

Crusading and Chronicle Writing on the Medieval Baltic Frontier

A Companion to the Chronicle of Henry of Livonia

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read as a kind of litany of the dead, where Henry recalls all the most important scenes of 'bad death' described earlier, attributing all the glory – and ascribing all the responsibility – for them to the holy Mother of God. That fascinating litany is too long to be quoted in full, so I would like to select just one eloquent passage from it:

Did She not kill Svelgate and many other princes and elders of the Letts through her Livonian servants? Did She not cause Ako, once the prince of the treacherous Letts at Holm, and many others, to fall dead at the hands of the Rigans? Did She not lay to rest Russin, the elder of the Letts in the fort of Dobrel? Did not all the elders of Treiden, who were called traitors, fall and die in the time of the pestilence? Did not all the elders of Oesel as well as of the provinces of Rotalia fall dead before the Rigans at Treiden? Did not Lembit, Vytames, and their other treacherous elders in Saccalia fall dead before the Rigans? And all those who remained and persisted in their treachery – did they not all perish?⁹⁶

This long quotation leads me to the final and concluding point I want to make in this chapter: death is very much one of the ideological and rhetorical backbones of Henry's chronicle, all the major themes of which seem to converge in the *topos* of death. Using the happy expression of the French literary theorist Michel Picard, 'when you speak about death, you always speak about something else.'⁹⁷

⁹⁶ HCL XXV.2, p. 180; Brundage, p. 199.

⁹⁷ Michel Picard, *La littérature et la mort* (Paris, 1995), p. 60.

Chapter 6

Henry of Livonia on Woods and Wilderness

Torben Kjersgaard Nielsen

Introduction

In an article originally titled 'Le désert-fôret dans l'Occident médiéval', and later translated into 'The Wilderness in the Medieval West' and published in his *The Medieval Imagination*, the French medievalist Jacques Le Goff investigated several notions of wilderness in the medieval West, drawing on a wide range of sources from the Bible and the Church Fathers, from early medieval writers such as the Irish monks, and from writers and scholars from the central Middle Ages, such as the vast hagiographic literature, while also touching briefly on the nascent vernaculars of the medieval West. To Le Goff, the different kinds of wildernesses he explored in his article in fact share some common features, which could be summarized into what almost amounts to a general perception of Le Goff's of landscape and society in the Middle Ages:

In the Middle Ages the contrast was not, as it had been in antiquity, between the city and the country (urbs and rus, as the Romans put it) but between nature and culture, expressed in terms of the opposition between what was built, cultivated, and inhabited (city, castle, village) and what was essentially wild (the ocean and forest, the western equivalents of the eastern desert), that is, between men who lived in groups and those who lived in solitude.¹

Explicitly operating within oppositions as it does, the quote of course displays some explicit dichotomies: between nature and culture; between cultivated and wild; between society and solitude. However, Le Goff – true to his analytic approach and with an evident debt to the structuralist tradition of the famed anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss – obviously considers these categories

¹ Jacques Le Goff, 'The Wilderness in the Medieval West', in his *The Medieval Imagination* (Chicago, 1992), pp. 47–59 (here 58).

themselves as analytical tools (and as such to have been in play in the minds of both modern and medieval men) rather than attempts at an actual description of a reality in the world presenting itself to men.

From another angle of cultural criticism, but still – at least partly – influenced by Lévi-Strauss, the American philosopher Hayden White has also considered conceptions of wildness. Hayden White traces the processes by which concepts like ‘the wild man’ have changed from myth to fiction and to myth again in European thought. White, rather than opting for an essentialist and steadfast character in the concept of wilderness, argues that the concept in fact has been subject to radical change over time. The concept of wilderness was widely used as an *anthropological* category in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, only to develop into an equally widely used *psychological* category in recent times. The use of it as an anthropological category would suggest that it represented some sort of presocial or supersocial state, that is, a particular phase in the histories of human societies moving evolutionarily and determinedly *out* of wilderness *into* civilization. The fundamental *dynamism* and changeability of the concept of wilderness is for White proved by the fact that wilderness in popular modern usage has changed into a term designating not societies but people, who for ‘psychological or purely physical reasons, are unable to participate in the life of *any* society, whether primitive or civilized’. Wilderness, then, in modern times seems, in White’s words, to become conflated with the popular notion of psychosis, a sickness reflecting a personality malfunction in this individual’s relation to society.² White claims that:

The notion of ‘wildness’ (or, in its Latinate form, ‘savagery’) belongs to a set of culturally self-authenticating devices which includes, among many others, the ideas of ‘madness’ and ‘heresy’ as well. These terms are used not merely to designate a specific condition or state of being but also to confirm the value of their dialectical antitheses ‘civilization,’ ‘sanity,’ and ‘orthodoxy,’ respectively. Thus, they do not so much refer to a specific thing, place, or condition as dictate a particular attitude governing a relationship between a lived reality and some area of problematical existence that cannot be accommodated easily to conventional conceptions of the normal and the familiar.³

It is in this line of thought that I would like to investigate the notions of woods and wildernesses in Henry of Livonia’s thought. Wilderness is not a given thing, but rather it takes on meaning exactly by the conceptualizations made

² Hayden White, ‘The Forms of Wildness: The Archaeology of an Idea,’ in his *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore, 1992), pp. 150–82.

³ White, ‘The Forms of Wildness,’ p. 151.

by the persons considering – in more or less explicit ways – ‘wildernesses’ in their own cultural ‘environment’. Even if the arguments put forward by White are concerned with the modern usage of the concept, I find it justified to use his observations as a point of departure. In doing this I consider myself in line with the ideas and considerations put forward by the historian Volker Scior. In his work on medieval chroniclers and their conceptualizations of identity and ‘otherness’, Scior is particularly interested in medieval concepts of space and place in the medieval chroniclers, and he discusses the scientific results reached by the school of so-called ‘cognitive cartography’. In opposition to older theoretical views on space and place, Scior relates:

it has been shown in works which theoretically and methodologically appeal to approaches from cognitive cartography, that space must not be understood as something objective or neutral. Rather, it has been convincingly argued that in principle space is always structured as a cognitive space and always dependable – albeit, quite differently so – on individual assessments of the phenomena which are in it and the evaluations made hereof.⁴

What follows from these observations is that ‘the concept of wilderness’ in Henry of Livonia is not a fixed one, to which we simply can refer. His conceptualizations must be seen as a mixture of ideas, sentiments and thoughts in Henry himself, brought home to him by his readings of written material, of which we know only very little, and of unknown personal relations in his own biography.

What we do know, and what will hopefully become clear in the following, is that the man with whom we are concerned, the Christian chronicler Henry of Livonia, over time designated his conceptualization of the woods and the wildernesses, not by conversations in the safe havens of a civilized refectory in a monastery or by the scholarly distance inherent in the lecture rooms of the emerging universities in Western Europe of his time; on the contrary, Henry’s possible conceptions of woods and wilderness were confronted with – and thus also formed by – his own bodily encounters with the actual landscapes of the Baltic. As such, his conceptions should not be called analytical, but rather, in a way, sensuous. It is my contention that Henry experienced the landscape of the Baltic in a specific historical setting – the Christianization of the Baltic – and that exactly this particular context and the events produced by and in it would have a marked influence on his – often, however, implicit – conceptualizations of woods and wilderness.

