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FROM THE PORT OF VENTSPILS TO GREAT COURLAND BAY: THE COURONIAN COLONY ON TOBAGO IN PAST AND PRESENT

Imbi Sooman, Jesma McFarlane, Valdis Tēraudkalns and Stefan Donecker

In the seventeenth century, Duke Jakob Kettler of Courland embraced the mercantile theories of his age and engaged in overseas colonialism. After several aborted attempts, the Courlanders managed to establish a settlement on Tobago in 1654 only to lose it to the Dutch five years later. European competitors and indigenous resistance frustrated the Duke's attempts to regain control over the colony. Despite its limited scope and success, the Couronian colonization of Tobago left a strong impact on the historical imagination. This paper aims to document the traces and remembrances of Duke Jakob's Caribbean endeavor on Tobago as well as in Latvia.

Keywords: Courland; Tobago; colonialism; historical memory; Jakob Kettler

On 20 May 1654, the Couronian frigate *Das Wappen der Herzogin von Kurland* ("Coat of Arms of the Duchess of Courland") dropped anchor off the leeward shore of Tobago. As 124 soldiers and 80 settler families went ashore and made themselves familiar with their new home, they were probably unaware of the significance of the moment. The smallest European state ever to engage in overseas colonialism had staked its claim on one of the most contested – and, according to contemporaries, most dangerous – islands of the Caribbean. In an extraordinary episode of colonial history, Courland's global ambitions had reached their peak (cf. Phillips 2004, pp. 43–50; Jekabson-Lemanis 2000; Lichtveld 1978; Anderson 1961/62b; Berkis 1960, pp. 61–83, 142–47, 176–88; Wise 1942; Mattiesen 1940; Wollebæk 1936; Sewigh 1872).

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We thought it appropriate to examine this unique Baltic-Caribbean connection through an international research collaboration – a cooperative project of scholars from Trinidad and Tobago, Latvia, Sweden, and Austria. Our joint paper intends, on the one hand, to give an overview of the historical events that took place in the seventeenth century, but also, more importantly, to survey the traces and remembrances of Courland's Caribbean enterprise on Tobago, in Latvia, as well as among Latvian exile communities in North America.

The Couronian Colonization of Tobago

Courland's venture into overseas colonialism was masterminded by Duke Jakob Kettler (1610–1682, ruled 1642–1682), the grandson of Gotthard Kettler, the last Master of the Teutonic Order in Livonia, who had secured Courland as a secular fief for his family in 1561. Influenced by mercantilist thinking, the energetic Duke initiated an extensive program of economic reform that he anticipated would develop his rural duchy in the European periphery into a major center of trade and commerce (Anderson 1956, pp. 15–16). Impressed by the wealth of the Netherlands, which he had personally visited as a young man, Duke Jakob intended to emulate the profitable maritime networks established by Dutch merchants all over the globe. The United Provinces of the Netherlands were to play a crucial role in Jakob's colonial efforts – as a trading partner, as a model of economic reform, as a recruitment area for settlers, sailors, and mercenaries, and ultimately as staunch competition.[1]

Jakob's ultimate aim was the establishment of a Couronian trading post in India that would enable him to partake in the wealth of the distant subcontinent (Mattiesen 1940, pp. 332–63).[2] As a preliminary stage in this ambitious scheme, he managed to acquire an outpost in West Africa, which was meant to serve as a stopover for ships en route to India. In 1651, a colony was successfully established at the Gambia River estuary, consisting of a fortification known as Fort Jakob on St. Andrew's Island and several small, disjointed possessions along the river (Mattiesen 1940, pp. 118–332, 518–48; Diederichs 1890).

The Gambia outpost would, according to Jakob's plans, be complemented by a colony in the West Indies.[3] During the first half of the seventeenth century, the Caribbean basin saw a flurry of maritime activity as numerous European powers began to challenge the Spanish rule over the Antilles. The English had occupied Barbados and were applying increasing pressure on Spanish Jamaica. The French were based on Martinique and Guadeloupe, the Dutch at Curaçao and the Guyana coast, and the Danes were soon to follow at St. Thomas and St. John. Colonial possessions both in Africa and in the West Indies would enable Courland to partake in one of the most inhumane, yet simultaneously most profitable trade ventures of the early modern age – shipping slaves from Africa to the plantations in the New World as part of the transatlantic triangular trade (Anderson 1961/62a, pp. 22–25; Anderson 1961/62b, p. 144; Mattiesen 1940, pp. 414–15). This enterprise would provide the necessary revenue for further investments towards Jakob's goal in India.

It seems likely that the first Couronian forays into Tobago (Anderson 1959; Anderson 1961/62a) even preceded their successful mission to Gambia.[4] According to John Scott, an

English historiographer from Barbados, the first attempt to establish a Couronian colony on Tobago was undertaken in 1634,[5] but failed dismally after 212 settlers, utterly unfamiliar with the tropical climate, succumbed to famine and disease. Scott's account has often been disregarded as unreliable, because no traces of the 1634 expedition are recorded in Couronian sources. It is, however, quite possible that Prince Jakob tried to keep the tragic failure a secret, since the disastrous result of the expedition would undoubtedly have discouraged future volunteers (Anderson 1956, p. 61).

After Jakob became Duke in 1642, he made yet another attempt and hired Dutch and Walloon sailors under the command of a certain Captain Cornelius Caroon. Relying on Dutch experts seems a reasonable measure, especially if the 1634 expedition, as Scott described, had failed due to the inexperience of the Courlanders. However, Caroon himself might not have been a good choice. Contemporary sources depict him as a rather disreputable character, one of the numerous dubious adventurers who were drawn to the Caribbean in the seventeenth century. He did, however, manage to establish an outpost on Tobago and remained there for several years, before indigenous resistance forced him to withdraw to Guyana, around 1650. This tenuous Couronian presence can hardly be described as a proper colony. Caroon's settlement was little more than a small illegal trading post, and it is more than doubtful that any revenues of this shady enterprise ever reached Courland. Jakob was, again, well advised to keep his involvement in the 1640s as secret as possible and avoided being associated with Caroon (Anderson 1961/62a, pp. 18–22; Anderson 1956, pp. 75–9).

