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Spreading the Catholic Faith in the Periphery. Jesuit Mission in Polish Livonia (1625–1772)

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ABSTRACT The region of Latgale/Polish Livonia lies at the intersection between the Lutheran northern half of the Baltic region and the Roman Catholic southern part. Almost all of the local German nobility had accepted Lutheranism by the seventeenth century, but the region was politically a part of the Roman Catholic Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, and Jesuit missionaries tried to re-Catholicise this region. The religious contact between the Catholic missionaries and the surrounding Lutheran and pagan countryside was diligently noted in the Jesuit reports, which became less polemical during the time period as the region's inhabitants turned to the Catholic Church. While the missionaries were solitary fighters for Catholicism in 1625, they had become ordinary representatives of the local elite by 1772, when the region was ceded to the Russian Empire.

KEYWORDS Latgale, Polish Livonia, Jesuits, mission, Roman Catholicism, paganism, Lutheranism

Introduction

[1] The region of Latgale, currently in East Latvia, is located on the crossroads between the core lands of three Christian confessions—Russian Orthodox to the east, Catholics to the south and Lutherans to the north. The region is still multi-religious, with all three confessions—in addition to the Orthodox Old Believers—visibly present, even though Latvia is a largely secular country (Rimestad 2021). The origins of this multi-confessional landscape lie in early modernity, when the region transferred from Baltic German to Polish and eventually Russian control. This article traces the role of the Jesuit missionaries who came to what was then called Inflanty in 1625 and their encounters with local heterodox believers and communities until the incorporation of the region into the Russian Empire during the first Polish partition in 1772. The focus is on how the Jesuit missionaries presented the region, since there are few non-Jesuit sources available for the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Moreover, the historiography of the territory that eventually became Latgale is particularly flawed because

of its historical trajectory as a plaything between three empires—Sweden, Poland-Lithuania, and Russia.

[2] The article focuses on the way the arrival and presence of the Jesuits contributed to establishing a balance between dynamics and stability in the region. The Jesuits clearly sought to bring the inhabitants back to the bosom of the Roman Catholic Church. In the tumults of the previous century, most of them had welcomed the Lutheran Reformation or even reverted to paganism due to a lack of priests. The Jesuits had come to re-establish order in a war-torn and desolate region, as the opening sentence of the very first surviving annual report of the Daugavpils[1] Mission from 1634 shows:

> [3] Dunenburgensis arx et ager Livoniae, ut amplitudine terminorum longe lateque diffusus, sic senticeto labis haereticae altaque ignorantia divinarum rerum horridus, quotidie se praebet subigendam mitius. (Kleijntjenss 1940, 261)

> [4] Dünaburg and the region of Livonia every day becomes easier to subdue, even though it extends widely within its ample borders and is cluttered with the thorn bushes of heresies and the deepest ignorance in things divine.[2]

[5] In other words, the Jesuits seemed to have a lot of work to do in this region, which the reports of the following centuries show. This article presents an insight into what the Jesuits termed “the thorn bushes of heresy and ignorance of things divine,” highlighting the religious contact in Polish Livonia. The first section sets the scene by introducing the region and the Jesuit order. In a second section, the struggle with paganism and Lutheranism over the seventeenth century is analysed. The third section details the way the Jesuits helped establish a lasting tradition of Catholicism in Polish Livonia during the eighteenth century, whereas the final fourth section brings the analysis together in a conclusion.

Polish Livonia and the Jesuits

[6] The modern city of Daugavpils is situated on the Daugava river (Düna in German, Dźwina in Polish), some 200 km upstream from the Latvian capital of Riga. The place was first mentioned in writing in 1275, when the Livonian Order built the Dünaburg stone castle (Selart 2018, 201–2). The Livonian Order was a missionary order from Northern Germany which had vowed to Christianise the Livonians. The Livonian and Lithuanian tribes were the last people of Europe to be Christianised, with the Lithuanians officially accepting Christianity only in 1386. The Dünaburg castle was erected to protect the Livonian order from the pagan Lithuanians, who repeatedly attacked and besieged the castle, until the region was more or less subdued by 1313 (Selart 2018, 205).

[7] On the eve of the Reformation, all of what is today Latvia and Estonia was firmly in the hands of German feudal lords, while the political rule of so-called medieval Livonia belonged variously to independent cities, the Livonian Order, the Bishops, or the Danish and Swedish king. By the sixteenth century, all territories were loosely gathered together in the Livonian Confederation. However, the Reformation, which spread very quickly in the Livonian cities,

1 This is the current Latvian name of the capital of Latgale. From its foundation in the Middle Ages, it was better known by its German name Dünaburg (or Latinised “Dunenburg”). In Polish, it is called Dyneburg or Dźwińsk.