⁴ Volker Scior, *Das Eigene und das Fremde. Identität und Fremdheit in den Chroniken Adams von Bremen, Helmolds von Bosau und Arnolds von Lübeck* (Berlin, 2002), p. 22.

While there is often room for criticism in Le Goff's eclectic work, his scholarship is always powerfully thought-provoking. Upon reading Le Goff, I wondered how notions of wilderness were displayed in the Chronicle of Henry of Livonia. Obviously, what the landscapes investigated in the above-mentioned work by Le Goff had in common was the fact that they were all thoroughly *Christian*. Hence the 'wildernesses' acknowledged and investigated by Le Goff are often the wildernesses experienced by a Christian anchorite's search for God in his self-sought solitude,⁵ or wildernesses alluded to and the fear instigated by a chance appearance of the occasional wild man in the (imagined) forests of Christian Western Europe.⁶ These are not the kinds of wildernesses experienced by Henry of Livonia. He does not encounter Christian hermits living in the wilds in the Baltic, and, as I hope to show in this chapter, whatever unease and anxiety about the wilderness he experiences in the Baltic comes across as something quite different from imaginations of wild men or monsters of and in nature.

One obvious difference between the landscapes investigated by Le Goff and the Baltic landscapes encountered by Henry is, of course, that from the outset of Henry's narrative, the Baltic landscapes were *not* Christian landscapes, although most of them ended up being just that over the period covered by his chronicle.⁷ The making of a Christian landscape is a huge topic, and I have investigated parts of Henry's chronicle elsewhere in this respect, arguing that the process of 'Christianization', 'Europeanization' or whatever other term is used, was not just a question of overcoming the pagan societies of the Baltic

⁵ Le Goff, 'The Wilderness', esp. pp. 48–51.

⁶ In another article, Le Goff analyses the story by Chretien de Troyes: *Yvain ou le Chevalier de Lion* (from c. 1180), in which the protagonist, fleeing to the woods from the court of King Arthur, encounters a 'wild man' in the forest and is shocked by this man's bestial appearance: 'His head was larger than that of a horse or any other animal, and he had bushy hair, a broad, hairless forehead more than two hands wide, large, soft ears like those of an elephant, enormous brows, a flat face, owl-like eyes, a cat's nose, a cleft mouth like a wolf's, sharp, reddish teeth like a boar's, a black beard, a curly moustache; his chin touched his chest, and his backbone was long, hump-backed, and twisted. He leaned on a club and was clad in a strange outfit that was made not of linen or wool but of two pieces of cowhide attached to his neck.' Jacques Le Goff and Pierre Vidal-Naquet, 'Lévi-Strauss in Broceliande: A Brief Analysis of a Courtly Romance', in Le Goff, *The Medieval Imagination*, pp. 107–31 (here 120). See also Richard Bernheimer, *Wild Men in the Middle Ages: A Study in Art, Sentiment, and Demonology* (New York, 1979).

⁷ A work which surveys this process is Eric Christiansen, *The Northern Crusades: The Baltic and the Catholic Frontier 1100–1525* (London, 1980). See also Tiina Kala, 'The Incorporation of the Northern Baltic Lands into the Western Christian World', in CCBF, pp. 3–20.

in war, but also – or, in fact, rather – a prolonged process with implications also for very basic conceptions like the sacrality of physical landscapes and man-made structures (churches and chapels), as well as the whole ‘cultural landscape’ in people’s minds.⁸

Thus, my expectation – when venturing into reading Henry again in search for his ‘concepts of wildernesses’, and having read Le Goff and the literature I used to consider the making of a new cultural landscape in the Baltic – was that Henry would possibly stage the wilderness of the Baltic landscapes through terms and in ways that would underline the fundamental ‘Otherness’ of this non-Christian, Baltic landscape. Despite the considerable time-gap, but considering the well-known Roman influence on medieval literature, I assumed that Henry might consider the forests and swamps of the Baltic ‘horrible’ and ‘foul’ – as, for instance, Tacitus did an ‘Other’ landscape in his *Germania*.⁹ After all, remembering modern anthropology and geography, landscapes are also – and maybe most of all – mindscapes,¹⁰ and landscapes thus cannot simply be rendered ‘objectively’ or ‘as they are’. A landscape will always be a construction in the mind of the person doing the rendering.¹¹ It was my thought that parts of the ‘mindscape’ of Henry, then, in a sense would be readable through his conceptualizations of landscape.

However, I quickly had to realize that Henry in fact does not bother himself directly with landscape or even geography. His chronicle does not contain a specific chapter or entry on how the particular regions of the Baltic look and what the characteristics of nature there are, let alone a discussion

⁸ Torben Kjersgaard Nielsen, ‘The Making of New Cultural Landscapes in the Thirteenth Century Baltic’ (forthcoming). See also Carsten Selch Jensen, ‘How to Convert a Landscape: Henry of Livonia and the *Chronicon Livoniae*’, in CCMBF, pp. 151–68; Kurt Villads Jensen, ‘Crusading and Christian Penetration into the Landscape: The New Jerusalem in the Desert’, in *Sacralisation of Landscape*, ed. Stefan Brink and Sæbjørg Walaker Heide (forthcoming).

⁹ Tacitus, *Germany – Germania: With an Introduction, Translation and Commentary*, trans. Herbert W. Benario (Warminster, 1999). See Tacitus, *Germany* I.A.5, pp. 18–19: ‘*silvis horrida*’, ‘*paludibus foeda*’. The internet article from Wikipedia, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Enchanted_forest>, is in itself a living proof of the continuing fascination vested in the theme of ‘wild’ forests. The site offers further examples from especially European literature and folklore.

¹⁰ See R.J. Zwi Werblowsky, ‘Introduction: Mindscape and Landscape’, in *Sacred Space: Shrine, City, Land*, ed. Benjamin Z. Kedar and R.J. Zwi Werblowsky (New York, 1998), pp. 9–17. Werblowsky attributes the phrase to Allan Grapard, who works on Japanese religious history.

¹¹ Cf. Barbara Bender, ‘Introduction’, in *Landscape: Politics and Perspectives*, ed. Barbara Bender (Oxford, 1993), pp. 1–17.

of wilderness and civilization. In his fairly everyday language, he seems not to be interested in either geographical (in contrast to, for instance, Adam of Bremen [d. 1081/85] before him)¹² or anthropological categories (in contrast to, for instance, a writer like Gerald of Wales [c. 1146–1223]).¹³ Henry does not strike his reader as being overly prone to symbolic or other interpretations of the world around him. He does, however, in fact include in his chronicle one very exciting chapter (XXV.2) in which he makes a symbolic interpretation of Livonia as the Land of the Mother. And his conceptualization of the city of Riga as the place from where the whole region is fruitfully irrigated with Christianity, punning of course on the name of the city and the Latin word *ri-go/irrigare*, stand out among the few symbolic interpretations of landscape in his chronicle.¹⁴ However, I shall not deal with these two examples in this chapter. I shall deal only with the woods of the Baltic as these are depicted in Henry's chronicle. Through this, hopefully, Henry's innate conceptions of 'wilderness' will also be brought to light.

