Order's *milieu*.¹ The presence of heroic masters and knights who upheld the Order's commitment to fight the enemies of Christianity can be seen well after the recognition of the conversion of Jogaila (pol. Jagiełło, King of Poland) in 1386/1387 to Christianity and the resulting period of crisis (in terms of its legitimacy as a crusading institution) in which the Order found itself.² Other aspects of crusade historiography linked with the expeditions to the Holy Land also appear in these texts, ranging from the adoption of terms and ideas from the ›traditional‹ crusades to the introduction of cults of saints and relics connected to the conquest of Prussia itself.³

1 Jarosław Wenta: Studien über die Ordensgeschichtsschreibung am Beispiel Preußens, Toruń 1999; Arno Mentzel-Reuters: Deutschordenshistoriographie, in: Gerhard Wolff/Norbert H. Ott (eds.): Handbuch Chroniken des Mittelalters, Berlin 2016, pp. 301–336.

2 For an overview of this crisis and attempts to navigate it, see Hartmut Boockmann: Johannes Falkenberg, der Deutsche Orden und die polnische Politik. Untersuchungen zur politischen Theorie des späteren Mittelalters, Göttingen 1975; Marcus Wüst: Studien zum Selbstverständnis des Deutschen Ordens im Mittelalter, Weimar 2013, pp. 270–273; Norman Housley: A Crusade against the Poles? Johannes Falkenberg's Satira, in: Helen J. Nicholson/Jochen Burgdorf (eds.): Templars, Hospitallers, and Crusades: Essays in Homage to Alan J. Forey, London 2020, pp. 183–198.

3 Janusz Trupinda: Ideologia krucjatowa w kronice Piotra z Dusburga, Gdańsk 1999, pp. 100–137; Gregory Leighton: Ideology and Holy Landscape in the Baltic Crusades, Leeds 2022. For the cult of saints in Prussia, see: Waldemar Rozyński: Hagioponimia w państwie zakonu krzyżackiego w Prusach. Zarys problematyki, in: Aleksandra Witkowska/Urszula Borkowska (eds.): Peregrinatio ad veritatem: Studia ofiarowane profesor Aleksandrze Witkowskiej OSU z okazji 40-lecia pracy naukowej, Lublin 2004, pp. 259–268; Id.: Święci na pograniczu: o świętych w państwie Zakonu Krzyżackiego w Prusach, in: Komunikaty Mazursko-Warmińskie 2 (2006), pp. 187–193; Cordelia Heß: Heilige machen

From the perspective of the construction and deconstruction of heroes and antiheroes in the Middle Ages, the key figures involved in the conflicts between the Teutonic Order and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, particularly Konrad von Jungingen (1393–1407), Ulrich von Jungingen (1407–1410), Heinrich von Plauen (1410–1413), and Vytautas of Lithuania (1392–1430) are extremely relevant examples. They became pivotal figures in the creation of images of heroes, counterheroes, and antiheroes, according to Ulrich Bröckling.⁴ In present-day Germany, Poland, and Lithuania, the images of these leaders continue to resonate as important figures of national heritage and identity.⁵

For example, Konrad von Jungingen's contacts with Vytautas were more nuanced and, perhaps, heroic—they represent the Grand Master's attempts to secure peace through diplomacy and to expand Christianity. However, he was hardly remembered in the modern period. His brother and successor, Ulrich, was remembered among Polish and Lithuanian historians as a hot-tempered ruler prone to violence.⁶ Prussian historians commemorated his death at the

im spätmittelalterlichen Ostseeraum: Die Kanonisationsprozesse von Birgitta von Schweden, Nikolaus von Linköping und Dorothea von Montau, Berlin 2008, pp. 81–98 for Prussia and the Baltic. Also see Marian Dygo: Zur Herrschaftssprache des Deutschen Ordens in Preußen im 13. Jahrhundert, in: Roman Czaja/Jürgen Sarnowsky (eds.): Die Ritterorden als Träger der Herrschaft: Territorien, Grundbesitz, Kirche, Toruń 2007, pp. 110–111. Also see Anti Selart: Life in Livonia after the Crusades: An Introduction, in: Anti Selart (ed.): Baltic Crusades and Societal Innovation in Medieval Livonia, 1200–1350, Leiden 2022, pp. 2–9, which rightly points out that the divide between 'Christian' and 'pagan' in the sources is the predominant focus of historians, while archaeologists present a different picture due to their evidence and approaches.

- 4 Ulrich Bröckling: Negations of the Heroic – a Typological Essay, in: *helden. heroes. héros. E-Journal zu Kulturen des Heroischen* 5 (2019), pp. 41–42.
- 5 I.e., they figure into the respective ›cultural memories‹ of those nations. See Jan Assmann: *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis. Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen*, München 1997. For the images of the Order in Polish and German, and Lithuanian national consciousness, see Henryk Samsonowicz: *Krzyżacy*, Warszawa 1988, pp. 3–16; Sven Ekdahl: *The Battle of Tannenberg–Grunwald–Žalgiris (1410) as Reflected in Twentieth-Century Monuments*, in: Victor Mallia-Milanes (ed.): *The Military Orders, Volume 3: History and Heritage*, Aldershot 2008, pp. 175–194; and Alvydas Nikžentaitis: *Der Vytautaskult in Litauen (15.–20. Jahrhundert) und seine Widerspiegelung im Denkmal*, in: Konrad Maier/Anja Wilhelmi (eds.): *Das Denkmal im nördlichen Ostmitteleuropa im 20. Jahrhundert*, Lüneburg 1997, pp. 131–145. A more recent example can be seen in Janusz Trupinda (ed.): *Nigra crux. Mala crux. Czarna i biała legenda Zakonu Krzyżackiego*, Malbork 2023, which considers the images of the Teutonic Knights in Polish and German national traditions.
- 6 This image emerged in Jan Długosz's *Annales seu cronici incliti regni Poloniae*, completed c. 1480.

Battle of Tannenberg/Grunwald as that of a hero (›Heldentod‹).⁷ Heinrich von Plauen was also deemed a hero for his role in the Battle of Tannenberg/Grunwald, as he saved the castle of Marienburg (Pol. Malbork) from the siege of Jagiełło and Vytautas.⁸ It is not surprising that the Grand Masters of the Order were remembered in a positive light among Germans in former East and West Prussia, given the ›Ostforschung‹ tradition.⁹

On the other side of the coin, Vytautas, the Grand Duke of Lithuania, was far from the ›evil traitor‹ or enemy to Christendom that the letters for the period reflect him to have been. He emerges more as a figure who possesses heroic qualities but strategically rejects them when necessary. In other words, he appears as a figure who is sometimes a counterhero, and sometimes an antihero. As a Christian ruler, he founded several monasteries and participated in the promotion of religious life in his territories in the 15th century, establishing a dichotomy with the image of him as a ruthless pagan and enemy of Christendom.¹⁰ He emerged in his own time as a heroic figure and became crucial within modern Lithuanian national memory as a pivotal ruler and ›event-maker‹.¹¹ His name was selected for the new name of Kaunas University in 1930, reflecting his legacy within Lithuanian national consciousness in the modern era.¹²

7 For the monument, see Wolfgang Wippermann: *Der Ordensstaat als Ideologie: Das Bild des Deutschen Ordens in der deutschen Geschichtsschreibung und Publizistik*, Berlin 1979, pp. 191–192. For the legacy of Tannenberg in Germany, see Udo Arnold: *Tannenberg (Grunwald) in der deutschen Tradition des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts*, in: *Ordines Militares. Colloquia Torunensia Historica* 19 (2014), pp. 241–256. For the battle's place in Polish and Lithuanian memory, see Alvydas Nikžentaitis: *Internationales Gedenken an die Schlacht bei Tannenberg*, in: Werner Paravicini/Rimvydas Petrauskas/Grischa Vercaemer (eds.): *Tannenberg – Grunwald – Žalgiris 1410: Krieg und Frieden im späten Mittelalter*, Wiesbaden 2012, pp. 321–328.

