

noch deren Umsetzung zu gewährleisten. In der livländischen Verfassung dominierten die territorialen Strukturen und eine territoriale Identität. Die horizontale Integration der Stände und ihre gemeinsame soziale Identität waren zu schwach ausgebildet, um Livlands Verfasstheit auf eine neue Grundlage zu stellen und einen einheitlichen Staat zu errichten.

SUMMARY

*The Livonian Diet during the Era of
Wolter von Plettenberg (1494–1535)*

This article is a contribution to the historiographical debates about the character of the political system of late medieval Livonia. It focuses on the institution of the Diet (*Landtag*) during the reign of Wolter von Plettenberg, the influential Master of the Livonian branch of the Teutonic Order. The Diet was the only institution that gave political unity to the conglomerate of princely territories of Livonia (the Order, the Archbishopric of Riga and the Bishoprics of Tartu, Saaremaa and Curonia). The broad question posed in the article is whether the Diet should be viewed principally as an assembly of estates (clergy, nobility, towns) or as a gathering of territories. This, in turn, would enable us to decide whether or not Livonia was developing the characteristics of a unitary state or remained a loosely bound confederation until its end in the Livonian War.

The analysis of the functions, structure and procedures of the Diet show that it was an irregular institution with restricted responsibilities and authority. Its main function was to organize Livonian common foreign and defence policy and to solve internal political conflicts. In these issues the Diet was acknowledged as the highest authority and the decisions were usually successfully carried out. In internal matters where common legislation was seen as desirable, such as monetary reform, export restrictions, delivery of escaped peasants or foundation of educational establishments, the authority of the Diet was not universally recognized. Therefore, the Diet seldom reached binding resolutions when dealing with these issues, and those reached were rarely carried out in practice. A major reason for the inefficiency of the Diet was the lack of an executive organ operating on the level of Livonia as a whole. The execution of resolutions fell to princes in their separate territories, which increased the power of the territories at the expense of the Diet.

The Diet was summoned and directed according to 15th-century custom, which gave equal importance to the Livonian Master and the Archbishop

of Riga. Yet, it seems that Plettenberg managed to dominate most Diets of the period. This was partly due to the division of labour between the Master and the Archbishop: the Master was responsible for the coordination of the foreign policy and defence of the land; the Archbishop for internal matters, church and education. The main functions of the Diet during the period under observation coincided with the responsibilities of the Master, while the matters brought forward by the Archbishop remained secondary.

The study of the structure and procedures of the Diet do not give an unequivocal answer to the question whether it was primarily an assembly for the negotiation between the embassies of the territories or a typical early modern proto-parliamentary assembly where the corporations negotiated with their lords about reciprocal rights and duties. The form of the negotiations was largely similar to the *Landtage* in German princely territories and the *Reichstage* in the Empire, where the plenary sessions alternated with negotiations within corporations. However, the Livonian Diet was different in several important respects. Firstly, the structure of the Diet was a unique combination of corporate and territorial principles: while the nobility and burghers of all territories of Livonia formed two *curiae* along the usual lines of social estates, the higher clergy – bishops with their chapters and the Order – formed two separate *curiae*. Secondly, the combination of corporate and territorial principles was also reflected in the form of negotiations: a large part of the negotiations were held not in *curiae* or in plenary sessions but within territorial embassies. Thus, the Diet was both a forum where lords and their estates negotiated their differences, and a meeting place for the leadership of the Livonian territories.

The negotiations tended to take place in *curiae* when the subject matter concerned the rights and duties of the estates towards their lords. However, such matters were usually not regarded as belonging to the sphere of authority of the Diet but were to be solved on the territorial level. When, on the other hand, specific political issues or conflicts between territorial lords were discussed, the negotiations happened largely within territorial embassies and the common viewpoint of the territory was then presented to the plenary meeting.

The most autonomous among the corporations were the large Hanseatic towns of Livonia (Riga, Tartu and Tallinn), whose specific trade-related interests often diverged from those of their lords. The noble corporations and chapters, on the other hand, did not form a distinct interest group on the Livonian level, since their only concern was the preservation of their privileges within territories. The events of the 1520s demonstrated that as long as these were guaranteed, the nobility had no incentive to cooperate with their fellows in other parts of Livonia. Therefore no institutionalized union of all Livonian noble corporations emerged.

The analysis of the procedures of the Diet revealed a number of factors that inhibited its decision-making capacity. The most significant of those

was the restricted mandate of the representatives of the corporations and the lords who did not appear in person. The other problem was the demand for consensus in the plenary session. The lords were well aware why the Diets often proved fruitless and made an effort to improve their procedures. One method was to send the propositions to other lords and corporations prior to the Diet so that they could give a more precise mandate to their envoys. Secondly, the convenors of the Diet insisted on giving a broader mandate to the representatives, which, as it appeared, was not consistent with sixteenth-century notions of legality.

The article concludes that in the era of Wolter von Plettenberg, the Livonian Diet was first and foremost a forum for negotiations between the embassies of Livonian territories led by their lords. The only estate that exercised autonomous policy were the burghers of the Hanseatic towns. The participation of other political estates (noble corporations and chapters) in the Diet was an expression of the significant role they had acquired in the government of their territories. The rise of the role of nobilities on the territorial level increased their corporate consciousness on the Livonian level as well but it was not sufficient to generate new institutions in addition to the Diet. The preoccupation of the Diet with specific issues of foreign policy, defence and internal conflicts, and the lack of authority over internal legislation demonstrates the weakness of Livonian regional integration. The common identity of the Livonian estates lacked the muscle to transform Livonia into a single, unified state. This proved fatal in the 1550s when the Livonian territories failed to rally to each other's aid to face the growing threat from Russia and fell victim to the Livonian War.