¹² Adam of Bremen, *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum*, ed. Bernhard Schmeidler, MGH rer. Germ. in usum scholarum separatim editi 2 (Hanover and Leipzig, 1917). The part of his work of interest here is the so-called 'Descriptio insularum Aquilonis' in the fourth book of his chronicle, which describes the northern lands and the islands of the northern seas. The work exists in an English translation: Adam of Bremen, *History of the Archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen*, trans. F.J. Tschan (New York, 2002).

¹³ Cf., for example, his *Expugnatio Hibernica*, ed. A.B. Scott and F.X. Martin (Dublin, 1978). His *Topographia Hibernica* is translated as *The Topography of Ireland* by J.J. O'Meara (Dundalk, 1951). His *Itinerarium Cambriae* and his *Descriptio Cambriae* are translated as *The Journey through Wales/The Description of Wales* by Lynn Thorpe (Harmondsworth, 1978). A biographical study is provided by Robert Bartlett, *Gerald of Wales 1146–1223* (Oxford, 1982).

¹⁴ HCL XXXV, pp. 268–73; Brundage, pp. 197–200. See, for example, the treatment of this chapter in Henry by Linda Kaljundi, 'Young Church in God's New Vineyard: The Motifs of Growth and Fertility in Henry's Chronicle of Livonia', *Ennen ja Nyt* 4 (2004), online at <<http://ennenjanyt.net/4-04/referece/kaljundi.html>>. Leonid Arbusow, *Colores Rhetorici. Eine Auswahl rhetorischer Figuren und Gemeinplätze als Hilfsmittel für akademische Übungen an mittelalterlichen Texten* (Göttingen, 1948), pp. 38–9 has also noted the use of another pun on Riga/*ri-go* in Henry's chronicle (HCL XXX.5, p. 220) with the aid of a literary half verse, which Arbusow believes Henry to have taken from a medieval poem, 'Tobiah', by Matthieu de Vendôme. Originally the phrase used stems from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* 11, l.419. See also Leonid Arbusow, 'Das entlehnte Sprachgut in Heinrichs "Chronicon Livoniae". Ein Beitrag zur Sprache mittelalterlicher Chronistik', *Deutsches Archiv für Erforschung des Mittelalters* 8 (1951), 100–153 (here 106).

Hiding in the Forest

The woods and forests in Henry's chronicle are most often presented as containing 'hiding places' for the indigenous – *latibula silvarum*. Henry only seldom designates these *latibula* any further. At the most, these hiding places appear to Henry to be dark or gloomy (*tenebrosa*) or he states that they are simply placed in particularly dense parts of the forests.¹⁵ This, of course, is not especially revealing. However, the *contexts* of the references to hiding places in Henry's chronicle seem slightly more promising for my investigation. We learn in Henry's chronicle that the forests contain hiding places for the Baltic peoples when they are threatened by either German missionary forces or by neighbouring tribes on the rampage. These *latibula* appear to be established as carefully selected places of refuge. It is as if almost every village would have known one or several of these places in the woods, the location of which were very well known to the locals.¹⁶ Henry relates that, following the 1224 German conquest of the city of Dorpat (Est. Tartu), the locals would now come out of the hiding places in the forests in which they had hid themselves for several years in times of war. Following the German restoration of peace, as we are led to think, every man returned to his village and his fields.¹⁷

Sometimes this would simply be the end of it: in times of war, the locals would flee to their *latibulis silvarum* and leave the village to be pillaged by the attacking enemy. When the enemy had left, the village people would again appear from their hiding places to consider the damage to land and property. In this sense, the hiding places seem to have served a purpose very well known in much medieval literature of Henry's time: the forest would be a place of refuge, an intermediate safe haven, that would serve to save lives.¹⁸

¹⁵ Cf. HCL XI.9, p. 58: '... silvarum tenebrosa querunt latibula ...'; and HCL IX.11, p. 31: '... nemore densissimo ...' Arbusow, 'Das entlehnte Sprachgut', p. 105, n. 2, considers phrases like these to be the result of oral teaching of Latin grammar, since these expressions are to be found in diverse *florilegia* of the time.

¹⁶ Cf. HCL XV.1, p. 88 and XIX.3, p. 126, to cite just a few.

¹⁷ HCL XXIX.1, p. 207.

¹⁸ Of course, medieval literature in general is very fond of using dense forests as typical loci for hiding places or places of refuge. An example is provided by the popular story of Tristan and Yseult, in which the two protagonists take to the forests once their adulterous romance has become known. See also the many versions available of Eilhardt von Oberge, Beroul, Thomas of Britain and the Prose Tristan. Also, for example, Bodo Mergell, *Tristan und Isolde. Ursprung und Entwicklung der Tristansage des Mittelalters* (Mainz, 1949). Beroul's *Tristan* is commented on by Le Goff, 'The Wilderness', pp. 55–6. Further, Jacques Le Goff and Pierre Vidal-Naquet, 'Lévi-Strauss in Broceliande', offer a structural (Lévi-Straussian) analysis of Chrétien de Troyes' story *Yvain ou le Chevalier de Lion* from c. 1180. In this

However, in Henry's judgement, these *latibula* actually most often did *not* serve this purpose of offering a place of protection, regardless of what the locals themselves hoped for by seeking the shelter of the forests. We often read that the refugees are brutally hunted and eventually simply dragged out of their hiding places in the woods. The men would then be brutally killed, the women dragged away together with the livestock and children.¹⁹ At other times, we learn that the refugees themselves have to leave their hiding places in order to collect food and other necessities from the villages – only to be captured or killed when they appear in the open or return to their villages prematurely. This is the case, for example, in Henry's story of the Lett convert, Thalibald, whom we learn was killed in 1215 by the Saccalians and Ugaunians of Estonia. Forced to flee from German troops, they accidentally come across Thalibald. They seize him on his return 'from the hiding places of the forests for a bath' and they burn him alive before a fire, because, as we are told, he would not give up his money.²⁰ In yet other instances we are told that the people hiding in the forests actually perished from hunger, thirst and cold:

On the following day and the third day, they went out and took horses and innumerable flocks; for of the latter there were four thousand oxen and cows, not counting horses, other flocks, and captives, of whom there was no count. Many of the pagans, however, who escaped through flight to the forests and the ice of the sea, perished in the freezing cold.²¹

story, the protagonist flees the court of King Arthur to take refuge in a forest. His stay in the forest is shown to have lasting effects on the once noble knight, in that the forest almost turns him into a 'naked savage', only to be re-integrated slowly into civilized society when Yvain encounters a hermit, the character of which obviously plays a mediating role between civilization and sylvan savagery, personified by the other creature encountered by Yvain, namely the wild man from the woods, see footnote 6 above. The folk stories of Robin Hood of Sherwood Forest are, of course, considerably later, but the stories do contain references to rhymes from at least the fourteenth century. Cf. Barrie Dobson and John Taylor, *The Rymes of Robin Hood: An Introduction to the English Outlaw* (Sutton, 1997).