2 All translations are the author’s own, unless otherwise indicated.

spelled an end to the rule of both the bishops and the Livonian Order, leaving a power vacuum which the kingdoms of Denmark and Sweden, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, as well as the Principality of Muscovy attempted to fill during the Livonian War (1558–1582). Livonia changed hands several times. Most of the region ended up under the Polish Crown, but in 1621 the latter lost it again to Sweden. That is, all but the region around the fortress of Dünaburg. After a century of war and upheavals, Polish Livonia (Inflanty in Polish, Latgale in Latvian) was to remain Polish for the next century and a half, even if Russian troops occasionally passed through on their way to attack Sweden (Dybaś and Jeziorski 2021).

[8] Legally speaking, however, Polish Livonia only officially became a regular part of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth after the treaty of Oliva from 1660, and the region was incorporated into the Commonwealth as one of its 33 *województwo* (counties) with the treaty of Andrusowo of 1667. From 1620 to 1667, it had been part of the Wenden *województwo*, which also encompassed the Livonian regions that had been lost to the Swedes. So, for half a century, it had been a kind of no-man's-land without a formal administration. However, due to wars and the concomitant epidemics and famine, it was a very sparsely populated region in the seventeenth century, with a population estimated at only around 50000 inhabitants for an area of 15000 km^2 (about the size of Northern Ireland, Dybaś and Jeziorski 2021, 227). The city of Dünaburg, which had received city privileges in 1583, is estimated to have had 400–500 inhabitants in 1710 (Dybaś and Jeziorski 2021, 231).

[9] Even though they did not leave any archival traces before 1634, we know that three Jesuit missionaries arrived in the region in 1625—Petri Culesius, Joannes Stribingius, and Joannes Schwartz (Kleijntjenss 1941, 345–50; Bogdanoviča 2018a, 47). All three originated from Livonia and were proficient in the local language. Moreover, they had all previously been working at the Jesuit college in Riga, which had been evacuated to Wenden (Cēsis in Latvian) when the Swedish army approached in 1621. When the Swedes occupied Wenden four years later, the Jesuits were sent to the last remaining part of Livonia under Polish rule. However, it took them five years to find a permanent residence in the city of Dünaburg and another five years before the Dünaburg Mission was upgraded to become a Residency by the Jesuit Order. The report from 1634, cited above, is therefore most likely the first official report to Rome, as they finally had settled in enough to report about successes. By then, they had also opened a school for which they had requested the help of three more Jesuits.

[10] The Jesuit Order was established in 1540 in the wake of the Reformation by the Basque nobleman Ignatius of Loyola as an order of learned monks that would enter into dialogue with common people in order to benefit their souls (Friedrich 2016). The order grew quickly—from ten monks in 1540 to more than a thousand 15 years later. When establishing the order, which he called Society of Jesus, Ignatius envisaged it to spread knowledge among the peoples in the form of teaching in schools and carrying out mission. This innovative vision acted as a magnet for many young Catholics, who saw the order as a way to share their passion for knowledge with the world and help the spread of Christianity. Within a few decades, there were Jesuit missions all over the globe, acting as a catalyst for globalisation (Banchoff and Casanova 2016). But the Jesuits were also active within Europe, primarily in the peripheries, where they opposed Reformation theology, winning regions back to the Catholic Church, loyal to the Roman Pope. This role had been carved out for the Jesuits especially during the three sessions of the Council of Trient (1545–1563), at which leading Jesuits had been important participants.

[11] So, when the King of Poland-Lithuania, Stefan Bathory (r. 1576–1586), requested help from

the Catholic Church to develop the newly conquered Livonian provinces, ten Jesuit monks were sent to Riga in 1583 and opened a college there (Runce 2021, 305). The Jesuits were not only active in the newly conquered Livonian provinces, but all across Poland-Lithuania, where they were very influential in educating noblemen, future politicians, and priests, even more so than in other European regions (Butterwick-Pawlikowski 2014, 51). The Jesuits were paramount in shaping Early Modern Polish religious consciousness within the Roman-Catholic frame. At the same time, Poland-Lithuania was a multi-religious society where Christians from different confessions lived alongside Muslims and Jews. Protestant protests and disputes over the royal succession had led to the Warsaw Confederation of 1573, which proclaimed freedom of confession in Poland-Lithuania (Kowalski 2001, 489). However, at the end of the sixteenth century, the Catholic Church, with the help of King Sigismund III (r. 1587–1632), regained predominance and pressured non-Catholic Poles into converting while nominally accepting the religious tolerance enshrined in law. The Jesuits, who had been invited to the Commonwealth on various occasions, were one of the main tools for this pressure (Bogdanoviča 2018a, 45), but reformed Franciscans and Capuchins also played a role (Kowalski 2001).