Some time between 1645 and 1647, Jakob supposedly acquired an English royal patent that granted him possession of Tobago (Anderson 1961/62a, pp. 25–27; Anderson 1956, pp. 71–75; Mattiesen 1940, pp. 440–42). Richard Rich, the Earl of Warwick (Phillips 2004, pp. 29–30), after himself having bought the patent a few years earlier and sponsored two unsuccessful expeditions to Tobago, was now, amongst the turmoil of the English Civil War, willing to sell his claim. Such a transaction was, of course, illegal, since no English Earl could simply sell a royal fief to a foreign ruler. Jakob did, however, invoke the royal patent decades later during his negotiations with England.

Based on this dubious claim, Duke Jakob dispatched yet another expedition to Tobago, and this time his persistent efforts proved successful (Anderson 1961/62b, pp. 129–30). *Das Wappen der Herzogin von Kurland*, a modern frigate and one of the most powerful warships in the ducal fleet, departed the Couronian port of Windau in November 1653 and reached Tobago on 20 May 1654. The expedition made landfall on the island's western shore – near present-day Plymouth at the bay that still bears the name "Great Courland Bay". Captain Willem Mollens reported that Tobago was uninhabited by Europeans and had not been settled for at least 30 years. It seems that he was either unaware of the previous attempts at colonizing Tobago, or chose to ignore them deliberately to strengthen the Couronian claim. He christened the island *Neu-Kurland* ("New Courland") and had a fortification, Fort Jacobus, erected at Great Courland Bay, where he took residence as ducal governor. Protected by the fortification, a settlement known as Jacobusstadt was founded (Anderson 1956, pp. 110–13).

The fledgling colony soon had to face serious competition: in September 1654 a group of Dutch settlers arrived in Tobago (Anderson 1956, pp. 116–20). In contrast

to the Couronian colony, this expedition was no state enterprise but a privately funded venture sponsored by the brothers Adriaen and Cornelius Lampsins, influential merchants from Walcheren in Zeeland. The Dutch established their colony, centered on the settlement of Lampsinsstad, on Tobago's southern coast at its present-day capital of Scarborough (cf. Goslinga 1971, pp. 440–41; Boomert, Ortiz-Troncoso, and Van Regteren Altena 1987, pp. 249–53). For several years and despite occasional skirmishes, the two colonies coexisted on opposing shores of the island, separated by the largely impenetrable interior. During the latter half of the 1650s, however, the Dutch colony – better organized and more regularly supplied from Europe – began to overshadow the motley Couronian settlement (Goslinga 1971, p. 442).

The fate of the Couronian colony was sealed by events in Europe: Courland's geopolitical situation, wedged between Poland and Sweden's Baltic provinces, was particularly unfavorable. Despite his formal status as a vassal of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, Jakob tried to preserve his neutrality in the Polish-Swedish War of 1655–1660. But his diplomatic efforts failed to secure the Duchy's position. In 1658, the Swedes invaded and occupied Courland, and took the Duke himself prisoner.

When news of these developments reached Tobago, the Couronian garrison realized it was in a dire position. Governor Willem Mollens disappeared *en route* to Jamaica with two ships fully loaded with tropical goods. Whether he was trying to secure a share of colonial wealth for himself or whether he was dutifully attempting to evacuate some of the colony's riches to Europe remains uncertain. At Fort Jacobus, the Dutch spread rumors about the serious situation of the Couronian homeland. Convinced that no further supplies and, more importantly, no more payments would be arriving from Europe, the ducal mercenaries mutinied and handed the colony over to the Dutch in exchange for a free passage back to Europe. On 11 December 1659, a representative of the Lampsins consortium took possession of the colony of *Neu-Kurland* (Anderson 1961/62b, pp. 147–50; Anderson 1956, pp. 166–71).

A year later, Duke Jakob was finally released from Swedish captivity. Unperturbed and insistent, he immediately began negotiations with the Lampsins, who, as expected, refused to relinquish their new possessions, which were developing into a prosperous colony (Anderson 1961/62b, p. 216). But increasing antagonism between the Netherlands and England soon endangered the Lampsins' position on Tobago. In the years preceding the second Anglo-Dutch War (1665–1667), numerous colonial skirmishes between Dutch and English soldiers and privateers took place both in Africa and in the Americas. Turning to France for help, the Lampsins swore allegiance to Louis XIV, thus drawing yet another European major power into the struggle for Tobago (Goslinga 1971, pp. 443–44). During the 1660s, English, Dutch and French ships, as well as independent buccaneers, repeatedly raided the island.

The Peace Treaty of Breda (1667) finally confirmed the Dutch possession of Tobago, but Duke Jakob was unwilling to accept the loss of his colony. In 1664, he formally renounced his claim to the Gambia estuary, and in exchange received Tobago as an English fief from King Charles II (Mattiesen 1940, pp. 600–06).

In an effort to re-establish a Couronian presence in the Caribbean, Jakob appointed his 22-year-old son Ferdinand as governor of the ducal possessions in the West Indies – Tobago as well as Trinidad, which he hoped to acquire from Spain. It

was very unusual to dispatch a member of the ruling family to a perilous colonial enterprise, and Ferdinand was probably well aware of the dangers that awaited him. He preferred to flee to western Europe, where he lived the unsteady life of a vagrant gentleman and mercenary adventurer (Mattiesen 1940, p. 675). An expedition was sent to Tobago in 1668–1669 to retake the colony and briefly raised the Couronian flag over the deserted Fort Jacobus, before Dutch forces drove it away (Anderson 1956, pp. 218–21).

In 1677, the Dutch lost Tobago to the French after the major naval battle of Rockly Bay (Phillips 2004, pp. 64–68; Goslinga 1971, pp. 449–55). Devastated by continuous pillaging, the island was no longer attractive to the French, who abandoned it to its indigenous inhabitants. From a European point of view, Tobago had reverted to a no-man's-land. Duke Jakob, by now an elderly man known for his stubbornness, made yet another attempt to regain control of his former colony with the unenthusiastic support of his English allies. In the summer of 1680, a Couronian expedition reached Tobago on a ship called *Der Schwann* ("The Swan") and began constructing a new fort at Great Courland Bay (Anderson 1956, pp. 279–80). Irregular supply ships found the Couronian settlers in a pathetic state, beleaguered by indigenous raiders from the Windward Islands as well as by French pirates. Couronian soldiers deserted to the English island of Barbados in large numbers and support from Europe was minimal, with many ships vanishing *en route*. At least one Couronian vessel, *Der Blumentopf* ("The Flowerpot"), was sold by her own captain and handed over, complete with her crew and cargo, to Algerian pirates (Anderson 1956, p. 279).