8 Although, it should be noted that he was subsequently expelled from his office in 1413 and exiled to Lochstädt Castle (Rus. Pavlovo).

9 Bernhard Grün: *Zwischen Fronteinsatz und Freiheitsklang – Studententum und Kameradschaftswesen im Nationalsozialismus*, Würzburg 2019, p. 71.

10 Jan Fijałek/Władysław Semkowicz (eds.): *Codex diplomaticus ecclesiae cathedralis necnon dioeceseos Vilnensis, voluminis I (1367–1468)*, Kraków 1932, p. 52 (no. 31), p. 75 (no. 50), p. 139 (no. 111), and several others record the pious foundations of Vytautas and Jagiełło in Lithuania from the 1390s to the 1420s.

11 Nikžentaitis: *Der Vytautaskult*, pp. 131–145; Giedrė Mickūnaitė: *Making a Great Ruler: Grand Duke Vytautas of Lithuania*, Budapest 2006, pp. 271–275.

12 Sven Ekdahl: *Crusades and Colonisation on the Baltic Frontier: A Historiographic Analysis*, in: Alan V. Murray (ed.): *The North-Eastern Frontiers of Medieval Europe: The Expansion of Latin Christendom in the Baltic Lands*, Farnham 2014, pp. 15–20.

The present chapter will focus on the potential origins of Vytautas' complex representation in sources such as letters and missives to supplement the content of the major narratives (i.e., chronicles) produced in Prussia during the late 14th and early 15th century. It begins with a brief overview of the sources available and addresses their general narrative strategies, before moving into the specific themes and depictions of Vytautas as a hero, counterhero, and antihero.¹³ It identifies a sort of ›corporate storytelling‹ of the Teutonic Order via narration strategy: the brothers of the Order and their Grand Masters were beneficial to the whole of Christendom through their wars against the enemies of the Church, which could be traced back through an extensive tradition dating back to the thirteenth century. Vytautas was an important figure in this storytelling by the late fourteenth century. In times of conflict he took on the same qualities of the Order's previous enemies at some points, whereas in times of friendship he took on positive, even heroic, qualities.¹⁴

Narrating heroes, counterheroes, and antiheroes: Methodology

The sources considered in this chapter, particularly letters and missives, have much to say about ›heroes‹, ›counterheroes‹, and ›antiheroes‹.¹⁵ However, most scholarship has focused exclusively on the chronicles and larger narrative texts written up to the end of the 14th century, a period described as a ›Golden Age‹ in the history of the Order's Prussian branch, and for good reason: these texts reflect the Teutonic Order's spirituality and crusade ideology clearly and consistently.¹⁶ This pattern continues in chronicles writ-

13 For the definitions and uses of these terms, see Bröckling: *Negations of the Heroic*, pp. 40–42.

14 Birgitte Norlyk/Marianne Wolff Lundholt/Per Krogh Hansen: *Corporate Storytelling*, in: Peter Hühn/Jan Christoph Meister/John Pier/Wolf Schmid (eds.): *Handbook of Narratology*, Berlin 2014, pp. 105–114.

15 Gustavs Strenga: *Remembering the Common Past: Livonia as a lieu de mémoire of the Teutonic Order in the Empire*, in: Anti Selart/Mathias Thumser (eds.): *Livland – eine Region am Ende der Welt? Forschungen zum Verhältnis zwischen Zentrum und Peripherie im späten Mittelalter*, Köln 2017, pp. 347–370; id.: *Remembering the Dead: Collective Memory and Commemoration in Late Medieval Livonia*, Brepols 2023. Also see Wenta: *Studien über die Ordensgeschichtsschreibung*, pp. 140–141.

16 E.g., Edith Feistner: *Selbstbild, Feindbild, Metabild: Spiegelungen von Identität in präskriptiven und narrativen Deutschordenstexten des Mittelalters*, in: Horst Brunner/Werner Williams-Krapp (eds.): *Forschungen zur deutschen Literatur des Spätmittelalters: Festschrift für Johannes Janota*, Tübingen 2003, pp. 141–158; Mary Fischer: *The Books of the Maccabees and the Teutonic Order*, in: *Crusades* 4 (2005), pp. 52–72; Edith Feistner/Michael

ten beyond the 1330s and 1340s.¹⁷ It appears in the *New Prussian Chronicle* of Wigand von Marburg (fl. 1394), a herald in the service of the Teutonic Order, the *Prussian Chronicle* of Johannes von Posilge, a churchman active in Pomesania (d. 1409), and the anonymous *Older chronicle of the Grand Masters* (c. 1440).¹⁸ Sources produced outside of the Order's sphere of influence, like the anonymous *Annals of the Franciscan of Thorn* compiled throughout the 14th and 15th centuries, show a similar pattern.¹⁹ The 1390s and the reign of Konrad von Jungingen as Grand Master (1393–1407) saw a peak in the Order's history in terms of diplomatic relations with European rulers.²⁰

The general trend in these texts is that the masters of the Order (or other higher officials) are praised for their piety, their diplomacy, or their valour in battle.²¹ Their actions are depicted as upholding the Order's mission and contributing to the betterment of Christianity. Antiheroic figures, unsurprisingly, are depicted as working for the Devil and contributing to the detriment of Christianity. This is particularly evident in the biblical depictions of indigenous Prussian and Lithuanian rulers.²² These trends, of course, fit into the ideological nature of the ›war against the pagans‹ presented throughout the sources associated with the Teutonic Order and the crusades in the Baltic.

Neecke/Gisela Vollmann-Profe: *Krieg im Visier: Biblepik und Chronistik im Deutschen Orden als Modell korporativer Identitätsbildung*, Berlin 2007; Jürgen Sarnowsky: *Das Bild der „Anderen“ in den frühen Chronistik des Deutschen Ordens in Preußen*, in: Steffen Patzold/Anja Lutz-Rathmann/Volker Scior (eds.): *Geschichtsvorstellungen: Bilder, Texte und Begriffe aus dem Mittelalter – Festschrift für Hans-Werner Goetz* zum 65. Geburtstag, Köln 2012, pp. 233–235; Wüst: *Studien zum Selbstverständnis*, pp. 105–116.

17 See Wüst: *Studien zum Selbstverständnis*, pp. 105–116.

18 Mentzel-Reuters: *Deutschordenshistoriographie*, pp. 324–325, for issues surrounding the chronicle attributed to Johannes von Posilge.

19 Ernst Strelhke (ed.): *Pomisaniani Thorunensis Annales Prussici (941–1410)*. Johannes von Posilge, Officials von Pomesanien, Chronik des Landes Preussen (von 1360 an, fortgesetzt bis 1419) zugleich mit den auf Preussen bezüglichen Abschnitten aus der Chronik Detmar's von Lübeck, in: Ernst Strelhke/Theodor Hirsch/Max Töppen (eds.): *Scriptores rerum Prussicarum* (hereafter SRP), vol. 3, Leipzig 1866, pp. 57–388; Wenta: *Ordensgeschichtsschreibung*, pp. 236–237.

20 Sebastian Kubon: *Die Außenpolitik des Deutschen Ordens unter Hochmeister Konrad von Jungingen (1393–1407)*, Göttingen 2016, pp. 13–16.

21 E.g., Peter von Dusburg: *Chronica terrae Prussiae*, ed. Jarosław Wenta/Sławomir Wyszomirski, Kraków 2007, p. 21 (describing Hermann von Salza), p. 73 (describing Dietrich von Bernheim); Max Töppen (ed.): *Die ältere Hochmeisterchronik*, in: SRP 3, p. 574 (describing Poppo von Osterna); Wigand von Marburg: *Nowa kronika Pruska*, (ed. and trans.) Sławomir Zonenberg/Krzysztof Kwiatkowski, Toruń 2017, p. 252 (describing Winrich von Kniprode); Töppen (ed.): *Hochmeisterchronik*, p. 624 (describing Werner von Tettingen).