As mentioned above, the Jesuit college in Riga was evacuated to Wenden in 1621 and closed down four years later after the Swedish army had conquered almost all of Livonia, forcing the three remaining Jesuits to look for a new mission field, which they found in the Dünaburg region. Due to a generous gift by a high-ranking nobleman, Aleksander Korwin Gosiewski, they were able to buy the Auleja manor, some 60 kilometres from Dünaburg, setting the foundation for a stable income and permanent residence in the city (Kleijntjenss 1940, 244; Bogdanoviča 2018a, 46). The report from 1650 states that Gosiewski had vowed in 1626 to fund a Catholic Church should the Swedes fail to take Dünaburg. Since they did, he donated the money to the Jesuits that had just arrived (Kleijntjenss 1940, 264). Instead of building a church, though, they purchased the Auleja manor instead. By 1630, a church for the Jesuits in the city of Dünaburg had been built, with funds provided by the city *starosta* (royal administrator), Alphonsus Lacki (Kleijntjenss 1940, 244; Bogdanoviča 2018a, 46). The same Lacki donated another manor to the Jesuits in 1643, further securing their educational activities financially and warranting the upgrade from Mission to Residency status. A Jesuit Mission is a group of Jesuit missionaries in a non-Catholic environment depending on external help, whereas a Residency is a more self-sufficient structural unit within the Society of Jesus, often including an educational institution, which can eventually become a Jesuit College. The Dünaburg Residency achieved this status in 1761 (Kleijntjenss 1940, 255, 441–42). [12]

Because of continuous wars over the following centuries as well as other tragedies, many of the original sources on developments in the Dünaburg region have not survived. However, the main source material, the annual reports of the Jesuit missionaries, still exist, providing a fascinating glimpse into the religious life of the region. The reports survived primarily because the Jesuit emphasis on hierarchy and accountability ensured that all documents and reports were triplicated: one copy for the local archive, one for the Vatican, and one for the Jesuit province, in this case in Vilnius. Only because of the existence of three copies of every document do we still have them, because the archive from Dünaburg itself burnt down in the early nineteenth century (Bogdanoviča 2018b, 30). Moreover, all the documents from these archives were published by Jozef Kleijntjenss (1940, 1941), a Dutch Jesuit priest, also including the documents from the other Jesuit Houses in Livonia. They are therefore more easily accessible than most Jesuit histories from Poland-Lithuania which are not edited (Bogdanoviča 2018b, 30). [13]

Included in the sources are two sets of annual reports—the *Historia Residentia Duneburgensis S. J.* (Kleijntjenss 1940, 261–343) and the *Litterae annuae Residentia Duneburgensis S. J.* (1940, 343–432). The former are economic reports, detailing transactions, construction projects, and war activities, but also information about the local inhabitants and incidences when influential people converted to Catholicism. The latter, which cover more spiritual matters, contain statistics of the administration of the sacraments and the total number of conversions. Besides these reports, which vary widely in their scope and explanatory power, Kleijntjenss included 16 documents from 1640 to 1810 (1940, 433–56) as well as the obituaries of 18 Jesuit fathers working in Dünaburg over the years (1940, 456–65). [14]

This source corpus is the main available source for religious, cultural, and even architectural developments in Polish Livonia over the seventeenth century, as significant complementary sources only appear at a later stage. Using only Jesuit sources as unbiased accounts of the religious contact in such a war-torn region is a dangerous undertaking, as the reports are extremely one-sided and most certainly embellished or tweaked by the chronicler for various reasons. However, as they often provide the only source available, there is no way around them, and they do provide some interesting insights into the everyday life of the Jesuits encountering more or less religiously literate heterodox inhabitants in their quest to re-Catholicise Polish Livonia after a century of war and reformatory upheavals. [15]

Encountering Pagans and Lutherans

The main problem for the Catholic Church in Polish Livonia was that the region had been ravaged by wars and destruction, leaving very few churches open, and even less available priests. Moreover, the German landowning class that remained in the province had all accepted Lutheranism. Because of Polish religious tolerance, according to which the nobility was free to choose their religion, there was nothing the Church could do about this, but it argued that it still had the right to continue to serve the peasantry. Therefore, the Jesuit missionaries in Polish Livonia were first and foremost concerned with providing religious service in the "true" religion—i.e. Roman Catholicism—to the peasants in the countryside. And there, they encountered on the one hand "Lutheran heretics" in the form of the manor lords, and on the other many pagan traditions that had survived both the Livonian Order and the Reformation turmoils. [16]

The Jesuits repeatedly report having to destroy "holy trees." In 1673, for example, a Jesuit missionary decided to cut down a "holy" lime tree. It was only after it became clear to the spectators that nothing bad happened to the missionary that some brave locals helped him finish the job (Kleijntjenss 1940, 247, 355–56). This episode, which employs rhetorical elements also encountered elsewhere, tells the story of an asymmetric religious contact. The Jesuits were eager to preach "pure" Christianity, where elements such as "holy trees" had no place. In the annual reports, the words used to denote these trees are "infernales cacodaemon"—devils from hell—which are hidden from the missionaries and difficult to find because of the boggy landscape and deep forests. [17]