Duke Jakob died on New Year's Day, 1682, and his precarious colony deteriorated even further since his son and successor, Duke Friedrich Casimir, uninterested in colonial matters, only hesitantly continued his father's efforts. Deprived of supplies, Governor Monck left Tobago with the last survivors in 1683. Between 1686 and 1689, two more doomed expeditions, ravaged by hunger, tropical diseases, and Caribbean storms, managed to retain a token presence on Tobago, though under inhumane conditions and with appalling losses (Seraphim 1913).

Back home in Courland, enthusiasm for the colonial enterprises seems to have remained undiminished at the ducal court. A contemporary poem hails Marshal Dietrich von Altenbockum, appointed governor of Tobago in 1686, with a patriotic fervor completely detached from the sad reality:

> Heaven, grant to the Hero of Heroes luck and good wind for his distant journey.
> So that he may prove himself to be a new Phoebus of the New World,
> that everything he endeavors there may well succeed,
> and that we, at his return, may sing: Be welcomed, Hero of Heroes! (Bornmann 1802, p. 14)[6]

Altenbockum, an elderly gentleman unsuited for his new post, never even set foot on Tobago but was fatally wounded during a tropical storm off the coast in 1687.

Duke Friedrich Casimir ordered yet another expedition in 1690, but it seems that the colonizers, aware of the fate that was awaiting them, refused to set sail. The report of a Danish captain from 1693 claims that a few Courlanders were still present on Tobago, but these scattered individuals had "gone native", adapting to a tropical lifestyle and managing to survive without any connections or support from their

homeland.[7] During the early eighteenth century, Tobago remained, from a European perspective, a no-man's-land. Both France and Britain formally claimed the island, but made little effort to establish a presence there (Boomert 2002, pp. 146–59; Archibald 1987, p. 66). Only after 1763 was Tobago developed into a plantation colony by the British. France briefly gained control of Tobago in 1781, and again in 1803, but ceded the island to Great Britain after the Napoleonic Wars. Tobago was administratively united with Trinidad in 1889 and remained a British crown colony until the declaration of independence in 1962.

The Duchy of Courland, however, continued to take legal proceedings against the Dutch and the English for decades, aimed at the increasingly unrealistic restitution of their colony or at least at a certain indemnity.[8] Titular governors of Tobago were appointed up to the end of the eighteenth century, when the Duchy itself was incorporated into the Russian Empire (cf. Tambs 1970, pp. 358–60; Anderson 1956, p. 351). The real Couronian presence in the Caribbean, however, had gradually petered out during the 1690s.

Composition of the Crews

Historical documents indicate that Jakob relied on foreign settlers to populate his Caribbean possession. Many of the ships that sailed under the ducal flag did not depart from Courland itself. Aware of his duchy's unfavorable position in the semi-landlocked Baltic Sea, Duke Jakob had leased the small Norwegian port of Flekkerøy, which promised better access to the open Atlantic (Mattiesen 1940, pp. 120–21). Since many Couronian expeditions and colonization efforts were in fact assembled in Scandinavia, it is hardly surprising that numerous Norwegians, Danes, and Swedes participated in the colonization of Tobago (Anderson 1961, 132–133; Jakovļeva 2013, p. 97). The first so-called "settlers" who established the Couronian colony in 1654 were most likely mercenaries hired in Courland and Denmark, a multi-national band consisting mainly of Scandinavians and Germans (Mattiesen 1940, p. 455).

Considering the confessional hostilities and the incessant warfare between Christian denominations that plagued the seventeenth century, it is remarkable that Jakob practiced religious tolerance in his colonies. Himself a protestant, the Duke is credited with the establishment of the first Lutheran congregation in the West Indies (Anderson 1961/62b, p. 142). He was, however, willing to accept settlers regardless of their faith and was even actively encouraging persecuted religious minorities. This extraordinary policy of confessional tolerance would have been more important in West Africa – where many Couronian subjects were Catholic Spaniards and Portuguese – than in the Caribbean, but a small Catholic community might have existed on Tobago as well (cf. Mattiesen 1940, pp. 179–80, 724).

The settlers on Couronian Tobago were a rather heterogeneous group, and included Frenchmen and Walloons (cf. Huyghues-Belrose 2009, pp. 166–67), as well as Dutchmen, Englishmen, and Germans. It is doubtful whether ethnic Latvians participated in the colonization of Tobago in any noteworthy numbers (cf. Jakovļeva 2013, p. 97).[9] As rural serfs suited to the climate of northeastern Europe, Latvians would have lacked useful skills for a tropical plantation colony. On the other hand,

they provided a cheap source of manpower for the thrifty Duke and could be coerced to settle on the dangerous island even after the regular disasters that befell Couronian expeditions, when volunteers were difficult to find. On other occasions, Duke Jakob was known to send Latvian peasants abroad, for example to his Norwegian ironworks at Eidsvoll (Wollebæk 1936, p. 463). A document from 1691 (Mattiesen 1940, p. 922), issued under Jakob's successor, indicates that a Latvian peasant and his wife were deported to Tobago as punishment for an unspecified crime. It remains unclear whether this was an isolated case, or if more Latvians undertook the voyage to the Caribbean – coerced or voluntarily (cf. Jekabson-Lemanis 2000, p. 32).

European–Indigenous Relations

Tobago's indigenous inhabitants, the Caribs,[10] had successfully repulsed numerous European colonization efforts throughout the first half of the seventeenth century, and gained a fearsome reputation for their tenacity in defence of their territory (cf. Jekabson-Lemanis 2000, pp. 33–34; Boomert 2002, pp. 118–19). When the first Couronian colony was established in 1654, the island's inhabitants seem to have resisted immediately. On 20 June 1654, exactly one month after the colonists' arrival, a certain Willem Brandt was killed by "savages". His death is an indicator for armed conflicts that most likely caused more fatalities, both indigenous and European, that remained unrecorded.