22 Peter von Dusburg: *Chronica*, p. 70; Wilhelm Wattenbach (ed.): *Das Formelbuch Arnolds von Protzan*, Breslau 1862, pp. 309–310.

For the Order, it formed the bedrock of its self-image and thus was crucial to the Order's communication of ideas about ›heroes‹ and ›antiheroes‹ with those who were not members.²³

As stated above, at around the turn of the 15th century, the Teutonic Order was functioning at its economic and administrative peak in Prussia.²⁴ Konrad von Jungingen's diplomatic reputation is often emphasized in this period.²⁵ A significant number of Konrad's letters and foreign correspondence involved Vytautas, and these pieces of correspondence demonstrate the complexity of the construction of heroic figures in premodern societies. At times, the two were friends. In October of 1383, for example, Vytautas was baptized as Wigand, and sided with the Order in its conflicts against Jogaila (Pol. Jagiełło) in the Lithuanian Civil War (1381–1384). The chronicle of Detmar von Lübeck describes how, after baptism, this led to several attacks into Lithuanian territories, in which Vytautas and the Order cooperated with one another as allies.²⁶ The positive aspects of this relationship are also evident in the Order's treasury book, compiled from 1399–1409, which records several gift exchanges between the two leaders, one example being a silver dog collar given by Vytautas to the Grand Master.²⁷ In 1406, Johannes von Posilge praised the joint expedition undertaken by Vytautas against Muscovy, in which Friedrich Zollern (the Commander of Ragnit (Rus. Neman)), and Michael Kuchmeister (the Advocate of Samogitia) took part.²⁸ In 1407, Ulrich von Jungingen congratulated Vytautas on this successful campaign.²⁹ Other examples will be discussed below, but the ones provided here demonstrate the ambiguity that allowed contemporaries in Prussia to construct key figures like Vytautas in a positive light.

23 Wüst: *Studien zum Selbstverständnis*, pp. 287–293.

24 Jürgen Sarnowsky: *Die Wirtschaftsführung des Deutschen Ordens in Preußen (1382–1454)*, Berlin 1993, pp. 3–4; id.: *Der Deutsche Orden*, München 1998.

25 Kubon: *Außenpolitik*, pp. 15–22.

26 Strehlke (ed.): Detmar, p. 127: »Darna in deme dage der XI dusent meghede do wart gedoft Witaute.«

27 Erich Joachim (ed.): *Das Marienburger Treßlerbuch der Jahre 1399–1409*, Königsberg 1896, p. 425.

28 Strehlke (ed.): Johannes von Posilge, pp. 282–283: »Ouch czoch Wytowt in desim jare vor senthe Jacobs tag us uff den koning von Moskow gar mit grossim volke...Und login dem koninge von Moskow XIII tage in syeme lande mit gewalt...Un worin us von heyme xv wochin, also verre worin sie hin geczogin, und nomin doch keynen schadin von den gnaden unsers liebin herren.«

29 Berlin, *Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz (GStA PK)*, XX. HA, *Historisches Staatsarchiv Königsberg, Ordensfoliant (OF) 3*, p. 320 (2 September 1407). Also see p. 333 (1 April 1408); p. 342 (23 June 1408).

However, there are some unique examples of the Grand Masters' foreign correspondence that provide a more interesting portrayal of the construction of counterheroes and antiheroes. For example, Vytautas could easily be depicted as a counterhero. In July of 1384, Vytautas, »*traditor perversus*« became an enemy of the Order, as noted in the anonymous annals of the city of Thorn (Pol. Toruń). The annals were originally composed in the 1340s but were completed less than 30 years after the treaty, around 1410.³⁰ This shift in the perception of Vytautas took place quite rapidly; in January of 1410, Vytautas had promised Samogitia to the Order and »gave himself to the Christian faith«. ³¹ The »*malignissimus et nequissimus traditor*« then constructed a castle in Lithuania and proceeded to destroy Marienburg (in Lithuania) and Georgenburg (Rus. Mayovka).³² The annalist describes Vytautas as »*sicut de venenose et infidelissima radice, patre suo Kinstut*«, linking him to his father, Kęstutis, who was often described as an antihero and in »qualitative opposition« to the efforts of the Teutonic Order.³³ By 1390, Vytautas allied with the Order again, and sought assistance in capturing the citadel of the Grand Dukes in Vilnius. According to local chroniclers in Prussia, he distinguished himself for his valour in battle, »storming the upper castle with might« alongside crusaders including Henry Derby, the future king of England.³⁴ The short amount of time that passed between the composition of the annals here and the events that they describe provide us the opportunity to examine changes in relations in real time.

This chapter employs a narratological approach in its reading of the sources. Such a method can aid in understanding texts from a wide variety of genres, and has recently been of interest to scholars of the crusades to the Holy Land, evident in the works of Beth Spacey, Stephen Spencer, and Thomas W. Smith.³⁵ Elements of historical narratives, like the »fear of the barbarians«, have been applied as a tool for identifying seemingly-invisible

30 Wenta: *Ordensgeschichte*, p. 236.

31 Antoni Prochaska (ed.): *Codex epistolaris Vitoldi Magnis Ducis Lithuaniae 1376–1430*, Kraków 1882, pp. 3–4: »*quame wir zu im und begoben uns gote und im genczlichen czum cristengloben*«. Further cited as CEV. This was the first Treaty of Königsberg, signed on 1 January 1384.

32 Strehlke (ed.): *Franciscani Thorunensis*, p. 130: »*Item IIIa die Julii traditor perversus Witaut combussit castra Beiern et Mergenborg*.«

33 *ibid.*, p. 131.

34 Strehlke (ed.): *Johannes von Posilge*, pp. 165–166: »*An dem virden tage septembris qwomen sie vor die Wille...und sthormeten das obirste hus mit craft und gewonnen is obirhaupt*.«

35 Beth Spacey: *The Miraculous and the Writing of Crusade Narrative*, Woodbridge 2020; Stephen Spencer: *Emotions in a Crusading Context, 1095–1291*, Oxford 2019; Thomas W.

links between different groups of authors writing in the Early Middle Ages.³⁶ However, this method has not been used for the later crusades to Lithuania and Samogitia, with exceptions being my own work and that of Loïc Chollet.³⁷ As this chapter will demonstrate, Vytautas' presence and significance as a historical figure can be identified in a huge body of written material for late medieval Prussia. In these texts, Vytautas is a central element of the narratives—both those produced within Teutonic Order circles and in narratives communicated to those not affiliated with the Order. His perception as a hero, counterhero, or antihero is dependent on the moral system (or political situation) in which his actions are read, thus presenting a case for the complexity of identifying such figures in the Late Middle Ages.

Source Overview

The majority of the sources in this chapter come from the correspondence of Konrad von Jungingen, Ulrich von Jungingen (his successor), and Heinrich von Plauen. These are housed in the main historical archives for the Teutonic Order's Prussian and Livonian territories in Berlin, the Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preußischer Kulturbesitz.³⁸ As they are registers, the collections are comprised of several templates and copies of correspondence including the acknowledgements of the receipt of gifts, the delaying of meetings, and reports of events abroad (i.e., instructions for emissaries to foreign courts). The missives and copies of letters are referred to as »Ordensfolianten« (further abbreviated as

Smith: First Crusade Letters and Medieval Scribal Cultures, in: *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 71 (2020), pp. 484–501.

36 Mateusz Fafiński/Jakob Riemenschneider: Literarised Spaces. Towards a Narratological Framework for Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages, in: Mateusz Fafiński/Jakob Riemenschneider (eds.): *The Past through Narratology: New Approaches to Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, Heidelberg 2022, pp. 7–26.