Already the opening sentence of the Jesuit report, referring to the thorn bushes of heresy and deepest ignorance, allude to the "impurity" of the region, which was in dire need of religious decluttering. The Jesuits arrived in Dünaburg precisely in order to help with this cleaning—or controlling—to "subdue the region." In conclusion to the story about the "holy [18]

tree" mentioned above, the chronicler voices the desire that the heretics may be purified (*expiaretur*) through the Catholic rites.

The other religious contact, between Catholics and Lutherans, was also asymmetrical, but in a completely different fashion. For the Lutherans were the German-speaking nobility of the region, which in part was theologically literate (Jeziorski 2019). The Jesuits rarely mentioned their encounters with the Lutheran nobility directly. Two official disputes between Catholic and Lutheran theologians are mentioned, in 1641 and 1671, but both ended in the Jesuit side winning because the Lutherans decided to give up before the dispute started. According to the reports, the Jesuits had become recognised as the religious virtuosi of Polish Livonia, even among Lutheran city burghers. Moreover, the reports are eager to state the number of returnees from Lutheranism (and Calvinism) to the "true" faith, numbers that grew steadily from 28 in 1645 to 660 in 1695 (Kleijntjenss 1940, 249), even if it is possible that these numbers are exaggerated. [19]

The encounter between Lutherans and Catholics is not only captured in Jesuit sources, but can also be grasped, for example, through the testament of Fabian Borch, the manor lord of the Preiļi estate, from 1649. Borch was a stout Lutheran and in his testament, he stipulated that there should never be a non-Lutheran service in the Preiļi estate church and that Catholic missionaries should forever be banned from the estate grounds (Norkārkls 2011, 157). By the end of the century, however, the entire Borch family had become Catholic and Fabian's testament provisions were not upheld any longer. After Johann Dominik (or Jan Andrzej Dominik) Borch converted to Catholicism, he is reported to have personally visited the peasants of his estate to convince them of returning from the Lutheran errors to the Catholic truth (Kleijntjenss 1940, 296–97). This happened to several of the Lutheran manor lords, and by the end of the seventeenth century, almost all Polish Livonian nobility had become Catholic—not by mission and physical pressure, but by living in a political environment that favoured Roman Catholicism (Jeziorski 2019, 134–40). [20]

Before this, according to the Jesuit reports, things were not as rosy. In 1677, following peasant complaints that the feudal lord of the manor of Subate forced his peasants to go to the Lutheran Church, a royal commission confiscated the Subate church and handed it over to the Catholics, who asked a Jesuit priest from Dünaburg to celebrate masses there. In the report, the priest explained how the peasants at first only visited the church under cover of darkness and in secret. The manor lord attempted to dissuade them from visiting the Catholic church by threatening them with imprisonment, expropriation, and fines. However, "the more their master oppressed them, the more fervent they became in their faith. They came openly to the church, lit candles, saying 'even if the manor lords would burn us alive, we would not renounce the true Catholic faith!' " (Kleijntjenss 1940, 246, 270). Since we do not have any accounts of this case from the Lutheran side, it is difficult to ascertain how much of it is actually verifiable and how much is Jesuit rhetorical exaggeration and grandiloquent narrative. [21]

The Jesuits clearly saw the Lutherans as a heretic sect (the words used are "haeretica secta lutherana") with which they had to reckon for political reasons. According to the classical scholar of Polish religious tolerance Janusz Tazbir (1977, 55), the powerful nobility in Poland had decided to place political issues above confessional ones, thereby avoiding the religiously motivated bloodshed that happened in Western Central Europe. This made Poland a special case of inter-confessional tolerance, a tolerance even most of the Catholic bishops supported. In the course of the seventeenth century, the Polish tolerance started to crumble, in conjunc- [22]

tion with the success of (primarily Jesuit) re-Catholicisation efforts, but religious pluralism still surpassed that of the lands further west.

[23] It is also in this context that we should see the gradual turn towards the Catholic Church among the Polish Livonian nobility. Throughout the seventeenth century, the confessional climate in the Polish-Lithuanian commonwealth grew harsher, and the influence and political prestige of the Catholic Church increased. The Polish Livonian nobility also grew more diverse, as Catholics from other parts of the Commonwealth settled in the region (Jeziorski 2019, 144–45). The wars of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries had left numerous estates without owners, and the newcomers were integrated into the hierarchy of the nobility at the lower end (Zajas 2013, 129–35). Nevertheless, as Catholics, they were increasingly favoured for political positions and offices, especially after Polish Livonia was integrated as a separate *województwo* (county) in the Polish-Lithuanian commonwealth in 1667. The long-established Livonian nobility of German descent did not want to be excluded from these positions, so by the end of the century, most of them had converted to Catholicism.[3] These conversions were not purely opportunistic, though, as several of them clearly had a theological foundation.