In his first report, dated from 11 August 1654, Governor Mollens gives an evaluation of Tobago's inhabitants:

> May His Ducal Grace deign to hear that I have occupied His island of Tobago, or New Courland, with the troops that I have with me. There, I encountered five captains of the savages. Each captain has twenty-five men and a canoe of his own, and this canoe is made from a hollowed out tree. With his twenty-five men he sets forth against a tribe called the *Ariwakas*, and this tribe lives on Trinidad and the mainland. These Ariwakas are strong, with fifty or sixty canoes, each manned by twenty-five or thirty men. Our islanders are very afraid of the Ariwakas when they come, because they are ghastly strong and great fighters. Our people on this island are called *Kriben*. These Ariwakas are enemies of all Christians. (Mattiesen 1940, p. 451)

Mollens does not conceal his sympathies. He hopes to establish a lasting friendship with "them" (after his aforementioned characterization of the two "savage tribes", it is quite obvious that he is referring to the "*Kriben*", the Caribs).[11] According to his report, he has already established some trade with them, exchanging simple weapons for hammocks, which prove useful for his settlers. Those savages who continue to cause trouble and refuse to acknowledge Couronian sovereignty, however, will be considered enemies and Mollens intends to repay them the trouble they have caused.

A map of Fort Jacobus from the 1650s seems to indicate almost neighborly conditions between the Couronians and the Amerindians. An indigenous village is depicted in the immediate vicinity of the Couronian fortification, with numerous round huts and a larger oblong building in the center (Mattiesen 1940, pp. 470–73).

The composition of the map might express political pretensions rather than portray the factual situation: the image of "savages" living under the protection of Couronian guns is undoubtedly to be understood as a claim to sovereignty over the entire island. But it is equally obvious that the idea of a close and seemingly peaceful coexistence between European colonizers and indigenous inhabitants was not alien to the anonymous settler who composed the map.

Couronian records indicate that the colonizers engaged in regular trade and barter with the island's inhabitants. Large quantities of spirits were shipped to Tobago (Mattiesen 1940, p. 505), to be used for trade or to bribe local indigenous leaders. Duke Jakob, probably well aware of his limited resources, was very interested in friendly relationships with indigenous rulers. He practiced this policy in West Africa and wrote remarkably respectful letters to his local allies, whom he addressed as "most serene kings" (*serenissimi reges*).[12] The Lutheran pastor at Jacobusstadt was instructed to study the language of the Tobagonian "savages" and to guide them towards a Christian understanding of God. The Duke's orders specified that he was to refrain from any kind of religious dispute but to conduct his missionary work with exemplary gentleness and tenderness (Boomert 2002, p. 129). In his instructions to Governor Monck dating from 1681, Jakob insists that his representatives should keep peace and friendship with Tobago's inhabitants and seems to insinuate that the "savages" should almost be treated as equals:

> We have never lived in enmity with the savages, and have always fostered good friendship with them. [...] You will endeavor to renew our old friendship and let them know, [...] that we will help to protect them from their enemies, and act beneficial to them. Formerly, both sides had exchanged hostages to seal our friendship, and we could arrange such an exchange with them again, and continue to trade with them. (Mattiesen 1940, p. 756)

Despite Jakob's conciliatory intentions, armed conflicts between the Couronians and Amerindians continued as long as the Couronian colony existed – although they were undoubtedly interrupted by periods of peaceful co-existence. Carib raiders from the Windward Islands, in particular St. Vincent and St. Lucia, mounted regular attacks on European settlements on Tobago and proved to be stauncher adversaries than the island's indigenous inhabitants. Despite numerous European attempts to eradicate them, the Amerindians could still muster an impressive strength during the latter half of the seventeenth century. Two Couronian ships, the *Fortuna* and the *Jäger* ("Huntsman"), that reached Tobago between 1686 and 1688 met heavy resistance and reported that the "savages" had assembled powerful canoe fleets manned by up to eight hundred people (Mattiesen 1940, p. 911).

Finally, it is quite likely that at least one individual with an indigenous background was brought to Europe. Starting in 1689, the accounts of a Couronian estate regularly list expenses for "the Tobagonian child" ("*das Tobagische Kindt*"), occasionally referred to as "Pierre", "Salmo", or "the moor". Pierre might have been a Carib boy taken to Europe, possibly abducted or sent as a hostage by an indigenous leader. It is, however, equally possible that he was the son of a Couronian settler with either a local woman or an enslaved African. It seems that Pierre later became a servant at the estate and disappeared from the surviving documents (Mattiesen 1940, p. 934).

Tobago: The Colony and its Traces

The Couronian possessions on the Gambia estuary were never intended to develop into more than punctual trade posts. On Tobago, however, efforts were undertaken to establish a settlement colony (Mattiesen 1940, p. 474), with plantations and a rural infrastructure that could support a larger number of colonizers.

The Couronian colony never extended beyond the western part of Tobago's leeward shore. Its main stronghold was Fort Jacobus, overlooking Jacobus Bay, the present-day Great Courland Bay.[13] The colonizers erected a warehouse and a pier for smaller ships – the larger ocean-going vessels had to anchor at the roadstead. The Lutheran church was safely situated within the bastions of Fort Jacobus. Between 1654 and 1657, a Lutheran pastor named Peter Engelbrecht, a personal friend of the ducal family, catered to the settlers' spiritual needs (Anderson 1956, p. 138). A small settlement developed in the vicinity of the fortification, with several plantations further inland where tobacco, indigo, ginger, and sugarcane were cultivated (Mattiesen 1940, pp. 506–08). During the 1650s, coffee, pepper, and cinnamon were transported to Courland and sold to neighboring countries, including Poland, Lithuania, Russia, and Sweden.

The total population of the Couronian colony did not exceed a few hundred men and women.[14] According to estimates, 20 officials and 80 soldiers were stationed at Fort Jacobus, with approximately 100 civilian settlers and an equal number of enslaved Africans in the vicinity (Mattiesen 1940, pp. 489–90). It is quite possible that Tobago might have been used as a base for Couronian privateers, who were commonly employed by all European powers competing in the Caribbean. There are, however, no documents which prove that Jakob issued any letters of marque.