37 Gregory Leighton: Crusading and Holy War in the Teutonic Order's Struggle for Žemaitija: Written and Visual Perspectives, in: *Acta Historica Universitatis Klaipedensis* 41 (2020), pp. 25–52; Loïc Chollet: *Les Sarrasins du Nord: Une histoire de la croisade balte par la littérature (xii^e–xv^e siècles)*, Neuchâtel 2017; Id.: *The Christianisation of the Baltic Seen from Medieval France*, in: *Acta Historica Universitatis Klaipedensis* 44 (2022), pp. 123–146.

38 They were formerly kept in Königsberg until the evacuation of the archive in 1945. See Kurt Forstreuter: *Das Preußische Staatsarchiv in Königsberg. Ein geschichtlicher Rückblick mit einer Übersicht seine Bestände*, Göttingen 1955, pp. 93–95. Also see Cordelia Heß: *The Absent Jews: Kurt Forstreuter and the Historiography of Medieval Prussia*, Oxford 2017, pp. 101–157 for an analysis of the fallout of the dispersal of the archive and its role in Ostforschung.

OF).³⁹ The registers for Konrad are kept in OF 2c and 3. Those of his successors, Ulrich von Jungingen, and Heinrich von Plauen, are kept in OF 5 (lost since 1945) and OF 6.⁴⁰ There are also important pieces of correspondence in OF 8 and OF 9. Several of the copies in the registers concern the relations between Vytautas and the Order before and after the Treaty of Sallinwerder (12 October 1398), in addition to subsequent conflicts in the early 15th century concerning the control of the territory of Samogitia and the fallout from the Battle of Tannenberg/Grunwald.

The contents of these registers remain either unedited or preserved in the older editions such as Johannes Voigt's *Codex diplomaticus Prussicus* (published in 6 volumes from 1836–1861), the *Codex epistolaris Vitoldi Magnis Ducis Lithuaniae*, and other collections of texts.⁴¹ These letters provide crucial material for historians seeking to study communication, exchange, and the expression of group identity. For one, the recipients of these letters were oftentimes not members of the Order, so the letters needed to be crafted carefully with the Order's image and goals in mind.⁴² Researchers in the Anglophone sphere primarily tend to focus on chronicles when studying the Teutonic Order; the letters examined in this paper present the opportunity to consider how depictions of heroic, counterheroic and antiheroic figures developed ›in real time‹, as it were. In other words, the letters represent events

39 Sebastian Kubon: Der Vertrag von Sallinwerder (1398) und sein Bruch aus der Sicht des Deutschen Ordens, in: Georg Jostkleigrewe/Gesa Wilangowski (eds.): Der Bruch des Vertrages: Die Verbindlichkeit spätmittelalterliche Diplomatie und ihre Grenzen, Berlin 2018, pp. 310–337, at p. 313n17 for a description of OF 2c and 3; Sebastian Kubon/Jürgen Sarnowsky: Regesten zu den Briefregistern des Deutschen Ordens: die Ordensfolianten 2a, 2aa und Zusatzmaterial: Mit einem Nachdruck von Kurt Lukas: Das Registerwesen der Hochmeister des Deutschen Ritterordens, maschinenschriftl. Phil. Diss. Königsberg 1921, Göttingen 2012, pp. 59–61.

40 OF 5 was lost during the evacuation of the archives in Königsberg in 1945. See Jürgen Sarnowsky: Regesten zu den Briefregistern des Deutschen Ordens III: die Ordensfolianten 5, 6 und Zusatzmaterial, Göttingen 2017, pp. 13–21; Markian Pelech: Der verlorene Ordensfoliant 5 (früher Hochmeister-Registrant II) des Hist. Staatsarchiv Königsberg, mit Regesten (nach Rudolf Philippi und Erich Joachim), in: Udo Arnold (ed.): Beiträge zur Geschichte des Deutschen Ordens 1, Marburg 1986, pp. 123–180.

41 Johannes Voigt (ed.): *Codex diplomaticus Prussicus*. Urkunden-Sammlung zur älteren Geschichte Preußens aus dem Königl. Geheim-Archiv zu Königsberg nebst Regesten, 6 vols., Königsberg 1836–1861. Further cited as CDP.

42 Jürgen Sarnowsky: Written communication in the later Middle Ages – the letter registers of the Teutonic Knights in Prussia, in: Iris Shagrir/Benjamin Z. Kedar/Michel Balard (eds.): Communicating the Middle Ages. Essays in Honour of Sophia Menache, Oxford 2017, pp. 76–87, outlines the source critical aspects of working with these letters.

and figures in close proximity to the events being described. It should not be forgotten, either, that the letters here were meant to be communicated orally.

As historical sources, letters offer a more nuanced understanding of ›heroes‹ and the perception of ›antiheroes‹ in the southern Baltic region, as opposed to the depictions of the Order and Vytautas in the Prussian chronicles written around the same time. Perhaps one of the best examples is a letter written by Vytautas at Vilnius in March of 1401. Addressed to the kings and princes of Christendom, the letter concerns a series of attacks on the Teutonic Order (referred to as »*cruciferi de domo Theutonica*«) concerning the Christianisation of Lithuania and Samogitia.⁴³ The document is particularly interesting regarding the ways in which heroes and antiheroes shaped one another, for we have a direct document issued by a figure who oftentimes was framed as the antihero himself describing the ›hero‹ in quite negative terms. As outlined in the introduction to this book, this is yet another example of the new assessment of heroic figures in lights of changing historical circumstances. Indeed, the subsequent complaints against the Teutonic Order by Vytautas and Jagiełło in the late 14th century present important examples in which groups or figures traditionally identified as heroic (i.e., the Teutonic Order, or its Grand Masters) could take on villainous qualities. Among the »striking issues« (»*fremden sachen*«) that the Order mentioned in a list of instructions for an embassy to the King of the Romans was the accusation, brought forth by the ambassadors of Polish King, Jagiełło, »that the Order fights against the new Christians, and not pagans«. Both parties (i.e., Poland and Lithuania) accused the Order of »fighting not for the betterment and expansion of the Christian faith, but for land alone«.⁴⁴

43 CEV, pp. 75–76 (no. 238). Also see Berlin, GStA PK, XX. HA, Historisches Staatsarchiv Königsberg, Ordensbriefarchiv (OBA) no. 665.

44 GStA PK, XX. HA, OF 2c, pp. 69–72 (= Kurt Forstreuter (ed.): *Die Berichte der Generalprokuratoren des Deutschen Ordens an der Kurie, Bd. 1: Die Geschichte der Generalprokuratoren von den Anfängen bis 1403*, Göttingen 1961, pp. 355–360, here p. 356 (no. 264)): »*der orden hilde das orloyge wedir die nuwen cristen und nicht wedir die heydenschaft*«. Furthermore, Jagiełło accused the brothers of »fighting for land, and not for the faith and Christianity« (ouch als ab her meynte, czu orloygen alleyne umb die land und nicht umb den gelouben noch umb des cristenthum).

Vytautas as Hero, Counterhero, and Antihero in the Correspondence of the Grand Masters of the Teutonic Order

As already mentioned, the chronicles produced in Prussia for the relevant period (i.e., the turn of the 15th century) refer to Vytautas regularly. He emerges in these texts as an important player in local and international politics and, as outlined above, could at times take on heroic qualities in the sense that he maintained the cultural norms embodied by the Teutonic Order and its mission. The first part of this section will outline some of these examples.