¹⁹ Cf. HCL XV.7, p. 97.

²⁰ HCL XIX.3, p. 125; Brundage, p. 144.

²¹ HCL XIV.10, p. 82; Brundage, p. 103. See also HCL XV.3, p. 91; Brundage, p. 112: 'The Estonians, however, fled by night in their pirate ships and wished to go down to the sea, but the ballistarii on both sides of the Aa hindered their descent. Other pilgrims came with Bernard of Lippe to the Aa from Riga. They made a bridge over the river, built wooden structures upon the bridge, caught the pirate ships as they came with arrows and lances, and completely cut off the pagans' escape route. In the still quiet of the night, therefore, the Estonians secretly disembarked from their pirate vessels, leaving all their things behind, and fled. Some of them perished in the forests and others yet died of hunger on the road; only a few of them escaped to their own land to announce the news at home.'

The forests simply did not work as protection. Referring to 1209, Henry relates, almost as a general statement, that the Lithuanians at this period were such dominant lords, and acted so cruelly, that scarcely anyone, and especially the Letts, 'dared live in the small villages. Not even by leaving their houses deserted to seek the dark hiding places of the forests could they escape them,' Henry states. Of course, this is a story meant first of all to portray the cruelty of the Lithuanian enemy, and to convey the sad message that refuge could not be found anywhere, and hence not even in the designated hiding places of the forests.²²

Not only did the forests not offer protection, they were in fact also the places of several kinds of abominable practices, and I shall deal with the most obvious of these – the forests as places of pagan worship – in a little while. Firstly, it is equally obvious that the forests worked well for ambushes: the pagan enemy would be lurking in the woods, from where he would mount sneak attacks on the Christians, instead of fighting in the open. Referring to 1205, Henry recalls how:

A short time thereafter the pilgrims, leaving the fort of Üxküll to collect grain, were attacked by Livonians hiding in the woods. Seventeen of them were killed, some of whom suffering a cruel martyrdom were immolated to the pagan gods.²³

It is clear from the context of many of these stories that pagan ambushes from the woods upon the Christians would often result in torture and murder. This was the case when, in 1209, a German army were in pursuit of a fleeing Estonian army. The Germans marched to the river Ümera (Latv. Jumara) 'not knowing that the army of the Esthonians were lurking in the forests near it.' They were taken by surprise when the Estonian army rushed upon them and were even left alone, since the army of the allied Livs coming up from the rear, upon realizing

²² The quote continues: 'For the Lithuanians, laying ambushes for them at all times in the forests, seized them, killing some and capturing others, and took the latter back to their own country, seizing all their possessions' (HCL XIII.4, p. 69; Brundage, pp. 90–91).

²³ HCL IX.12, p. 31; Brundage, p. 52 ('... insidiantibus in silvis ...'); cf. also HCL XIV.8, p. 81. An example of attackers using the woods for ambushes but without success is HCL XII.4, p. 60; Brundage, p. 81: 'After this, however, the Lithuanians entered Semgallia with a great army and began to kill and lay waste all they found. The Semgalls, indeed, ambushing them on the road and felling trees, killed almost all of them on their way back. And the Semgalls honourably sent gifts to the Rigans from their spoils.' The Latin text reads: 'Semigalli vero insidiantes eis in via et silvas succidentes in reditu fere omnes occiderunt.' Thus it might seem that actually it was the Lithuanians who were using the woods this time, and that the Semgallian attack on them was maybe not carried out 'on the road' but rather while the Lithuanian army was on the move back. When the Semgallians destroyed the forest, they were then able to cut down the enemy as well.

the Estonian ambush, 'immediately turned to flight, and the Germans remained alone.'²⁴ The Germans should maybe have considered more carefully whether or not to fight the Estonian pagans on this occasion, since Henry relates that the Germans suffered numerous casualties following the flight of their Livish allies:

The Esthonians, however, followed both the Germans, the Livonians, and the infantry of the Letts from right and left. They captured about a hundred of them, killed some, and, leading the others back towards the Sedde, tortured them in a cruel martyrdom. Of the fourteen of the latter, they roasted some alive, and, after stripping the others of their clothes and making crosses on their backs with their swords, they cut their throats, and thus, we hope, sent them into the heavenly company of the martyrs.²⁵

Besides being sites for ignoble ambushes, causing severe damage and numerous casualties among the German troops, the forests were abominable places in yet another way as well. In the forests, terrifying acts would take place. The forests were places of death, even providing the locus for the deadly sin of suicide: 'Since it was now winter, the Lithuanians who escaped through the woods, because of the difficulty of crossing the Dvina, either drowned in the Dvina or hanged themselves in the woods (*in silvis suspenderunt*).'²⁶ This feature of what looks like a collective suicide can be said to have later established itself as something of a trait in European literature: in the 'Inferno' of his *Divine Comedy*, Dante pictured exactly the 'violent against themselves' as trees in a gloomy forest.²⁷

²⁴ HCL XIV.8, p. 81; Brundage, p. 101.

²⁵ HCL XIV.8, p. 80; Brundage, p. 102. The forests as places from where ambushes could be made are also prominent in other historical periods. For a short overview, see J.R. McNeill, 'Woods and Warfare in World History', *Environmental History* 9/3 (2004), 388-410.

²⁶ HCL XXV.4, p. 184; Brundage, p. 203. It is not the woods themselves that finish off the Lithuanians on this occasion, but rather the fact that they 'had despoiled the Blessed Virgin's land, and Her Son returned vengeance against them. To Him be praise throughout the ages', writes Henry.

²⁷ The relevant lines in Canto XIII of the *Divine Comedy/Inferno* are as follows:

'Nessus had not yet made the further shore
 Before we'd reached a wood in which there lay
 No clearly marked out pathway any more.
 Not green in foliage but a dusky grey;
 Not smooth the branches - warped and gnarled like roots;
 No apples there but poisoned stuntings sway.
 Between Cecina and Corneto the wild brutes
 That hate the cultivated land infest

Thus in Henry's view, the forests in fact did *not* offer the expected protection from enemies. People hiding in the forests could *not* sustain their lives, because the uncultivated forests did not offer human nourishment of any kind; and, furthermore, the forests were the sites of unjust ambushes and truly abominable behaviour. In this sense, to Henry, the forests did not *save* lives; rather, they *took* lives. The forests were to be shunned by any human. In this sense, the forests of the Baltic were regarded as uncanny and fearful.