On paper, the Couronian outpost, small as it must have been, leaves the impression of a suitable base for further expansion and for the colonization of the entire island. Yet it is doubtful whether the reality was as promising as such a brief description implies. In 1658, an anonymous Dutch report provides a dismal impression of the state of New Courland:

> In the Couronian quarter I have, with great sadness, witnessed the indescribable misery of the people there. They have nothing but a fair amount of flour, a watery mush and some salt. They are not allowed to hunt, because of the savages. The seasoned soldiers number approximately forty, and among them are less then twelve healthy men, the others just wait for their end to come. Of the ninety farmers that settled here, more than forty are dead, and they die like animals on the ground, without anybody caring for them. They do not plant anything, because they are not allowed to leave their fort, lest they succumb to the plague, which is out of control, or get caught by the savages. The lieutenant who commands them is a truly godless man, and does nothing but gets drunk all the time, and swears so horribly and insolently that one is afraid to be in the company of such a godless man. (Mattiesen 1940, pp. 477–78)

These bleak conditions are sharply contrasted by an enthusiastic account of Tobago, published in 1683 under the title "*Prospect of the famous and fertile Island of Tobago*". In this pamphlet, the land is described as both beautiful and perfectly suited for colonization. On numerous plantations, enslaved Africans could produce profitable tropical goods while the settlers would enjoy a carefree life in their prosperous colony:

> And I am perswaded [sic] that there is no Island in *America* that can afford us more ample Subjects to contemplate the Bounty and Goodness of our Great Creator in than this of *Tobago*. […] Inasmuch therefore as by reason of her Fertility she acquires to her self [sic] the Sirname of *Fortunate* […] and by the Providence of God sleeps in the Arms of Security; whose Soil is so rich without Art or Cultivation, that some have fancied her the *Paradise* of the *Indies*. (Poyntz 1683, fol. A2^{v}, pp. 2–3)

The author of this eulogy is Captain John Poyntz, commissioned by Duke Jakob to re-establish the Couronian colony. His brochure attempts to lure settlers to the Caribbean with a fanciful description of the paradisiacal conditions that await them.

Neither Poyntz nor the Dutch were inclined to describe Tobago according to the facts – the former tried to encourage prospective colonists, whereas the latter intended to claim the island for themselves. Another document, however, might give a more authentic description of the hardships endured by the Couronian pioneers. Jan Waebe, a Dutchman, served as helmsman on the *Fortuna*, a Couronian vessel dispatched to Tobago in 1686 in an effort to re-establish the lost colony. His diary has survived (Mattiesen 1940, pp. 821–85) and, since he did not intend to publish it, he probably had no reason to exaggerate or embellish his experiences. After their arrival, Waebe and his company managed quite well to survive by hunting and fishery, despite continuous attacks by the "savages". But in the rainy season, the situation deteriorated rapidly. Numerous people fell ill and died in droves. The food decayed and the timbers of the ship and the wooden fort began to rot. After waiting in vain for a supply ship from Europe, the surviving Couronians left the island on the hardly seaworthy *Fortuna* and managed to reach Jamaica. There, the captain was forced to sell a large number of his own crew into slavery, to be able to finance the journey home.

Judging from Waebe's testimony, life on Couronian Tobago was harsh indeed. Even if one takes into consideration that the *Fortuna* expedition in the 1680s met with harsher obstacles than the colonizers during the comparatively successful years in the 1650s, it is likely that the situation in the Couronian colony was precarious from the very beginning.

When we conceptualized this research project and decided to follow the traces of Duke Jakob on Tobago, we told ourselves to keep our expectations low: this short episode in colonial history must have been hidden by later colonizations …. Could such delicate patterns in the sand, swept over by continuous waves of history, belong in any meaningful way to Tobago's "cultural identity" today, which seems, politically and socially, so strongly influenced by the long-lasting British colonial rule?

The wooden houses in Scarborough, painted with clear colors, convey a distinctively Caribbean flair that appears detached from distant Baltic colonizers. And far more than a foray into the Couronian past, in present-day Tobago other issues take on great importance: the Tobagonians' active and largely successful striving for economic development, a wide political participation and far-reaching gender equality. "Together we aspire, together we achieve", the national motto states, embodying the effort to meld the identities of Trinidad and Tobago.

Still, "We want to get to know *all* our colonial powers", historians at the University of the West Indies near Port of Spain told us. Trinidadian and

Tobagonian students seemed eager to learn about the Couronian colonization, Latvia, and what could be called "Courland" today. In the historical consciousness of Tobago's inhabitants, the brief Couronian presence has indeed left an impact, although it has dramatically changed with the developments of the ensuing centuries and their residues in collective memory.[15]

At the magnificent Great Courland Bay on Tobago's western coast a bulky concrete monument, designed by Latvian-American sculptor Jānis Mintiks and erected in 1978, rises skyward, commemorating the "bold, enterprising and industrious Courlanders from faraway Latvia on the Baltic shores who had lived in this area named after them from 1639 to 1693" (Cāzere, Vahšteins, and Blūms 2010, p. 61; Merritt 2010, p. 501). On a more mundane level, even the local grocery store still bears the name "Courland". On the beach nearby, annual Courland meetings have been organized, sponsored by the World Federation of Free Latvians, a diaspora group formed during the Cold War, and attended mainly by Latvians residing in the United States (Merritt 2010, p. 500). The participants celebrate the Midsummer festival at the site of former Jacobusstadt, bringing Latvian folk dresses and customs to Tobago and, in doing so, preserve their interpretation of the Couronian colonial history.