There was a straightforward pattern among the authors of the chronicles: when Vytautas and the Order were on friendly terms, he was depicted as a valuable asset and friend. For example, Wigand von Marburg (fl. 1394) refers to several collaborative expeditions led by the marshals of the Order and Vytautas against the Lithuanians and Samogitians.⁴⁵ In November of 1398, following the Treaty of Sallinwerder, Konrad von Jungingen wrote to Vytautas, »beloved friend« (»lieber herre«), reassuring him that the Order (in this case, the Livonian Branch) would intervene on his behalf concerning Pskovian raids into Lithuanian territories.⁴⁶ In 1400, he also wrote to Vytautas concerning the state of affairs with the Russians and Tatars.⁴⁷

Johannes von Posilge, writing shortly after these events (he is believed to have died in 1409), refers to the joint expedition led by Vytautas and Marquard von Salzbach (the Commander of Ragnit) against the Golden Horde in 1398/1399 as a conflict between Christianity and its enemies.⁴⁸ He also recounts another campaign in which the Order and Vytautas worked together, namely a military campaign (Ger. *Reise*) into Samogitia in the winter of 1400.⁴⁹ This same campaign is mentioned in a report to the Holy Roman Emperor and copied in Konrad von Jungingen's register, in which the crusaders fight »for the love and honour of God our Lord and his worthy Mother, and [for] the expansion of the holy Christian faith«. ⁵⁰ By far the most examples

45 Wigand von Marburg: *Nowa kronika*, p. 512, p. 540.

46 CEV, p. 57 (no. 192).

47 CEV, p. 60 (no. 206).

48 Strehlke (ed.): Johannes von Posilge, pp. 230–231, lamenting the fallen knights of the Order: »Unser herre gebe yn die ewige ruw mit enander, die do sint geblebin!«

49 *ibid.*, pp. 235–236. Johannes states that the successful expedition was completed successfully »von der hulfte unsers herin.« See Arno Mentzel-Reuters: 'unde den vride machten wider in dem lande'. *Kriegsziele in der Historiographie des Deutschen Ordens*, in: *Ordines Militares. Colloquia Torunensia Historica* 18 (2013), pp. 93–100.

50 *GStA PK, XX. HA, OF 2c*, p. 104 (= *CDP 6*: pp. 99–100 (no. XCVI)): »gote unserm herren und synir werden muter czu lobe und czu eren, und merunge des heiligen cristiglouben«.

come from correspondence between Konrad and Vytautas concerning the attempted conquest of Samogitia. Five years later, in August of 1405, Konrad thanked Vytautas for constructing the castle of Königsburg in Samogitia.⁵¹ In the letter, he praises Vytautas' efforts as beneficial to the expansion of the holy Christian faith: »God himself will be your protector for constructing this castle, in which you have shown your hard work not only for helping our Order, but also for the honour and service of the holy Christian faith.«⁵² A month later, Konrad also thanked three boyars of Vytautas' who also distinguished themselves in a raid of Samogitia.⁵³ In 1409, Vytautas wrote a letter to the Vogt of Samogitia, »our good friend«, to inform him that he would punish a certain Rambold for his incursions into Samogitia.⁵⁴ In 1411, he wrote to Heinrich von Plauen: »honourable lord, Grand Master of the German Order of Prussia« addressing the recipient as a friend.⁵⁵ Similar salutations appear throughout the extensive correspondence between the Teutonic Order Grand Masters and Vytautas and demonstrate that at times, he could be assigned positive/heroic values depending on the external political situation.⁵⁶

These positive descriptions of Vytautas extended beyond the lead-up to the Great War between the Order and Poland-Lithuania (1409–1411). For example, in 1426, Vytautas wrote to the Grand Master outlining his plans for a campaign »uf die ungläubigen« – Pskov and Novgorod.⁵⁷ The next year, Vytautas wrote to the Livonian Master about his »fortunate expedition against Novgorod« and informed him about news of Turkish raids in Wallachia, lamenting to the Master: »and this is a sadness to us all, and it pains God, that paganism should conquer over Christianity.«⁵⁸ These reflect the ways in which Vytautas himself could adopt positive values and goals when it best

51 The location of this castle remains a matter of debate.

52 GStA PK, XX. HA, OF 3, pp. 212–213 (=CEV, p. 117 (no. 324)): »Sunderlich grosmechtiger herre, got der almechtige geruche ewer beloner czu sein vor die buwunge des huses, in der ir euch swerer arbeit der ewern so gar willechlich habt dirczeiget, nicht alleine unserm orden czu hulffe und czu fromen, sunder ganczen cristenheit czu eren und czu dinste.«

53 GStA PK, XX. HA, OF 3, pp. 222–223 (= CEV, pp. 120–122 (no. 329)).

54 CEV, p. 175 (no. 398): »Dem ersamen herren foite czu Samayten, unserm guten frunde«.

55 *ibid.*, p. 226 (no. 483): »Deme erenwürdigen herren Heinrich von Plawen, homeister dutschs ordens von Prewsin unsir fruntschaft zcu vor.«

56 Sarnowsky: Written communication, p. 79.

57 GStA PK, XX. HA, OBA no. 4581.

58 GStA PK, XX. HA, OBA no. 4975 (= Hermann Hildebrand (ed.): Liv-, Esth-, und Curländisches Urkundenbuch, Bd. 7, Riga 1881, pp. 526–527 (no. 737)): »Dornoch czogen dy Turken obir dy Thune in Gros Walachie, das auch den romisschen konig angehoret, und in demselben lande haben sy czumole grossen schaden getoen...Und daz ist uns alles czumole leit, und daz sey Gote geclaget, daz dy heydenschaft also macht nynt obir dy cristenheit.«

sued him, and how these could be received by others (i.e., the masters of the Order) as heroic ones.

Of course, several opportunities to criticize Vytautas can be seen in the sources and these reflect how his image could quickly be transformed into that of a counterhero or even an antihero. Categorizations and applications of the heroic and its antitheses were fluid and refused strict compartmentalization in the Middle Ages. Johannes von Posilge (who was not always supportive of the Teutonic Knights), is a good example.⁵⁹ He describes Vytautas as a traitor who thwarts the efforts of the Teutonic Order to make peace in the land.⁶⁰ For example, describing an attack on the castle and town of Memel (Lit. Klaipėda) in May of 1402, Vytautas is described as »the traitor, Vytautas.«⁶¹ Later in 1409, the continuator of Johannes von Posilge's chronicle describes Vytautas and his cousin, Skirgaila (regent of the Grand Duke from 1386–1392), as »those who have done great harm to Christianity and have shed the blood of many Christians.«⁶²

This theme of depicting Lithuanian rulers as enemies of the faith also appears in Konrad von Jungingen's correspondence concerning Vytautas, written around the same time. These especially concern the peace negotiations leading up to the Treaty of Sallinwerder (mentioned above), in addition to the subsequent fallout of that treaty, the Samogitian Uprising of 1400/1401. As Sebastian Kubon has convincingly demonstrated, a primary goal of the Order's foreign policy at that time was not simply the construction of a land bridge between Prussia and Livonia. The conversion of Samogitia and its people was also a frequent theme in his letters abroad. Therefore, the efforts to deliberately thwart the terms of the treaty can be seen as counterheroic. To demonstrate this, we can examine two important letters composed by Konrad von Jungingen in 1401. The first was addressed to supporters of the Order abroad: the archbishops of Trier, Köln, and Mainz, as well as to the dukes of Austria, Saxony, and Guelders (the latter of which was a frequent guest of the Order and participant in the *Reisen*). The second was addressed to the Pope, the King of France, the College of Cardinals and the Order's proctor in Rome.