The 'Un-Cultured' Forests

In his *Etymologies*, the seventh-century Bishop Isidore of Seville included a section on 'Remote places' in his chapter on 'Mountains and other terms for landforms': '[r]emote places (*devium*) are secret and concealed, as if they were away from the road (*via*). The same places are also called impassable places (*invium*).'²⁸ Clearly, the famous Iberian writer is here establishing the conceptual relations between concealed and open – or secret and public – as a binary opposition reflected in the Latin words of *devium* and *via*. Even if some linguists would maybe nowadays object to such etymological reasoning and the conceptualizations ensuing from it, it seems as if Henry would have been quite inspired by the use of such dichotomies had he read Isidore. Unfortunately, it is not possible to enlist any of Isidore's works as possible sources for Henry's writings,²⁹ even if Henry in fact also seems to work by establishing and employing binary oppositions. With Henry, however, such an opposition is established directly between the forests and the roads and the behaviour in these different settings by the groups using them. Thus we read in Henry how the Germans almost always use the roads – at times even singing while

No brakes as harsh and dense in barbs and shoots.'

Dante, *The Divine Comedy. Hell. Purgatory. Heaven in a Terza Rima Translation*, trans. Peter Dale (London, 1996), p. 51. See also Alexander Murray, *Suicide in the Middle Ages*, vol. 1 (Oxford, 1998), esp. pp. 81–91.

²⁸ *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*, trans. Stephen A. Barney, W.J. Lewis, J.A. Beach and Oliver Berghof (Cambridge, 2006), XIV, viii, 32, p. 299, col. 2.

²⁹ Considering the number of extant manuscripts containing (elements of) Isidore's *Etymologiae*, the chances that Isidore's work would have been a part of a library at, for instance, the bishopric in Riga, are in fact not that small. Isidore's *Etymologiae* survives in more than a thousand manuscript copies, a truly impressive number, evidencing, of course, the immense popularity and importance of the work, which also was among the first works printed in the fifteenth century. See *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*, p. 24. For a discussion of the biblical and liturgical material which Henry of Livonia might have had access to and made active use of, see Arbusow, 'Das entlehnte Sprachgut'. See also Wilis Bilkins, *Die Spuren von Vulgata, Brevier und Missale in der Sprache von Heinrichs Chronikon Livoniae* (Riga, 1928).

marching!³⁰ – while the pagans most often use the forests, when moving from one destination to another: ‘All the other Livs and Lettgallians returned without any wound. Many of them came again to the Germans, from the forests to which they had fled, as the Germans returned by the road.’³¹

Henry relates how, in 1211, bands of Livish warriors on the rampage crossed the woods into the Estonian region of Saccala (Est. Sakala), pillaging and murdering on their way. As the story is told by Henry, it seems that the warrior bands would cross through the forests on their way to their targets, while they would use the road when returning home with all their loot:

They seized the Esthonians, who were returning to the villages for food. The males they killed; the women they spared and took away with them. They also took much loot. Returning home, other Letts met them on the road, going again into Ungannia. What the first left, these took. What the first neglected, these took care of. Those who had escaped from the first were killed by these. Into the regions and villages which the first had not penetrated, these went, and, taking many spoils and captives, they returned. As they were returning, they again met still other Letts on the road into Ungannia. Whatever was left undone by the earlier men was fully completed by these. They killed all the men whom they caught: they spared neither the rich nor the aged; all were condemned to the sword. Russin, however, as the others were doing to avenge their friends, killed all whom he took, some by roasting, others by some other cruel death. When these men had returned to their forts, still other Letts from Beverin started out with a few men. They crossed through the woods into the province of Saccalia, which is called Hallist.³²

In his chronicle Henry also gives other examples in which this division of the road and the forest is obvious. We find the chronicler complaining about the conditions when fighting the Lithuanians, forcing the Germans to go first into battle, ‘since the road was narrow because of the nearby forest’, which obviously the Germans would not fight in.³³ Only very seldom do the Germans actually enter the forests of the Baltic. They needed to have local forces with them. I have in fact found only four such examples in all of Henry’s chronicle, and in every instance, the Germans were accompanied by their native allies: sometime in the second half of the 1180s the first missionary bishop to Livonia, Meinhard (r. 1186–96), fled to the forests together with the people of Üxküll (Latv. Ikšķile) to avoid raids from

³⁰ HCL XXII.3, p. 150: ‘... per viam cantantes redierunt...’

³¹ HCL XXII.3, p. 150; Brundage, p. 169.

³² HCL XV.7, pp. 94–5; Brundage, p. 116.

³³ HCL XXV.4, p. 184; Brundage, p. 202.

the Lithuanians.³⁴ We learn of how some Germans, pursuing a band of Russians in 1208, came across a number of 'treacherous fugitives' in the forests and swamps, whom they then 'killed with a cruel death, as they deserved, and thus rooted out traitors from those regions.'³⁵ In 1211 some Germans, in the company of the Livish leader Caupo (d. 1217), entered the forest and swamps. A three-day journey ended in terrible losses, since, as we learn, 'Their horses gave out on the road and about a hundred of them fell down and died.'³⁶ In the same year, Theodoric, a brother of Bishop Albert of Riga (r. 1199–1229), together with a nobleman, Bertold of Wenden (d. 1217), entered into the forests to find fugitives. Apparently, on this occasion, the Germans stumbled into one of the hiding places of the local pagans. Henry reports that they encountered an enclosure in the densest part of the forest. Here, the pagans had felled the trees 'on all sides so that when the army came they could save themselves and their possessions.'³⁷ On most other occasions, the Germans would simply send in some of their allied local tribes to pursue the pagan fugitives and drag them out of the woods.³⁸

To Henry, the roads, then, seem to symbolize orderliness, method and planning – in short, a Christian cultivated landscape – whereas the forests represent the uncultured, the chaotic and – in an Isidorian sense – the 'de-viant'.³⁹ This feature of the uncultured forests in opposition to the cultured roads and other components of a controlled nature or human landscape becomes especially clear when Henry describes the region of Vironia (Ger. Wierland, Est. Virumaa):

They took with them the Saccalians and even the Ungannians and marched into Jerwan. They chose guides for themselves from among the Jerwanians and they spent the whole night entering Wierland, a very beautiful and fertile land with level fields.⁴⁰

³⁴ HCL I.5, p. 3.

³⁵ HCL XII.1, p. 58; Brundage, p. 79.

³⁶ HCL XV.7, p. 94; Brundage, p. 115.

³⁷ HCL XV.7, p. 96; Brundage, p. 117.

³⁸ HCL XV.7, p. 96.

³⁹ The forests were in fact so disorderly and chaotic that they did not even make it possible to count the number of men killed in battle or pursuit: 'After all the Estonians had been put to flight, the Livonians, Letts and Saxons pursued them and killed some of them in the woods. The number of the dead ran almost to a thousand – nay, they were innumerable, for in the woods and swamps they could not be counted.' HCL XX.3, p. 136; Brundage, p. 163.

⁴⁰ HCL XXIII.7, p. 159; Brundage, p. 178: '... terra fertilis et pulcherrima et camporum planicie spaciosa ...'

Here the Vironia region is firmly established as the antithesis of the otherwise densely forested landscapes. Henry feels the landscape opening itself to him: it is spacious in opposition to the dense forests; it is fertile in opposition to the forests in which people die of hunger and thirst; and it is beautiful (*pulcher*) in contrast to the gloomy (*tenebrosa*) places of refuge in the forest. To my knowledge, this is one of only two instances where Henry allows himself what superficially seems a purely 'aesthetic' designation. Henry has no apparent need to describe the landscape further. What matters to him is the fertility, spaciousness and beauty of this landscape.