In the vicinity of the Great Courland Bay monument, a sign informs visitors that this location is "[t]he site of the oldest fort and town in Tobago". It reads:

> The Dutch town Nieuw Vlissingen and settlement Nieuw Walcheren (1628–1630). Twice destroyed by the Spaniards and Caribs; later the capital (Fort Jacobus and Jacobustadt) of the Couronian colony Neu-Kurland (Jaunkurzeme) and the site of the oldest church (Evangelical Lutheran) in Tobago (1654–1659) renamed as Fort Beveren under the Dutch occupation (1659–1664), restored to the Couronians by the English; remained as a point of attraction to the French, Dutch, British, and Carib invaders for the next 160 years. Under the benevolent rule (with interruptions from 1639–1693) of the Dukes of Courland in Latvia, the Germans, Latvians, Scandinavians, Dutch, British, French, Jews, Caribs and Gambians from Africa formed an international settlement of free men at the Great Courland Bay engaged in trade with North America, Brazil, Europe and Africa. Other Couronian settlements[16] were located at Black Rock (Fort Bennett), Mount Irvine (Little Courland Bay, Fort Monck, Fort Schmoll, Fort Casimir), King Peter Bay (Kalpi Bay) and Castara (Coerse Bay, Kursu Licis).

Another sign was erected to the memory of Couronian Fort James, located in the present-day village of Plymouth. The sign indicates that the area was settled during the 1650s; it also makes reference to a four-gun battery and an oven for heating shots. The so-called Couronian ruins are, in fact, remnants of the British fort constructed after the cession of the island by the French (1763). Thomas C. Cambridge, a local amateur historian and archaeologist, believed that they formed the remnants of the Couronian fortress and informed the Trinidad and Tobago Tourist Board on this matter. Fort Bennet at Black Rock is a similar case: Lt. Robert Bennet was an English mercenary who commanded a small party of settlers which left the Duchy of Courland aboard *Der Schwann* in July 1680. They established a small fort, but in less than a year were driven out by Amerindian resistance and left for Barbados. Cambridge decided to commemorate the Couronian commander and named the ruins at Black Rock after him,

although it is not certain that Bennet's fortification was located at that site. Currently, a "Courland Bay Heritage Museum" is being planned and prepared at Black Rock with the aim of educating visitors and locals on the Courlanders' role in the island's history (Cāzere, Vahšteins, and Blūms 2010, p. 60).

The Couronian past is also a topic in the exhibitions at the Tobago Museum in Scarborough, which documents the Couronian as well as the Dutch and other nations' presence in Tobago. A map shows the islands' place names and their origins disaggregated among the Dutch, Couronian, French and English colonizers. Interestingly enough, the collection of the Tobago Museum even provides information on a "Musical Performance of Tobago" in Latvia, a musical by Māra Zālīte that premiered in Riga in 2001.

Archaeological research has unearthed a number of ruins in the so-called Courland division in western Tobago that might relate to the Couronian settlement. Indigo was listed as one of the export products from Tobago and the ruins of an indigo factory have been discovered in Parlatuvier. Historical records show that there were several indigo factories on the island. Enslaved Africans[17] from Mali and Senegal brought the practice of using indigo to dye fabrics with intricate patterns to the American south. Since there was a strong demand for the blue pigment extracted from the plant in the European textile production, indigo became one of the chief articles of trade of both the Dutch and the British East India companies in the seventeenth century.

In 1780, as many as 42,750 lbs of indigo were exported from Tobago. Records indicate, however, that the cultivation of indigo had already been introduced by the Courlanders, and one might trace the origins of the factory at Parlatuvier back to the mid-seventeenth century. The indigo grown in Tobago belonged to the species *Indigofera anil* (*suffruiticosa*) and pockets of indigo plants are still found on the island. The dye is obtained from the plant through a process of fermentation carried out naturally by bacteria. The leaves are immersed in a tub with water where they begin to ferment after 18 hours and the blue color becomes discernible. Both liquid and mash are drawn off into another tub where they are agitated. At this point the mash settles to the bottom and the remaining water is drawn off into a third tub and once more allowed to settle. Tools, such as forks and a wrench, found at the site were probably used in the processing. The deep-water harbor in the village of Parlatuvier was possibly used as a port from which to ship indigo.

In the vicinity of the former Couronian settlement in western Tobago, remnants of windmills and other ruins associated with the sugar industry can still be seen today. Historical notes indicate that the former Couronian sugar works existed until 1946, and at least one was converted to a copra (dried coconut) drying plant.

The scale of the Couronian colonization might have been limited, but its influence on Tobagonian historical memory should not be discounted. The colonizers certainly left their traces on the island's historical consciousness. Further archaeological studies are necessary to confirm whether the mentioned ruins are to be considered tangible vestiges of the Couronian presence. In 1987, the Tobago House of Assembly started an annual cultural program to showcase Tobago's heritage over a two-week period in late July and August. The production was staged in various communities and highlighted the respective community's history and traditions. In 1987, a re-enactment of the Courlanders' landing at Plymouth Bay was organized, and visitors from Latvia participated in the event. Thomas C. Cambridge's efforts to label British fortifications

as Couronian can, likewise, be seen as an attempt to construct a Couronian heritage on Tobago.

The memorial sites on Tobago convey a rather idealized view of the Couronian colonial episode. The image of "bold, enterprising, and industrious Courlanders from faraway Latvia" who "formed an international settlement of free men" at Great Courland Bay whitewashes the historical reality of seventeenth-century colonialism. Considering Duke Jakob's involvement in the slave trade and the ongoing strife between Europeans and Amerindians, it seems hardly opportune to claim that "Caribs and Gambians" lived contentedly "under the benevolent rule [...] of the Dukes of Courland", as the Trinidad and Tobago Tourist Board purports. This exaggeratedly positive image of Couronian rule provides a striking contrast to the problematic aspects of the colonial past that dominate the collective memory in the Caribbean.

Latvia: Remembering Tobago

After Latvia declared independence in 1918, Tobago became one of the historical motifs employed in the construction of a national identity. In the interwar period, especially under the authoritarian regime (1934–1940), the story of Couronian Tobago was seen not only as an intriguing passage from the annals of history, but also as a feature of Latvia's national mythology that would project the existence of a Latvian nation and at least some form of Latvian statehood into the seventeenth century. The colonization of Tobago implied a glorious past of the territory inhabited by Latvians, during times when every "decent" nation supposedly possessed a colony. The stage play "Tobago" (1935), written by Aleksandrs Grīns and based on his novel of the same name (Merritt 2010, p. 498), is an emphatic expression of this patriotic attitude. The play was staged by Eduards Smiļģis, a famous stage director, and the stage setting and decorations were designed by the well-known artist Oto Skulme. The première in Riga's Daile Theater was attended by the Ministers of Finance and Education, demonstrating that the topic was of importance to the political elite (Dombrovskis-Dumbrājs 1935, p. 12). In some newspaper announcements the play was labelled as "national", to highlight its ideological relevance (*Rīts* 1935c, p. 6).