These letters focused on Vytautas' betrayal (»verraterei«) of the terms of the Treaty of Sallinwerder and highlighted that it was harmful to the whole

59 Mentzel-Reuters: 'unde den vride', pp. 97–100.

60 Of course, this »peace« was brought about through war. See *ibid.*, pp. 93–100.

61 Strehlke (ed.): Johannes von Posilge, p. 257: »rechtin vorretir Wytold.«

62 *ibid.*, p. 306: »die der cristinheyt grossin schadin habin czugeczogin und vil cristinliches blutes ere tage habin vorgossin.«

of Christianity.⁶³ The depiction of Vytautas as a counterhero was meant to garner further support for the Order and its cause. It served as an important propaganda tool for the Order.⁶⁴ It is quite clear that Konrad wished to remind the recipients of his letter of older ›heroic‹ ideals (i.e., the holy wars waged by the Order). Vytautas and his men are depicted as pagans and enemies of Christ, while the Order's task of fighting God's war and the patronage of that war by the Virgin Mary is emphasised. Rhetorical devices and specific way of depicting the Order as a bulwark (›vormauer‹) against the enemies of Christianity (i.e., the King of Poland and Vytautas) were important ›weapons‹ in this conflict.⁶⁵

Other important strategies were the use of the Bible and religious imagery to differentiate Vytautas from the Order. This is especially true in the second letter. Specific elements in the letter provide insight into the depiction of Vytautas in the Order's diplomatic correspondence, the construction of him as a counterhero, and, ultimately, his transformation into an antihero in the early 15th century. The first theme in this letter reaffirms the positive image of the knights, who ›propagate the buds of the Catholic faith in the farthest boundaries of the pagans‹.⁶⁶ This is in line with the tradition of crusading and conversion in the Baltic, in which the Teutonic Order saw itself as part of the ›vineyard of the Lord‹ (›vinea Domini‹).⁶⁷ The meaning of buds in relation to extending the faith was well-known among medieval commentators

63 GStA PK, XX. HA, OF 3, pp. 27–28. For an edition of these texts, see Kubon: Der Vertrag von Sallinwerder, pp. 329–32.

64 Annika Souhr: Von jeher *Fredeschilt* der Christenheit. Rückgriffe auf die eigenen Ursprünge im auswärtigen Schriftverkehr des Deutschen Ordens in Krisenzeiten, in: Philippe Josserand/Mathieu Olivier, Mathieu (eds.): Die Erinnerung an die eigenen Ursprünge in die geistlichen Ritterorden im Mittelalter, Berlin 2012, p. 239. Also see Hartmut Boockmann: Der Deutsche Orden. Zwölf Kapitel aus seiner Geschichte, München 1980, p. 177.

65 See: Małgorzata Morawiec: Antemurale christianitatis – Polen als Vormauer des christlichen Europa, in: Jahrbuch für Europäische Geschichte 2 (2001), pp. 249–260; Annika Souhr: Von jeher *Fredeschilt* der Christenheit, p. 239; Paul Srodecki: Antemurale Christianitatis. Schilt der Cristenheite i scutum christianitatis. spory polsko-krzyżackie a retoryka przedmurza / tarczy na początku XV wieku, in: Górzyński, Sławomir (ed.): Unia w Horodle na tle stosunków polsko-litewskich, Warsaw 2015, pp. 147–163; id. Antemurale-Based Frontier Identities in East Central Europe and Their Ideological Roots in Medieval/Early Modern Alterity and Alienity Discourse, in: Michaela Antonín Malaniková/Robert Antonín (eds.): Collective Identity in the Context of Medieval Studies, Ostrava 2016, pp. 97–120. Also see Boockmann: Der Deutsche Orden, p. 177.

66 GStA PK, XX. HA, OF 3, p. 35.

67 Leighton: Ideology and Holy Landscape, p. 17, p. 52, for analysis of this imagery surrounding plants and their symbolic functions in the chronicles and charters for the Baltic Crusades in the 13th and 14th century.

on the Bible. Rabanus Maurus (d. 856) connected the word »seed« to the allegorical meaning to the planting the Christian faith.⁶⁸ In depicting Vytautas as an unjust ruler, the letter emphasizes the just rule of the Order for it was ordained by God.⁶⁹ Also emphasized in the letter is the Order's mission of »expanding the reverence of the Apostolic throne«. ⁷⁰

Key to the depiction of Vytautas in the letter as an antihero is the employment of citations from the Bible in the letter. The use of this language indicates that the author of the letter, a member of the Grand Master's chancery, was an ecclesiastical official. This would have perhaps been Arnold Stapel, chaplain to the Grand Master from 1397 to 1402.⁷¹ The biblical citations primarily focus on Vytautas and his breaking of his treaty with the Order. Most of them revolve around a specific theme: the root that produces nothing. This represents abandoning the Covenant of God, and in the typology developed by Bröckling, we can see Vytatuas placed into the category of an antihero: one who stands in opposition to the heroic code of behaviour.⁷² Invoking Deuteronomy 29:18, the author likens Vytautas to »a root that produces bitter poison« by turning away from God and toward idolatry. A similar example appears in the 1 Maccabees 1, where Antiochus Epiphanes is the »sinful root« who came forth from the generals of Alexander the Great. In the time of his rule there were »certain renegades« (>filii iniqui«) who appeared in the kingdom and suggested making a covenant with the Gentiles, resulting in the construction of a temple of the idols in Jerusalem (as described in 1 Maccabees 1:10–15). These images would have been understood by the recipients of the letter, and thus were employed to place Vytautas in a long line of those who wished to harm Christianity. Four subsequent examples concerning the root of wickedness are used in the letter to describe Vytautas. The first alludes to Job 18:16, describing the wicked »whose roots dry up beneath, and whose branches wither above«. From here, the author invokes Sirach 40:15, referring to »the children of the ungodly« who »are unhealthy roots upon sheer rock.

68 Jacques Paul Migne (ed): *Patrologia cursus completus. Series Latina*. Vol. 112: B. Rabani Maurii Opera Omnia, Paris 1878, column 849–1088, here 1013.

69 See Stefan Kwiatkowski: *Der Deutsche Orden im Streit mit Polen-Litauen. Eine theologische Kontroverse über Krieg und Frieden auf dem Konzil von Konstanz (1414–1418)*, Stuttgart 2000, pp. 11–15.

70 The importance of this can be traced throughout the Order's historical canon. See Wüst: *Studien zum Selbstverständnis*, p. 44.

71 Martin Armgart: *Die Handfesten des preußischen Oberlandes bis 1410 und ihre Aussteller*, Köln 1995, pp. 172–176.

72 Bröckling: *Negations of the Heroic*, p. 41.

« Vytautas and his associates are then compared to the children of Ephraim in Hosea 9:16: »their root is dried up, and they shall bear no fruit.« In each of the examples, those who stray from God and towards idolatry are likened to roots that dry up and produce nothing.

From these comparisons emerges an image of Vytautas as counterhero: a figure who deliberately chooses to turn away from heroic ideals. The letter specifically states that Vytautas sought to lead the people of Samogitia, who had converted to Christianity, from the obedience to the Roman Church back into the abyss.⁷³ This may be a reference to the Gospel of Luke 8:30–32, which describes how Jesus exorcised the Gerasene demoniac and transformed the spirits into a herd of swine. Before the spirits leave the man, the people of Gerasene beg Jesus to not let the man return to the abyss (i.e., the wilderness surrounding the city). A more direct citation of the Bible appears in the comparison of Vytautas, Jagiełło, and the Russians. The letter states that this situation is like the alliance between Christ and Belial, or God and an idol. This verse comes from 2 Corinthians 6:15, and the entire chapter of Book 2 of Corinthians has been recently analyzed regarding the martial imagery of its content. Specifically, this concerns the language of conflict between good and evil.⁷⁴ After narrating how Vytautas led new converts away from the Christian faith, the author of the letter frames the situation quite directly within the context of the Order's existence in the region:

...truly the extent to which the height of his [Vytautas'] ungodliness could be strengthened by means of a rampart, the King of Poland and his Lithuanians and Schismatic Russians, more correctly, heretics, they all joined together with Vytautas and conspired as one in wickedness to my Order and, what is more, to the whole of Christendom, [as] Christ and Belial, God and idol, against the rule of the Christian Faith.⁷⁵

The imagery of Christ and Belial reflects a continued thread of Apocalypticism as it relates to religious conflict, which itself goes back to the early

73 GStA PK, XX. HA, OF 3, p. 35 (= CDP 5: pp. 163–165 (no. CXXII): »dictos ab Ecclesie Romane obediencia retrahendo in abyssum.«

74 Lisa M. Bowens: Investigating the Apocalyptic Texture of Paul's Martial Imagery in 2 Corinthians 4–6, in: *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 39 (2016), No. 1, pp. 3–15.