Of course, Henry is not at all alone in European literature when considering some landscapes beautiful and others not. The literary scholar Ernst Robert Curtius made famous the literary topos *locus amoenus*, claiming that this forms the principal motif of all nature descriptions from the Roman period to the sixteenth century.⁴¹ However, Henry seems quite at odds with some of the other Christian writers of his day, who would consider, for example, the solitude of forests as almost paradisaical and a perfect place for contemplation, thus combining beauty with a purely religious purpose. Peter Damian (c. 1007–72), for instance, tells of the young Romuald (d. 1027), that 'whenever he went hunting and entered a *locus amoenus* in the woods, would feel his soul burn with desire for the desert, and would be saying within himself, "Oh, how well hermits could live in these recesses of the forest, how perfectly they would be able to contemplate quietly here, away from all the disturbance of worldly noise".'⁴² On a quite

⁴¹ Ernst Robert Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages* (Princeton, 1990), pp. 183–202. Leonid Arbusow, *Colores Rhetorici*, p. 73 has noticed this phrase in Henry's chronicle. Arbusow connects it to Curtius's observations, arguing that the precise notion of the place as beautiful and spacious is what puts Henry's phrase directly into the category of *locus amoenus*, as defined by Curtius.

⁴² John Howe, 'Creating Symbolic Landscapes: Medieval Development of Sacred Space', in *Inventing Medieval Landscapes: Senses of Place in Western Europe*, ed. John Howe and Michael Wolfe (Gainesville, FL, 2002), pp. 208–23 (here 210–11). Howe goes on to relate how St Bernard of Clairvaux (c. 1090–1153) would state in a letter that, if religiously dedicated, you would 'find more [by] labouring amongst the woods than you ever will amongst books. Woods and stones will teach you what you can never hear from any master. Do you imagine you cannot suck honey from the rocks and oil from the hardest stone; that the mountains do not drop sweetness and the hills flow with milk and honey; that the valleys are not filled with corn?' (Howe, 'Creating Symbolic Landscapes', p. 211). This phrase by St Bernard is also quoted by Le Goff, 'The Wilderness', p. 54. Clearly, the last description from St Bernard would be more in line with the ideals of Henry as well. After all, *loci amoeni* could be shaped and improved, were we to believe the Christian authors. See Howe, 'Creating Symbolic Landscapes', p. 211.

different note, in his *Topographia Hibernica*, Gerald of Wales would write of the Irish as a people stuck in an early phase of evolution:

This is a people of forest-dwellers, and inhospitable; a people living off beasts and like beasts; a people that still adheres to the most primitive way of pastoral living. For as humanity progresses from the forests to the fields, and towards village life and civil society, this people is too lazy for agriculture and is heedless of material comfort; and they positively dislike the rules and legalities of civil intercourse; thus they have been unable and unwilling to abandon their traditional life of forest and pasture.⁴³

To Gerald, of course, only the civilizing effects of the invasion of Henry II (r. 1154–89) would make sure that this people were thoroughly brought up-to-date. Henry of Livonia would maybe have felt himself more in agreement with the views of Gerald of Wales than with those of the religious writers just mentioned. Surely, he would not have considered the dense forests of the Baltic to be places for contemplation and religious improvement. However, Henry would probably agree with these writers when it came to regarding some parts of the landscape as, in a way, religiously charged: humanly cultivated land – involving without doubt the clearing of forests! – is his ideal landscape, and it is to such landscape that Henry's religious connotations are connected, thus in a way fusing the insights of writers like Gerald and St Bernard.⁴⁴ This way, at least, we can maybe better understand Henry's reasoning when, following the Latin Christian conquest of Dorpat in 1224 and the ensuing peace agreement with the neighbouring peoples, he states that:

The Estonians left their forts and rebuilt their burnt-out villages and churches. The Livonians and Letts, too, did likewise. They came out of the hiding places in the forests in which they had hidden now for many years in times of war and

⁴³ *Topographia Hibernica*, III.10. Quoted from Joep Leerssen, 'Wildness, Wilderness, and Ireland: Medieval and Early-Modern Patterns in the Demarcation of Civility', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 56/1 (1995), 25–39 (here 30). Leerssen states further of Gerald's views of the Irish: 'In short, the Irish are what Gerald calls a *gens silvestris*, a term which serves to describe their habitat and their lifestyle and proves their cultural inferiority, even their lack of true humanity.' See also Robert Bartlett, *The Making of Europe: Conquest, Colonization and Cultural Change 950–1350* (London, 1993) for an excellent overview of medieval Christian expansionism, which includes both the Western Isles and the Baltic.

⁴⁴ Still, it must be remembered that we have in fact no indication that Henry had actually read anything by these authors. The examples are only used here in an attempt to bring the themes inherent in Henry's chronicle together with elements of European literature. Other paradigmatic authors besides the ones mentioned could be listed instead.

each man returned to his village and his fields. They plowed and sowed in great security, such as they had not had for the previous forty years, for both before the preaching of God's word and after their baptism, the Lithuanians and other peoples had never given them any rest or security. Now, therefore, they rested, rejoicing in their fields and their labours, and there was no one who terrified them.⁴⁵

The opposition between order and chaos, between Christian (culture) and pagan (nature), is also visible when Henry relates how the pagans came out from their hiding places in the woods to obtain food. The food they wanted so desperately was bread – the product, of course, exactly of an orderly, or in other words cultivated, landscape.⁴⁶ Man, then, is only brought back to his original meaning of life – which of course is to till the soil, like Adam and Eve – when a true, everlasting Christian peace has been established.

The (Pagan) Sacrality of Forests

That notions of cultivation and non-cultivation were somehow connected to notions of civilization and wilderness is also testified to by Isidore of Seville, referred to above. Isidore in his *Etymologies* directly highlights the opposition between cultivation and non-cultivation:

Wildernesses (*desertum*) are so called because they are not planted (*scere*), and therefore, in a manner of speaking, they are abandoned (*deserere*), as are wooded and mountainous areas, places that are the opposite of fruitful regions that have the richest soil.⁴⁷

Actually, only very seldom do the Christians in Henry's chronicle enter the forests themselves. The dragging out of the pagans from their hiding places is almost always reportedly performed by other – former or allied – pagans,

⁴⁵ HCL XXIX.1, pp. 207–8; Brundage, p. 229: '... de latibus silvarum egredientes ...'. The quote in fact contains a reference to John 7:53. Compare Henry's '... rediit unusquisque in villam suam ...' with John's: '... et reversi sunt unuquisque in domum suam'.

⁴⁶ Cf. HCL XIX.3, p. 124; also XI.5, p. 52.