Before the première, the author revealed his patriotic intentions: "Latvian history so far has been depicted in too dark colors. Looking to the past in true light many will be dazzled by the history of their fatherland." Grīns claims that the reign of Duke Jakob is one of these glorious periods. He talks about the brave Latvian sailors and the folk songs sung by their wives. However, he prefers to ignore the involvement of Baltic Germans, thus stressing the allegedly national Latvian character of Jakob's enterprises (*Rīts* 1935a, p. 4). In his review of the play, an anonymous journalist even stated that, when Courland was ruled by Jakob, "a Latvian felt like in his own country, [he] had to support his ruler's intentions and had to take care of the prosperity of his fatherland" (*Rīts* 1935b, p. 4). Jakob is glorified as a good ruler, a personal friend of Louis XIV, but his ethnic background is not mentioned. The author stresses that Jakob stood up against the Baltic German barons and that he received support from the Latvian serfs – the fact that Jakob was himself German is omitted.

Such a narrative is typical for the 1930s when the authoritarian regime tried to popularize the myth of "800 years of Latvian slavery under German rule". The German role in the colonization of Tobago therefore had to be downplayed.

The play was followed by an opera, also entitled "Tobago". It was completed in 1938 by composer Mārtiņš Jansons and premièred in the Riga Opera House in the beginning of 1939. "Tobago" was Jansons's first opera and the tenth to be written in independent Latvia. According to reviews, the "national-ethnical aspect plays a major role in the opera" (Zālīts 1939, p. 11). The expressions used in the libretto indeed fit very well into the ideological framework promoted by the national authoritarian regime. In many ways, it resembles the various festivals organized by the political elite to promote the idea of a nation united around its leader. The people's enthusiasm for Jakob, as their ruler, is dutifully stressed in the opera: "Glory and praise to the Duke, / Praise to the ruler of our land!" (*Brīvā Zeme* 1938a, p. 12). The opera's hero, Latvian Kurzemes Jānis, rises to prominence and eventually becomes the Duke's deputy in Tobago (*Jaunākās Ziņas* 1939a, p. 10). Cultural stereotypes are emphasized through simple yet effective contrasts: Līna, the wife of Kurzemes Jānis, is described as "lovely and tidy" but her counterpart, Spanish Isabella, as "wily, hot-blooded and vibrant". Later, during the German occupation World War II, parts of the opera were played in concerts.[18]

During the years of the authoritarian regime some local scholars contributed to the creation of an exalted and simplified image of Tobago. Interesting insights are gained from an article published in 1936 that describes Ulmanis's visit to courses of Latvian history teachers in Riga. Among the papers given during that event was one read by M. Stepermanis, General Secretary of the newly established Institute of History, which, according to the political leadership of the time, was to become a major center for writing "Latvianized" history. The paper delivered by Stepermanis dealt with "free Latvian Courland during the time of Jakob". Its author had to acknowledge the economic and political shortcomings and the subsequent decline of the Duchy of Courland. However, he explains it by blaming the Germans: "Guilty were not the main inhabitants, the Latvians, but the minority of German landlords who – led by intrigues and other politically insignificant reasons, but mainly because of the growing Latvian power – created such obstacles that the mighty Latvian state lost its role in a European context" (*Rīts* 1936, p. 2). It was obviously a manipulation of historical facts; Courland clearly had not been a Latvian state in a political sense, as all power had belonged to Baltic German elites. Likewise, the Dukes had not had any intention to change the distribution of power – despite their conflicts with local German landlords who wanted to keep their privileges and influence in decision-making processes.

Duke Jakob and his reign were praised in specially organized Memorial Days. For example, there was one organized in Kuldīga in 1939. Its activities were placed in current national context – even the sermon at the Lutheran Church of St. Anne was about nationhood, and President Ulmanis sent an address to the event, which he did not attend. Stepermanis gave a paper where he stated that, in Courland, "the Latvian nation lived an independent life for more than two hundred years" (*Jaunākās Ziņas* 1939b, p. 16). He drew parallels between Ulmanis and Jakob by calling Jakob the "master of Kurzeme" (Ulmanis also often was depicted as a master, a farm owner, and

typical representative of the peasant class), but he did not forget to stress that Ulmanis was more important than Jakob. "Duke Jakob with his plans and activities was too lonely because he did not know how to wake the national forces of his land and to trust them, thereby putting the fate of his actions and his Duchy in the hands of Latvians. Such a task can be realized only by a true Latvian, a national leader who has come from the midst of the nation" (Stepermanis 1939, p. 6). The speech given by Stepermanis was popularized not only by the main newspapers by also by small regional publications.[19]

There was also a plan to organize scientific expeditions to Tobago and Gambia but these were postponed, most likely because of the outbreak of World War II (*Brīvā Zeme* 1938b, p. 2). Nevertheless, Tobago became a popular exotic destination for traveling or, taking into account how expensive it was, at least for describing others' impressions. In 1936 a journalist from the newspaper *Rīts* ("Morning") wrote a review of a recently published British traveler's book. The journalist was pleased to find that the author of this book called the period when Tobago belonged to the Duchy of Courland the "golden age" of this island. At the same time, the author critically presented the current situation when most inhabitants were poor and dissatisfied with British rule (Varenais 1936, p. 3).

A year earlier the same newspaper published information on a journey undertaken by two Latvian naval officers, Jānis Ozoliņš and Miķelis Plēsums, who left Riga and crossed the Atlantic Ocean with their small yacht *Laima* (cf. Merritt 2010, p. 498). They had two goals – to be the first Latvians to cross the Atlantic in such a small boat as well as the first Courlanders to set their feet on Tobagonian soil after the death of Duke Jakob. They both were pleased that after all the difficulties they encountered on their way to Tobago, local authorities met them well. The two travelers suggested that British ships should offer special discounts for tourists because "Courlanders have a great interest in Tobago" (*Rīts* 1935d, p. 1). It is interesting to note that this article is placed on the front page. Another article by a Latvian traveler describes life in Tobago (as "slow") and mentions with excitement that one local shop sells Latvian butter (Zelis 1936, p. 12).

