Introduction

The Livländische Reimchronik (or Livonian Rhymed Chronicle) is the oldest surviving document of the literature of the Teutonic Order. In 12,017 verses it tells of the Christianization of Livonia, first under the Sword Brothers, and later under the knights of the Teutonic Order. In 1198 the first crusade to Livonia took place under Bishop Bertolt, who had convinced Pope Innocent III to consider the crusades to Livonia as of equal importance to those to the Holy Land (Hucker 1989, 39-64). The Order of the Sword Brothers was founded in 1202/3, when the ruling Bishop Albert could not secure any outside support for his missionary work within Livonia. Following later negotiations with the papal legate William of Modena, the Order received one third of the conquered land, the archbishops received the second, and the rising city of Riga the final third. After the defeat of the Order of the Sword Brothers in the devastating battle of Siaule in 1236, the Teutonic Order took over its legacy. Battles and numerous minor quarrels took place between the Order and the various pagan tribes up to the conquest of Livonia in 1290, when the Teutonic Order finally defeated the long-resisting Semigallians, who either surrendered or fled to neighboring Samogitia. The Livonian Rhymed Chronicle covers these
events up to 1290 and consists, for the most part, of descriptions of the
knights' encounters with various indigenous tribes. Due to the
topography of the region, the crusaders usually timed the major raids
to take place in winter when the cold and ice of the season made it
possible for the heavily armed knights to penetrate the deep woods
with their numerous bogs, lakes and rivers. The pagan tribes on the
other hand attempted to use the terrain to their advantage throughout
the year by engaging the knights and brothers in numerous smaller
skirmishes. The landscape as represented from the point of view of the
Teutonic Order in the *Livonian Rhymed Chronicle* is thus portrayed as
deceptive and treacherous.

In the following I will first address the *Livländische Reimchronik* as
both a historical and a literary document. In order to explain what we
may (or may not) learn from this text document, I will focus on how
the chronicle affords us a glimpse into the mindset of the Teutonic
Knights at the frontier in Livonia. I will then describe how the chroni-
cler represents the indigenous pagan tribes as foreign others, before
turning to the representation of landscape. I will argue that the land-
 scape resists imperial conquest and instead functions, in the termino-
logy of W. J. T. Mitchell, as an agent: it is actively seeking to seduce
the would-be conquerors. The landscape takes on primeval feminine
attributes, attracting but at the same time evoking fear in the exclu-
sively masculine world of the Teutonic Knights. Finally I will argue
that the representation of landscape exposes a conundrum faced by the
military monk: the dichotomy between absolute obedience and aggres-
sive subjugation. In other words, he lives by two opposing principles:
submission to the Order rules, which require repressed sexuality, and
domination of pagan others in battle, which demand unrelenting ag-
gression.

1. The *Livländische Reimchronik* as a historical and a literary
document

Two chronicles serve as the major sources for the historiography of
medieval Livonia: the Latin *Chronicon Livoniae* composed by Henry

gas had united the Lithuanian lands and established a Lithuanian kingdom in 1253,
and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania expanded in the 14th century as far as the Black
Sea.