[24] A third occurrence of religious contact in Polish Livonia in the seventeenth century was constituted by the Russian Orthodox who lived beyond the eastern borders of the region. In the years 1656–1667, Polish Livonia was officially ruled by Muscovy, and there are no Jesuit reports from these years. It is not clear whether any Russian Orthodox settlers actually came to Livonia during those years, but a garrison church was built for the passing soldiers on their way to fight the Swedes. In any case, there was no stable Orthodox community till the end of the century, although occasional mentions of the Orthodox do appear. In 1667, the Jesuits reported nine conversions of heretics (Protestants) as well as four of schismatics (Orthodox) (Kleijntjenss 1940, 351). Such conversions are also reported in the following years, as well as the occasional conversion to Catholicism from the "ritus Roxolanus"—the Russian Old Believers. There are also mentions of Orthodox priests who roam the border regions, with local peasants turning to them because there was no Catholic priest available (Kleijntjenss 1940, 355; Litak 1998, 147).

[25] Other than that, there are hardly any mentions of Orthodox believers during the seventeenth century. However, the Jesuit sources should not be overestimated. The reports are short and often missing. For 1681 and 1682, for example, the Jesuit reports claim that "apart from the daily work, nothing happened nor was seen that is worth mentioning" (Kleijntjenss 1940, 271) ("Nihil momanteneum seu tulit, seu vidit, praeter quotidiana quaedam ne quidem memoranda multo minus in fastos referri digna"). It is only possible to get a glimpse of the religious contact that was happening and most everyday interactions do not figure in the available sources. Even the Union of Brest from 1596 between Orthodox and Catholics in the Commonwealth is hardly mentioned in this peripheral region, where the Catholic Church was too busy fighting paganism and Lutheran feudal lords while (re-)establishing ecclesiastical structures to conduct elaborate theological work.

3 Krzysztof Zajas (2013, 304–5) claims that "for the most part, old knightly families from Polish Livonia converted to Catholicism only in the second half of the 18th century, practically after this territory was already separated from Poland, i.e. when there was a growing threat of Russification." It is possible that he is referring to families that had heretofore identified as Courlanders but were forced to re-affiliate due to the Polish partition of 1772.

Establishing a Lasting Catholic Tradition—the Eighteenth Century

[26] Throughout the seventeenth century, the Jesuits were eager to establish a dominance of the Catholic tradition in this region, which they had considered unwelcoming. By the turn of the eighteenth century, they had appropriated the region to the extent that Catholicism dominated, and the Jesuits were seen as the hegemonic religious authority. After a fire destroyed much of the Jesuit college in Dünaburg in 1749, for example, donations came from all over Livland, expressly even from several Lutheran manor lords (Kleijntjenss 1940, 254). Such donations are even asserted at the end of the seventeenth century (Norkārkls 2011, 158; Jeziorski 2019, 139–40). Moreover, the Jesuit school in Dünaburg became increasingly attractive, even to Lutheran Courlanders, who sent their sons to Dünaburg to learn "properly" (Norkārkls 2011, 160n66; Mariani 2012, 133). This often resulted in their conversion to Catholicism, but the parents accepted this in return for a good education. This was, for example, the case with 12- and 14-year-old Georg and Mathias Korff[4] in 1748, who, "while in our school, devoted themselves to studying the rudiments of Latin and linking them to the Catholic faith, to the extent that they were admitted to the Eucharist with the consent of their non-Catholic mother" (Kleijntjenss 1940, 410).

[27] In order to establish a tradition, one must show innovative potential. This was, inter alia, realised in the Catholic restructuration efforts from the end of the seventeenth century. As mentioned above, the Catholic bishops, most importantly the Archbishop of Riga, had been part of the ruling elite of the region until the Protestant Reformation degraded episcopal power. When the Polish-Lithuanian crown captured almost all of Livonia in 1561, it established the Diocese of Wenden (north of Riga) in 1582 and established Jesuit colleges in Riga and Dorpat (Tartu) in order to re-Catholicise Livonia. This failed, and most of the region came under Sweden by 1621. The Bishop of Wenden (which by then was called the Bishop of Livonia) went into exile—to become an auxiliary to the Archbishop of Warsaw. In the following decades, three different bishops held the title "Bishop of Livonia," but none of them ever visited Polish Livonia, which became a sort of missionary territory without an established Catholic Church, served primarily by the Jesuits. The Roman Curia considered Polish Livonia as "in partibus infidelium" ("in the regions of the infidels", Litak 1998, LXXVIII).