⁴⁷ *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*, XIV, viii, 31, p. 299, cols 1–2. Here, as we can see, the dichotomy in Isidore's conceptualizations cannot quite be upheld simply by the apparent semantics in the Latin words for 'wilderness' or 'fruitful regions'. Rather, he argues by way of immediate similarity in the words and only establishes his oppositions by alluding to some sort of common sense or observation.

sometimes following the orders of the Germans. And when we read that armed Christians in fact do enter the woods, they are always in the company of their native allies. Thus, Henry in a sense displays a marked anxiety when it comes to the forests. These are not the beautiful, airy, green ones we all know from Romantic literature. The forests are sites of violent ambushes and of deviant behaviour; they are uncultivated chaotic residences of refugees. A forest was not a *locus amoenus* to Henry, but rather a *locus horribilis*. However, a *locus horribilis* can be made into a *locus amoenus*, as we will see below.

This opposition between wild and uncultivated areas on the one hand and man-made and levelled agrarian fields on the other of course highlights – and this has been hinted at earlier in this chapter – an analogous dichotomy between paganism and Christianity. Linda Kaljundi has investigated Henry's conceptions of places and peoples. She states: 'As the forests are described to hide many idolatrous things in them, entering into the forest means also entering the idolatrous landscape.'⁴⁸ That some pagans worshipped nature in some form, and often used natural sites in the landscape as places of worship rather than man-made religious buildings,⁴⁹ was not something unknown to Western Christians. That this could take place in forests was no secret to them either. To cite Isidore again:

A grove (*lucus*) is a place enclosed by dense trees that keep light (*lux*, gen. *lucis*) from reaching the ground. It is also possible that the word is derived from lighting (*conlucere*) of many lights, which were kindled there because of pagan beliefs and rituals.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Linda Kaljundi, *Waiting for the Barbarians: The Imagery, Dynamics and Functions of the Other in Northern German Missionary Chronicles, 11th–Early 13th Centuries. The Gestae Hammaburgensis Ecclesiae Pontificum of Adam of Bremen, Chronica Slavorum of Helmold of Bosau, Chronica Slavorum of Arnold of Lübeck, and Chronicon Livoniae of Henry of Livonia* (unpublished MA dissertation, University of Tartu, 2005), p. 259.

⁴⁹ Because of the scarcity of reliable written sources, Pre-Christian Baltic pagan religion (mythology and ritual) remains very difficult to investigate. Most of the information used by modern historians of religion for this region stems from folklore material collected in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. See Marija Gimbutas, 'The Pre-Christian Religion of Lithuania', in *La Cristianizzazione della Lituania. Atti del Colloquio Internazionale di storia ecclesiastica in occasione del VI centenario della Lituania cristiana (1387–1987)*, ed. Paulius Rabikauskas (Vatican City, 1989), pp. 13–25 and the literature listed herein. Also Haralds Biezais, *Die Hauptgöttinnen der alten Letten* (Uppsala, 1955); Biezais, *Die Gottegestalt der lettischen Volksreligion* (Stockholm, 1961) and Biezais, *Die himmlische Götterfamilie der alten Letten* (Stockholm, 1972).

⁵⁰ *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*, XIV, viii, 30, p. 299, col. 1.

Henry mentions pagan sacred groves several times in his chronicle. These sacred groves were venerated in and for themselves. Thus, apparently the sacredness of some of these groves consisted both of their form created *by* nature and their place *in* nature: they were perceived as places where numinous feelings could be more easily aroused than in other places.⁵¹ Sometimes the sacred grove and the pagan god are conflated in Henry's narrative:

The Christian army rejoiced, shouted, and implored God. The enemy also cried out, rejoicing in their Tharapita. They called upon their sacred grove, the Christians upon Jesus.⁵²

This story could be a reflection of the fact that the pagans of the Baltic actually did not regard the groves and the gods as two different things.⁵³ Apparently, they did not, as Christians do, distinguish between God and the place of His worship. Henry relates that in one of these groves the pagan god Tharapita was actually said to have been born and to have resided until leaving for the island of Ösel (Est. Saaremaa).⁵⁴ Interestingly, this is the second instance in Henry's chronicle of a specific landscape being considered beautiful: the pagan god Tharapita's birthplace is characterized as consisting of 'a mountain and a lovely forest'.⁵⁵ Why, suddenly, is a part of this pagan forest considered 'lovely' or beautiful (*silva pulcherrima*) by Henry? The answer to this question is, I believe, connected with the actions which immediately followed his description: standing in this grove, Henry would look on while his fellow priest committed a deliberate act of de-sacralization, when 'he went and cut down the images and likenesses which had been made there of their gods'.⁵⁶ Added to this, we are told

⁵¹ For a somewhat formalistic, but nevertheless inspiring, juxtaposition of paganism and Christianity in the Baltic, see Przymislaw Urbanczyk, 'The Politics of Conversion in North Central Europe', in *The Cross Goes North: Processes of Conversion in Northern Europe, AD 300-1300*, ed. Martin Carver (York, 2004), pp. 15-27. See also Stefan Brink, 'Mythologizing Landscape: Place and Space of Cult and Myths', in *Kontinuitäten und Brüche in der Religionsgeschichte. Festschrift für Anders Hultgård zu seinem 65. Geburtstag am 23.12.2001*, ed. Michael Stausberg (Berlin, 2001), pp. 76-112.

⁵² HCL XXX.4, p. 218; Brundage, p. 242.

⁵³ Of course, the wording in Henry's chronicle could also be taken as a warning not to take Henry at face value. Maybe he did not fully comprehend the Baltic pagan religion(s).

⁵⁴ HCL XXIV.5, p. 175.

⁵⁵ HCL XXIV.5, p. 175; Brundage, p. 193: '... ubi erat mons et silva pulcherrima ...'. Brundage translates the Latin *pulcher* as 'beautiful' in the first instance and 'lovely' in this second instance.

⁵⁶ HCL XXIV.5, p. 175; Brundage, p. 194: 'Et ibat alter sacerdos succidens imagines et similitudines deorum suorum ibi factas ...'.

that 'The natives wondered greatly that blood did not flow and believed the more in the priests' sermons.'⁵⁷ This is of course exactly why this part of a pagan forest can be considered beautiful by Henry: it has now been conquered and made into a Christian environment. Unfortunately, we still do not know how beauty actually looked to Henry, since his lack of description leaves us with no other clues to this than the ones given by our own imagination.