75 GStA PK, XX. HA, OF 3, p. 35 (= CDP 5: pp. 163–165 (no. CXXII): »Et quod peyus est dictos ab Ecclesie Romane obediencia retrahendo in abyssum pristine perfidie destinavit periculosius et transmisit, verum quatinus sue impietatis arcem vallo scrupulose societatis arcibus muniret, cum Rege Polonie se suosque littwanos ac Ruthenos scismaticos, ymmo hereticos in malum Ordinis mei quinvero tocius xpistianitatis quasi in unum coeuntes et consencientes, xpistus et belial, deus et ydolum, contra rationem fidei perversius colligavit.«

crusading movement.⁷⁶ It is particularly important that the author uses the image here, for it reflects his perception of the conflict with Lithuania, Poland, and Russia as a legitimate cause for continued support among the rulers of Christendom.⁷⁷ As such, it might be seen within the context of the crisis faced by the Teutonic Order after the conversion of Lithuania to Christianity in the 1380s (mentioned above). To attempt to remedy this situation, the Order continued to depict itself as a protector of the whole of Christendom, with the letter translated below as a strong example of the rhetorical devices employed.⁷⁸ Also interesting is the depiction of the King of Poland in the example above as a »rampart« (»arx«) supporting the betrayal of Vytautas, reflecting the continued use of »bulwark rhetoric« in the depiction of the Order's enemies while also linking two of the main antiheroes in the Order's narrative strategy: Jagiełło and Vytautas.

The author of this letter continues to use allusions to the Bible to depict Vytautas as an antihero. He refers to Galatians 6:2, a Pauline epistle describing »the Law of Christ.« In the context of Konrad von Jungingen's letter and the depiction of Vytautas, the verse is applied to the alliance between Vytautas, Jagiełło, and the Russians. This alliance has resulted in them »suffocating and profaning the law of Christ.« In this way, the author of the letter wishes to emphasize that the Grand Master and his Order are keeping that law alive by its very presence in the region and, in expanding to Samogitia, continue to maintain this law. Therefore, the situation of this alliance calls out to those who are in name defenders and supporters of the Mother Church. The letter then implores the reader to not believe the accusations waged against the Order by the King of Poland, and then reminds them that, as a result of the King of Poland's support, there are many more heathen peoples in the region than there are Christians.

Most important to the depiction of antiheroes in the correspondence of the Teutonic Order is the use of the Bible to frame conflicts at the turn of the 15th century. This is even more rare in that the example is not depicted in the Teutonic Order's chronicle tradition for this time. Even if there is no direct call for assistance by western crusaders in the letters describing the uprising

76 Miriam Rita Tessera: The Use of the Bible in Twelfth-Century Papal Letters to Outremer, in: Elizabeth Lapina/Nicholas Morton (eds.): *The Uses of the Bible in Crusader Sources*, London 2017, pp. 179–205.

77 Sebastian Kubon: Die Wahrnehmung der Litauer durch den Deutschen Orden um 1400 und die Rolle des kollektiven Gedächtnisses, in: *Studia historica Brunensia* 66 (2019), No. 2, pp. 81–92.

78 Wüst: *Studien zum Selbstverständnis*, p. 280.

of 1401, the significance of a threat to the wellbeing of Christianity remains front and center. Vytautas and Jagiełło are thus transformed into antiheroes: in terms of the Order's own self-image and its communication of its activities abroad, the knights and the Grand Master are upholders of true Christianity. Of course, this reflects what the Order wanted its supporters to believe, hence the direct request of the author of the letter to ignore the sayings of the embassies of the King of Poland.⁷⁹

The letter marks the beginning of a significant shift in the diplomatic representation of crusading activities and the legitimacy of the crusade in the southern Baltic region. This trend would continue for the next several years. In 1402, Konrad sent out a similar report outlining Vytautas' actions against the Order and his efforts to turn the Samogitians against the Order's rule.⁸⁰ The audience of the letter is not clear, as the manuscript is poorly preserved. Later, in 1409, Vytautas was accused of allying with Moscow, Pskov, Novgorod, and the Tartars to the detriment of Christianity, according to a letter written to an anonymous prince by Ulrich von Jungingen.⁸¹ However, those efforts to describe Vytautas as an antihero appear to have been in vain—the Order would suffer a resounding defeat at the Battle of Tannenberg/Grunwald on 15 July 1410. The fallout from this would cement the decline of the Teutonic Order's authority in Prussia and external perceptions of its usefulness in the region.⁸²

However, the depictions of Vytautas in this light did not cease after this defeat. Conflict between the Teutonic Order, Lithuania, and the Kingdom of Poland remained, and so did the attempts of the Grand Masters to depict Vytautas as an antihero. The bulk of this correspondence can be found in the registers of the Grand Masters Ulrich von Jungingen, Heinrich von Plauen,

79 See Sven Ekdahl: *Die Schlacht bei Tannenberg 1410. Quellenkritische Untersuchungen*, Band 1: Einführung und Quellenlage, Berlin 1982, pp. 156–181.

80 GStA PK, XX. HA, OF 3, pp. 23–25 (= CDP 6: pp. 131–132 (no. CCXXIII)).

81 CEV, pp. 204–206 (no. 437).

82 The literature on the Battle of Tannenberg/Grunwald is extensive in itself. For overviews in English, see Eric Christiansen: *The Northern Crusades. The Baltic and the Catholic Frontier, 1100–1525*, London 1980, pp. 219–222; Michael Burleigh: *Prussian Society and the German Order: An Aristocratic Corporation in Crisis, c. 1410–1466*, Cambridge 1984, pp. 70–79; Sven Ekdahl: *Crusades and Colonisation*, pp. 1–42. Also see Roman Czaja/Zenon Hubert Nowak: *An Attempt to Characterize the State of the Teutonic Knights in Prussia*, in: Roman Czaja/Andrzej Radzimiński (eds.): *The Teutonic Order in Prussia and Livonia. The political and ecclesiastical structures, 13th–16th centuries*, Toruń 2016, pp. 13–30. One should also consult Sławomir Józwiak/Krzysztof Kwiatkowski/Adam Szweđa/Sobiesław Szybkowski: *Wojna Polski i Litwy z zakonem Krzyżackim w latach 1409–1411*, Malbork 2010.

and Michael Kūchmeister von Sternberg. They regularly highlight Vytautas as an ally of Jagiełło, Russians, Tatars, and other heathens, thus continuing his depiction in antiheroic terms. This was the case in several pieces of correspondence written by Heinrich von Plauen in the summer of 1413 to rulers throughout Christendom, highlighting the negative depiction of Vytautas as an ally of the King of Poland, the Russians, pagans, and other schismatics.⁸³ A letter to the King of England in the same year linked Vytautas and the King of Poland with the enemies of the Christian faith, with Heinrich von Plauen imploring the King of England to remember the deeds of his predecessors.⁸⁴ He also reminded the King of France, Charles VI (1380–1422), of the heroic deeds of Charlemagne against the pagans. Charles was to remember, therefore, the heroic lineage of his predecessors, which might be seen as likening Vytautas to the legendary Marsile in the eleventh-century *Song of Roland*.⁸⁵ An impending invasion of Vytautas and Jagiełło (which would destroy Christendom, according to Plauen) was referenced in several letters from Heinrich von Plauen to rulers of Bohemia and the Empire.⁸⁶ An embassy of the Order to the Empire also implored their audiences to remember their predecessors who helped the Order in the expansion and protection of the Christian faith in Prussia and fought against paganism (»die heidenschaft czu swechen«).⁸⁷ In this letter, Vytautas and Jagiełło »with a great collection of Christians and pagans« are also described as waiting on the borders of the Order's land,⁸⁸ and thus the princes of the Empire should remember that the entirety of the Christian faith lay in danger on account of this alliance.⁸⁹

83 Jürgen Sarnowsky: Regesten zu den Briefregistern des Deutschen Ordens III, pp. 207–208 (no. 141–142).

84 *ibid.*, p. 224 (no. 172).