[28] Towards the end of the seventeenth century, the Jesuits repeatedly petitioned for a bishop to take better care of Livonia, as the region differed greatly from the rest of Poland-Lithuania and required a particular approach. The first bishop to take up residence in Polish Livonia was Mikołaj Korwin-Popławski (1685–1710). He took over the main Jesuit church in Dünaburg to convert it into a cathedral in 1690, heralding a new era for the Catholic Church in Polish Livonia (Manteuffel 1902, 409; Kleijntjenss 1940, 275). However, he also appropriated the Auleja manor, the main source of income and the countryside residence for the Jesuits, which they were not happy about (Kleijntjenss 1940, 274, 365–66). Nevertheless, they remained loyal to the bishop. The economic report from 1690 recounts how a local Lutheran nobleman exclaimed "Now I see that you are rightly called Jesuits: Just like Jesus, you defend even those who take away your belongings and properties!" (1940, 367). The Jesuits brought the matter to court, though, especially as one of the two Pilten Canonicals that had taken up residence in the manor, Stephano Dębkowski, had shown rather un-Christian behaviour towards them (1940, 438–39).

4 The Korff family were among the last Lutheran landowning families in Polish Livonia. See also below.

The case was handed from court to court and dragged on for a decade until it suddenly stops appearing in the annual reports after 1700. The case reappeared in 1718 (Kleijntjenss 1940, 296) and by 1721, "the case of Auylmuyža [Auleja Manor], which has been neglected for decades, is again to be reviewed in the nunciature this year, and after a long wait we expect a crowning end to this story" (1940, 300). In 1724, the courts decided in favour of the Dünaburg Jesuits, but the saga does not end there (Kleijntjenss 1940, 304). Only in 1727, with the help of the Catholic parish priest Joachim Gönner from Courland, did Bishop Adam Wessel finally give up his pretensions to the manor (Kleijntjenss 1940, 306–7; Mariani 2012, 128). In return, Gönner was honoured with his own commemorative plaque when the new Dünaburg Jesuit church was constructed in 1737 (Kleijntjenss 1940, 318). [29]

Once a regular Catholic diocesan structure was established, the dominance of the Jesuits diminished. However, the tradition they had initiated remained substantial. The historian Gustaw Manteuffel, whose family converted only in the 1820s as the last Polish Livonian noble family, starts his 1902 article on Livonian Church History with a praise to the Jesuits: [30]

> Everything that was done at the end of the sixteenth, beginning of the seventeenth century in Livonia and Courland to bring the inhabitants back into the bosom of the universal Church was almost exclusively the effort and work of the Jesuits. They travelled, fought, and reigned so independently that it does not surprise when, in the works on Livonian history written by Protestants, the words Catholicism and Jesuitism are almost synonymous. (Manteuffel 1902, 401) [31]

With the existence of a local diocese also followed a diversification of the Catholic landscape, with Dominicans, Lazarists (Mariani 2012, 131), Bernardines, and individual missionaries also being invited to the region. Unfortunately, no archival materials are available to any of these orders, so we still rely primarily on the Jesuits, whose reports get longer and longer into the eighteenth century. They stayed in the region, helping out in the parishes and continuing their missionary work among the peasants. They held sermons in four languages (Latvian, German, Polish, and Lithuanian) throughout the eighteenth century, which made them superior to most parish clergy, who were limited to one or two languages. The network of Jesuit mission stations that had been built up over the previous century was therefore rather expanded instead of establishing an exhaustive net of parishes (Mariani 2012). [32]

This was not without controversy, as the reports from the mid-1740s show (Kleijntjenss 1940, 323–25). One of the main avenues for innovation within the Jesuit-induced Catholic tradition in Polish Livonia was the founding of churches and endowment of parishes. The manor lords, often themselves recent converts from the Lutheran Church or even still Lutherans, happily donated money and land for the erection of parish churches and other houses of worship, thereby inscribing themselves into a tradition (Zajas 2013, 147). The most famous of these magnates was the head of the influential Plater family—Jan Andrzej—the *starosta* of Dünaburg, who converted in the 1690s (Manteuffel 1902, 409–10; Mariani 2012, 130–31; Jeziorski 2019, 135–36). He then donated part of his lands, including buildings, as a residence for the bishop. Similarly, he made several endowments from his estates across the province over the following years in order to build and maintain parish churches. [33]