At other times the pagan holy places seem taboo for the Christians. Following a battle with a band of Öselians, we learn that Germans 'pursued them from the village into the field, killing them through the fields up to their sacred grove.'⁵⁸ Here, at some apparent boundary between the pagan holy site itself and the surrounding landscape, the Germans seemingly stopped. '*Usque ad lucum*', Henry writes – not '*in luco*'. Stopped outside this holy place, the Germans 'stained their holy woods with the blood of many of their slain men'. Brundage's translation is powerful here, offering 'stained', which is, of course, a metaphorically very strong verb; as is the original *maculaverunt* used by Henry. What was going on? Did the Germans not dare enter? Why didn't they simply destroy this pagan holy place? Did Henry actually regard the act of killing *outside* this locality as an act of desecration in itself, and thus just as effective as an actual, physical destruction of the site?⁵⁹ Obviously, what this story highlights, but which I shall not go further into in this chapter, is the fact that the Christians at times actually regarded the pagan sanctuaries and the pagan pantheon as an otherworldly force which had to be taken into account. Also, the pagan religious world obviously did have power, albeit not of the good, Christian kind, but rather as the abode of some sort of demons,

⁵⁷ HCL XXIV.5, p. 175; Brundage, p. 194. Stories of the desacralization of pagan holy places abound in Christian literature, but sometimes the de-sacralizers are reminded that it might not always be such a good idea to demolish the pagan sanctuaries. See the letter from Pope Gregory the Great (r. 590–604) to Mellitus (d. 624) in 601 (as rendered in the Venerable Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*), ordering him not to tear down the pagan sanctuaries because it would not help the mission, but actually might even hinder it. Instead, the missionaries should have re-dedicated the buildings and shrines to the service of the Christian God. To Gregory a degree of pragmatism worked much better than a high-profile destruction. See Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (Oxford, 1969), pp. 106–9. For a discussion of the de-sacralization of paganism in the Baltic, see Torben K. Nielsen, 'The Making of New Cultural Landscapes'.

⁵⁸ HCL XXIII.9, p. 166; Brundage, p. 185: 'Et persequuti sunt eos Theuthonici de villa in campum, occidentes eos per campos usque ad lucum ipsorum ...'

⁵⁹ HCL XXIII.9, p. 166; Brundage, p. 185: '... et ipsam sanctam silvarum ipsorum multorum interfectorum suorum sanguine maculaverunt.'

able to do harm and damage if allowed.⁶⁰ The forests can also be seen as sites for pagan religion, as in the story of the Liv who came out from his *latibulum* to report a vision:

I saw the god of the Livonians, who foretold the future to us. He was, indeed, an image growing out of a tree from the breast upwards, and he told me that a Lithuanian army would come tomorrow.

In the following phrase it becomes evident that the Christian priest takes pagan beliefs quite seriously, while on the surface pretending otherwise:

The priest, knowing this to be indeed an illusion of the devil, because at this time of autumn there was no road by which the Lithuanians could come, continuing in his prayers, commended himself to God. When, in the morning, they heard or saw nothing that the Livonian's phantom had foretold, they all came together. The priest then execrated their idolatry and affirmed that a phantom of this kind was an illusion of the demons.⁶¹

Apparently, it was only the state of the roads in autumn – and of course the non-appearance of the Lithuanians – which convinced the priest that the Livonian could not have experienced a proper vision in his 'enchanted forest'. Had the Livonian told his story in wintertime, the priest would have been likely to believe his story.

This story highlights yet another feature of the relationship between Christianity and the paganism of the woods. If in Henry's chronicle we find the pagan gods manifested in the dense woods, in which landscape can we then encounter the Christian God?

Actually, the Christian God manifests himself in the world on several occasions in Henry's chronicle. In congruence maybe with Henry's symbolic

⁶⁰ This is a theme in Raza Mažeika, 'Granting Power to Enemy Gods in the Chronicles of the Baltic Crusades', in *Medieval Frontiers: Concepts and Practices*, ed. David Abulafia and Nora Berend (Aldershot, 2002), pp. 153–71. Mažeika offers the following conclusion to her very interesting investigation, drawing mostly on the chronicle of Henry and slightly more recent works (dating approximately from the first decades of the fourteenth century): '... Baltic pagans sometimes treat Christian religion as a formality to be accepted or cast off as convenient; yet the pagans sometimes grant power to Jesus as a physical, powerful enemy. More surprisingly, crusaders fighting the Baltic pagans are portrayed as granting power to pagan deities and acknowledging the efficacy of pagan rites' (Mažeika, 'Granting Power', p. 171).

⁶¹ HCL X.14, p. 35; Brundage, p. 66.

interpretations of the forests as the abode of demonic practices and the birthplace for pagan gods, it is no big surprise to find that all of the interventions from the Christian God occur in the maritime parts of the region: His miracles are never performed in the woods, but only at sea. Like the landscape so greatly appreciated by Henry (see above), the sea is also described as 'wide and spacious'.⁶² The Virgin Mary is named 'the Star of the Sea'.⁶³ The sea is considered a good landscape, in that it annually brings the armed pilgrims to relieve the Christians from their tribulations in Riga, surrounded as they often were by hostile pagans and attacked by Russians.⁶⁴ Similarly, the waters of the rivers floating into the sea bring rescue, in that they serve to break pagan blockades:

The Rigans received the pilgrims with joy and blessed the Lord, Who had comforted His people in this present tribulation. The waters of the rivers wishing to have their strong course free and likewise the sea, in the violence of storms, afterwards broke up the objects which the Oesilians had put in the depths.⁶⁵

In a naval battle off the coast of Ösel in 1215, dangerous floating fires lit by the pagans threaten the Germans. Aroused by the prayers of the bishop of Riga, God changes the direction of the wind to let the fire float back. Later in the same battle, prayers to the Mother of God secured that two of the Öselian ships collided and sank.⁶⁶ Only Bishop Philip of Ratzeburg's (r. 1204–15) prayers to God would save the Christians.⁶⁷ Several other examples could be put forward, offering perhaps the conclusion that Henry, having come originally across the sea to the Baltic, felt more safe and familiar in this environment.

The forests served as a refuge for the Baltic people in times of distress and suffering, but to Henry they were in fact seedbeds for violent ambushes against

⁶² HCL XXV.2, p. 178; Brundage, pp. 197–8.

⁶³ HCL XXV.2, p. 178; Brundage, p. 198.

⁶⁴ HCL XI.9, p. 57 relates a story from 1208 in which a Russian attack was avoided because God sent adverse winds to the harbour of Riga which stopped the armed pilgrims from returning to Germany. The Russians turned back when they learned that the armed pilgrims had had to postpone their departure.

⁶⁵ HCL XIX.2, p. 124; Brundage, pp. 143–4.

⁶⁶ HCL XIX.5, p. 128–9; Brundage, pp. 149–50. Henry quotes from the Breviary hymn *Ave Maris Stella*, sung at vespers on the feasts of the Virgin. The scene described probably took place on Thursday 2 July, which is the Feast of the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin, when this hymn would have been sung in office.

⁶⁷ Philip himself did not like to be out at sea, if we are to believe Henry. We learn that he 'abstained from the solemnities of the Mass only with many groans while he was at sea, although he took communion every other day between Sunday services' (HCL XIX.6, p. 131; Brundage, p. 151).

the Christians. For the indigenous people, the forest would be the residence of their religious pantheon and in itself a place of awe, where numinous feelings could be stirred. To Henry, on the other hand, the forest was the abode of demonic rituals and devilish phantasms. His perception of the dense and dark forests in the Baltic in a sense seems to have underlined his own thorough alienation and feeling of 'Otherness' when confronted with the pagan peoples. These pagan peoples were in violent opposition to exactly that specific kind of Christian civilization which Henry, however, considered a precious gift as well as the only way to salvation. Clearly, he would have regarded the local landscape as both frightening and awe-inspiring.