85 *ibid.*, p. 205 (no. 138). Also see Robert Allen Rouse: *Crusaders*, in: Niel Cartlidge (ed.): *Heroes and Anti-Heroes in Medieval Romance*, Cambridge 2012, pp. 173–183, here p. 175.

86 Sarnowsky: Regesten zu den Briefregistern des Deutschen Ordens III, p. 210 (no. 146), p. 216 (no. 157), pp. 219–220 (no. 164).

87 *ibid.*, pp. 224–225 (Nr. 173); GStA PK, XX. HA, OF 6, p. 303: »Item ab die herren den offen briff horen wellen adir nicht, so sprecht gnediger lieber herre der orden ist gewortzilt und inbefestunge bebstlicher und keyserlicher gnade mit gar vil gunsten, koningen, fursten und herren die heidenschaft zuswechen und den heiligen cristenglawben czubreiten das her gar getruwlichen mit hulfē euwir eldirn und vorfarn euch selbst missentlich invorgissunge vil blutes bis an die czeit dises ingekomenden koning Wladislaus von der heidenschaft czu Poland geruffet hat getan.«

88 GStA PK, XX. HA, OF 6, p. 305: »... mit grosser sammelunge cristen und heydin.«

89 *ibid.*, p. 305–306: »...so ir meiste moget czu hulfē komet, wann is ny so not teten desen landen und der armen cristenheit wy wol her bis her eyn fredeschilt mit hilfē uewir vorfar und eldern der gantzen cristenheit ist gewesen. So getruwt und hofft unser homeister czu

In addition to letters written to secular rulers, Vytautas also appears as a villain in the papal correspondence of the Order in the aftermath of the Battle of Tannenberg/Grunwald. Writing to Antipope John XXIII (1410–1415) in the late summer of 1413, Heinrich von Plauen implored him to think of the Order's poor situation in Prussia. Moreover, he reminded John that he indeed wished to make peace with Jagiełło and Vytautas, but that these wishes were in vain. The reason behind this was, according to the Order's side, that Jagiełło and Vytautas instead preferred to ally with Russians from Pskov and Novgorod and neighbouring barbarian peoples against the Order, thus harming Christianity.⁹⁰ Subsequent depictions in the foreign correspondence of Heinrich von Plauen continue this trend and appear throughout his letter registers.⁹¹

The negative depictions of Vytautas as an ally of Jagiełło and the image of him leading armies of pagans and Russians into the Order's territories continued in the correspondence of Michael Kuchmeister von Sternberg. In 1414, he wrote to Sigismund of Hungary that Vytautas and Jagiełło, in addition to princes from Silesia and Mazovia, had allied with Tartars, Russians, and other pagans and invaded Prussia in July of that year.⁹² He also wrote to the princes in Jagiełło's army in August of 1414, in which he reminded the men of the Order's commitment to uphold the conditions of the First Peace of Thorn (concluded on 1 February 1411) and admonished them for allying with enemies of the Christian faith, including Jagiełło and Vytautas, to shed Christian blood in Prussia. As in the letter written by Konrad von Jungingen in 1401 (described above), Kuchmeister portrayed Vytautas and Jagiełło as having acted against the Law of Christ.⁹³ An set of instructions for an Order's messenger dated 1424 repeats several aspects of this alliance between Vytautas, Jagiełło, and »unbelievers« (»unglowbigen«, in this case,

euern gnaden das ir euwer eldern fusporn und noch volgnug, got und syner werden muter czu lobe der cristenheyt czu dinste euch czu eren dem orden czu troste.«

90 Sarnowsky: *Regesten zu den Briefregistern des Deutschen Ordens III*, p. 226 (no. 175); GStA PK, XX. HA, OF 6, pp. 317–319.

91 *ibid.*, p. 229 (no. 179), p. 230 (no. 180), p. 231 (no. 182), pp. 232–233 (Nr. 184), pp. 240–241 (no. 198), pp. 241–242 (no. 199).

92 Sebastian Kubon/Jürgen Sarnowsky/Annika Souhr-Könighaus: *Regesten zu den Briefregistern des Deutschen Ordens II: Die Ordensfolianten 8, 9 und Zusatzmaterial mit einem Anhang: Die Abschriften aus den Briefregistern des Folianten APG 300, R/LI, 74*, Berlin 2014, p. 105 (no. 53). These letters comprised Ordensfoliant 8, which has been lost since 1945.

93 *ibid.*, pp. 109–110 (no. 61).

Russians, Walachians, Tartars, Turks, and others), reinforcing the continued practice of depicting Vytautas as an antiheroic figure.⁹⁴

The regularity of the accusations and negative depictions of Vytautas make it quite clear that he continued to play an important role in the Order's narrative strategy in its letters as an enemy of the Christian faith and, as such, an antihero in the tradition of its earlier enemies in Prussia and Lithuania. Several of these letters are quite detailed and provide rich examples of the ways in which the Order used diplomacy to attempt to garner support from a variety of groups in western Europe, thus highlighting the importance of these texts as important examples of not only written, but oral communication (as highlighted in the work of Jürgen Sarnowsky).⁹⁵

Conclusion: Vytautas the Hero, Counterhero, and Antihero

Vytautas of Lithuania was obviously a key player in the internal and external politics of the southern Baltic region in the late Middle Ages. Moreover, he appears as an important character throughout the written corpus of materials available to historians studying the medieval history of the southern Baltic region. This chapter has attempted to highlight how sources beyond those of the Teutonic Order's chronicles can help to shape our understanding of the making of heroes, counterheroes, and antiheroes in the Baltic during the late 14th and early 15th centuries. A significant body of research has considered the ways in which medieval audiences were attracted to antiheroic figures in contemporary literary works, such as the *Chansons de geste* and early medieval examples such as Beowulf. As Neil Cartlidge argued in his study of heroes and antiheroes in the Middle Ages, the fascination with these figures was so prominent that oftentimes we overlook the ways in which heroic figures were immoral, while their antiheroic counterparts could be praiseworthy and impressive.⁹⁶ The investigation of heroes and antiheroes as part of a broader phenomenon of the rise of literary culture, and the reception of pre-Christian

94 CEV, pp. 562–563 (no. 1024): »Item am dinstage noch quasimodo genti haben die herczogen in der Maszaw...den der konig von Polan, herczoge Wytawt und andere heidenische forsten samt mit im werden halden.«

95 Sarnowsky: Written communication, pp. 76–87.

96 Niel Cartlidge: Introduction, in: Niel Cartlidge (ed.): Heroes and Anti-Heroes, pp. 1–5.

literary traditions, was the topic of a collection of studies published a decade ago.⁹⁷

However, the sources presented in this chapter are entirely different from the perspective of genre and intended audience(s) while sharing several aspects of the Teutonic Order's chronicle tradition. What do they say about heroes, counterheroes, and antiheroes? Can sources such as letters, which reflect a similar method of communication to literary texts (such as poetry, which was recited aloud) illuminate the perception of figures in quickly changing contexts? This chapter has attempted to illustrate that they can. Ultimately, the image of Vytautas in these sources highlights the presence of moral ambiguity concerning who was heroic, and who was not. Vytautas' ability to fight in the Order's interest and for the Christian faith is jarring in light of his alliance with Jagiełło and »unbelievers« expressed in these sources. This serves to demonstrate that there was »cross-pollination« between the goals of the Order's historical texts and the personal correspondence of its Grand Masters, which applies to the times when the Order and Vytautas were at peace with one another, as well as when the two were at war. It would seem that Vytautas, as a historical figure, embodied the multifaceted roles of hero, counterhero, and antihero.

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