Besides the Jesuit reports, there is another important source available, as there was a canonical general visitation of the Livonian Diocese in 1761, whose acts have been published (Litak 1998). The visitation acts nicely show how the religious situation in Polish Livonia became more stable, even though it was hardly a wealthy diocese, with less than 20 parishes—and [34]

some 30 additional houses of worship for around 80,000 believers. The Jesuit reports are more focused on the local missionary work and the activities of the Jesuits themselves than developments in the region as such. The religious contact they report differs only marginally from the previous century. There are still cases of pagan encounters, and these are even more decisively combated than before. Instead of describing the individual events, the Jesuits now report statistically: For example, ten "holy trees" were cut down in 1728, and 21 in 1740. In 1742, 661 individuals were "driven away from paganism" (*gentilismo absterriti*, see also Manteuffel 1902, 404). In later years, there are annually up to a dozen people "recalled from superstition" (*superstitionibus revocati*) or "discouraged from divination" (*divinationibus deterriti*). These are often qualified as "simple Latvians" (*simplices Lotavi*). The Latvians receiving the sacrament of the last anointment are reported to enthusiastically refer to it as "the great sanctification" (Kleijntjenss 1940, 397).

[35] The conversions from Lutheranism decreased steadily, and the remaining Lutherans were often migrants from neighbouring Courland, which was still majority Lutheran. Between 1700 and 1768, a total of about 900 persons converted from Lutheranism (Kleijntjenss 1940, 254; Norkārkls 2011, 163). The visitation acts claim that Lutheran peasants only lived in the manor of the Korff family in Kryżbork (Krustpils), where the only remaining Lutheran parish was also situated (Litak 1998, 4; Norkārkls 2011, 163; Jeziorski 2019, 141–44). Neither the Jesuits nor the bishop had much to do with this group, though. In the visitation acts, the Lutherans are only mentioned in connection with tithe collection from the Korff estates, which did not benefit the Catholic Church (Litak 1998, 180). The Korff family, while remaining steadfast in the Lutheran faith, did entertain friendly relations with the Catholic clergy, though (Jeziorski 2019, 143–44). Other than that, no contact between the confessions is detectable in the sources.

[36] All the more so, there is the contact with representatives of the Orthodox Church. These are, on the one hand, the occasional roaming priests, especially in the Marienhausen *starostwo* in the north. In the visitation report, we read that "since the population, which had poor knowledge of God and used to be pagans and sacrifice to 'holy trees', should not have to turn to the Russian popes in order to save their souls, it was decided to build a church here" (Litak 1998, 147). On the other hand, there were individual Orthodox faithful, who came to the region for various reasons and accepted conversion to the Catholic faith. According to the Jesuit reports, there were 1683 conversions from Orthodoxy between 1634 and 1768 (Norkārkls 2011, 171). Although the Orthodox Church had no legal status in the Polish-Lithuanian commonwealth after the union of Brest (1596), pockets of Orthodox believers had survived in Polish Livonia. With the establishment of a more stable diocesan structure in the early eighteenth century, even a few Greek-Catholic churches were opened here, which naturally integrated these Orthodox pockets. A small Greek-Catholic monastery (or rather, mission station) was even established in Jakobstadt directly on the border between Polish Livonia and the Duchy of Courland, with the financial support of the recently converted noble family Borch from the Polish Livonian side (Rączka-Jeziorska and Jeziorski 2019). However, the Greek-Catholics hardly ever turn up in the documents, since they are already Catholics, even though they possibly did not themselves notice (Norkārkls 2011, 172; Mariani 2012, 132–33). In the visitation acts, they are simply part of the statistics, without any further mention.

[37] Another rather important religious contact in the eighteenth century is the one with the Old Believers, who were mentioned briefly above. This group, which had fled the Russian Empire in the second half of the seventeenth century in protest against the liturgical reforms

of Patriarch Nikon, preferably settled directly beyond the borders, many in Polish Livonia. The Old Believers tended to isolate themselves in the deep forests and were thus not seen as a threat by the Catholic Church (Kleijntjenss 1940, 315–16; Norkārkls 2011, 173). By 1744, however, as their numbers had risen to several thousands, the Catholic Church started to officially warn against too much contact with Old Believers, even calling for their eradication. In the visitation acts, inter-marriages involving Old Believers are strictly forbidden (Litak 1998, LXXXVI, 42, 153; Norkārkls 2011, 175). However, the nobility's indifference to orders from the Catholic Church ensured that the Old Believers were left alone (Norkārkls 2011, 176; Mariani 2012, 129).

[38] Finally, over the course of the eighteenth century, there were also a few thousand Jews that settled in Polish Livonia. They, however, are only mentioned in passing in the visitation acts, promulgating a recent decree from Pope Benedict XIV banning forced baptism of Jewish children. It is very unlikely that this had been practiced in Polish Livonia, as the Jews were scarce and reportedly only lived in private estates, where the Catholic Church had no access anyway (Litak 1998, LXXXVII). In the first census of the region from 1766, there were some 3000 Jews in Polish Livonia. From 1764, they had their own *kahal* in the region, in Krāslava (Levins 1999, 29). The Jews do not turn up in the Jesuit sources, with the exception of the rare occasion of a conversion, which is recorded under the number of baptisms. There seems to have been no noteworthy religious contact with Jewish inhabitants in this region, in contrast to the south-eastern parts of Poland (Teter 2006).

[39] In the first partition of Poland in 1772, Polish Livonia became part of the Russian Empire, changing the political and religious scene considerably. Subsequent events have little resemblance to the developments described above, even though the Jesuits stayed in the region until well into the nineteenth century. Unlike in the rest of the world, where the Jesuits had been persecuted since the 1750s and finally abolished by a papal *breve* in 1773, the Russian government of Empress Catherine II refused to follow through and left them thriving (Zajas 2013, 305; Friedrich 2016, 560). The reports of the early nineteenth century are mere statistics and list of visitors, though, except the last report from 1808 (Kleijntjenss 1940, 428–32). It laments the end of the Jesuit order outside Russia and the consequences that entailed for the spiritual life of a number of former Jesuits, many of whom had migrated to the Russian lands, where the order continued to exist (Friedrich 2016, 561).

Analysis and Conclusion

[40] In general, it is possible to divide the history of the Jesuit encounters with heterodox faithful into two distinct periods. There is the seventeenth century, when they arrive to the region and set out to 'subdue' it. Their initial successes may seem negligible, but they slowly come to grips with this unorderly and hostile environment. A comparison between Polish Livonia and neighbouring Courland, separated only by the river Düna, reveals an unbridgeable chasm: on the one hand a civilised, highly organised Lutheran state with a strong confessional identity (Courland) and on the other an almost anarchic, loosely structured peripheral region without much central governance (Mariani 2012). Certainly, the Jesuits exaggerate the barbarity of the region in their reports, but the river Düna clearly demarcates a significant cultural divide.

[41] The religious encounters of the seventeenth century in Polish Livonia also differed considerably from the peripheral regions further north, such as Ingermanland (Lotman 2023) and Kexholm County (Laitila 2020), both on the Finnish/Russian border within the Swedish Em-

pire. In these regions, the state-sponsored (Swedish) Lutheran Church encountered a more or less organised Orthodox population. The official Swedish policy was to approach the heterodox cautiously and try to co-opt Orthodox priests to spread Lutheranism. The Jesuit mission in Polish Livonia did not have this kind of government backing, nor was most of the heterodox population it encountered organised in any way. Their endeavour was thus more akin to colonial mission than what the Jesuits encountered in most parts of 'civilised' Europe. A similar kind of situation was the Jesuit encounter in Corsica in the late sixteenth century, where they faced a largely illiterate and religiously ignorant population (Leone 2010, 244–45).

In the eighteenth century, the pendulum swings from a dynamic development towards the stability side, with the Catholic Church becoming the norm in the region, which makes it possible to concentrate on creating stable structures and using harsher methods towards non-Catholics. The Catholics, most importantly the Jesuits, had successfully incorporated Polish Livonia into the Catholic world by suggesting stability and strength. Nevertheless, Polish Livonia never became a fully integrated part of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, and neither did it retain its separate identity in the way the Duchy of Courland did. According to the Polish scholar of literature Krzysztof Zajas, "Livonian culture did not come into existence because it could not fully fit into any of the communal discourses which were imposed on it from without" (Zajas 2013, 23). The fact that Polish Livonia did not interest the Polish-Lithuanian central authorities much ensured that the Jesuits remained important actors in the region, also exemplified by their four decades long legal struggle with the diocesan authorities. [42]

With the more organised Catholic structures of the eighteenth century, however, the region was no longer a no-man's-land, and the Jesuits could become bolder in their encounters with the heterodox, which they aggressively sought to convert to Catholicism. The encounters with Lutherans and heathens diminished, as most of the population had been turned Catholic. Instead, the "others" were now the Orthodox, either migrants and settlers from the East or roaming priests and Old Believers. Nevertheless, religious contact was no longer the main topic of the Jesuit reports, which focused on descriptions of church buildings, social relations, and political and climatic events. The religious situation had stabilised and was therefore no longer worth focusing on. [43]

In the nineteenth century, there were efforts to Polonise and Russify the region, whereas the early twentieth century sought to Latvianise it. After World War II, it was part of the Soviet brand of internationalism and only in the post-Soviet era has it been possible to freely claim a distinct regional identity for Latgale. One of the elements that characterises Latgale today is the clear visual marks that Catholicism has left in the region. It is much more religiously vital than the rest of Latvia (Rimestad 2021, 594–95), even though Roman Catholicism is only the most prominent of the various religious communities in the region. The influence of the Jesuit missionaries from the early seventeenth century was of paramount importance for this state of affairs. [44]

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