During the Soviet period, the mythology of Latvian Tobago was discontinued. The name, however, was indirectly referenced in the novel *Tobago Changes Tack*, written by G. Cīrulis and A. Immermanis, and its subsequent film adaptation (cf. Merritt 2010, pp. 498–99). The film depicts the fate of a Latvian merchant ship named after Tobago which was far away from Latvia during the early days of the Soviet occupation in 1940, but that voluntarily returned home (Riekstiņš 1965, p. 4). To Soviet propaganda, it supposedly proved that ordinary people trusted the new political system.

In the period after 1991 numerous businesses were named after Tobago. The names of Duke Jakob and Tobago were featured in various cultural activities like the wine festival in Sabile in 2004, where the Duke appeared in a theatrical performance accompanied by natives of Tobago (Jaunbelzere 2004). In Riga, both a prominent casino – which, however, has been defunct since the economic crisis of 2008 – and a prestigious modern apartment complex are named "Tobago" (Merritt 2010, p. 499).

Latvian President Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga visited Trinidad and Tobago before formal diplomatic relations were established between the two countries. Although she met with A. N. R. Robinson, President of Trinidad and Tobago, it was an unofficial

holiday trip. When diplomatic relations were established in 2003, Gints Jegermanis, Latvian Ambassador to the UN, spoke of the "emotional bond between the Latvian public and the island of Tobago" in his commemorative speech (Merritt 2010, p. 500; Orlovs 2002).

The Duchy of Courland's colonial endeavors also inspired a musical written by well-known playwright Māra Zālīte that premiered at Riga's Daile Theater in 2001. "*Tobāgo!*", performed in the local dialect of northwestern Courland, blends the history of Courland and its colony with fictional motifs. The plot juxtaposes the lives of Duke Jakob and his wife to the story of Latvian commoners who colonize Tobago, proudly proclaiming the freedom of their native land and their possession of Tobago against the ambitions of the Dutch antagonists (Merritt 2010, p. 499). The 400th anniversary of Jakob Kettler's birth was commemorated in autumn 2010; on that occasion the Duke even became the protagonist of a special issue of the Latvian comic magazine, *š!*, which illustrated his colonial endeavors (cf. Ķešāne 2010).

Upon arrival at Duke Jakob's former port at Ventspils, from where his world expeditions departed, visitors can hardly fail to notice the red shining neon sign of the store house that reads "Tobago" or the tour boat docked at the city port, aptly named *Herzog Jakob*. But this is about all that refers to the Duke's far-reaching ambitions in this sprawling city by the dunes of the Baltic Sea. For visitors interested in the colonial past, the ducal castle turns out to be an unexpected disappointment: compared to four floors of exhibition devoted to the city's history, archaic coins, medieval excavations, and relics from World War II, the few lines that deal with Couronian colonialism are inscribed on two display boards tucked away in a tower cabinet and hardly leave a lasting impression.

In the city of Jelgava, on the other hand, Jakob Kettler and the Couronian identity are appreciated all the more. The local Museum of History and Art houses, among many other things, an exhibit with a life-sized Jakob sitting in front of a huge map of Tobago. The Couronian dukes themselves are just a mile away, lined up in their sarcophagi in a narrow room with direct entrance from the lawn at Jelgava castle, built in the eighteenth century on the site of Duke Jakob's residence. The colonial past even inspires the gastronomy in the city, with a restaurant called "Tobago" adorned with the proper wooden ships in the windows.

What significance does Kurzeme, Courland, as one of the historical regions of Latvia, have beyond the slogans of the tourist information?[20] In 2004, Imants Lancmanis, Director of the Rundale Castle Museum, stated, "To a large extent, the Duchy of Courland and Semigallia has now disappeared, vanished into thin air. However, reflections of the duchy are still alive in our memories of European history, and these reflections are part of Latvia's identity today" (Cāzere, Vahšteins, and Blūms 2010, preface). Similarly, Ojārs Kalniņš, Director of the Latvian Institute, claimed the Couronian colonial past as part of Latvia's history. On the occasion of the 90th anniversary of the foundation of the Republic of Latvia, Kalniņš argued, "[T]he Republic of Latvia has never had colonies, but they were held in the seventeenth century by the Duchy of Courland and now Courland is today part of Latvia" (Merritt 2010, p. 500).

Is the colonial past of the Couronian dukes part of a national Latvian identity, or could one assume a regional layer of particularly Couronian identity even today? Does

the attribute "Couronian" have any meaning today, other than a connotative one? The importance of historical regions for the self-perception of present-day Latvia and for its role in the EU of today remains to be investigated. Generally speaking, historical regions appear to be the result of an effort to construct memory rather than an expression of collective self-perception.[21]

Furthermore, is Duke Jakob's extraordinary life just a small stone in the Couronian mosaic or does he dominate the picture of "the Golden Couronian Age"? In the present-day reception, the Couronian peasants' culture overlaps with the Baltic German European elite culture. This becomes obvious in historical re-enactments such as the "Couronian dance evenings" at the Liepāja city museum, where baroque dances in historical costumes are performed, rather than the rural folk dances one might expect.

On the other hand there has also been an ironically reflecting discourse in Latvia, concerning the sometimes overenthusiastic reception of the Tobago colonization among the Latvian exile community in the United States, and their romantic pirate activities at Great Courland Bay. The relationship between the commemoration of the Tobago colonization among North American Latvians and the perspective from Latvia herself requires further investigation.

Present-day Latvian scholars tend to approach the Couronian colonial past with scepticism and bemusement, and try to keep a critical distance. The visit to Tobago by the Latvian State President, Vīķe-Freiberga, could be interpreted as being in accordance with the position of the exile community, but due to its unofficial nature it can hardly be considered to be representative of the domestic discourse in Latvia. A further inquiry into the importance of the Couronian colonial past in Latvian historical memory – for example through an examination of school textbooks and curricula as well as official commemorations – would seem advisable.

Today's scepticism can also be connected to an exaggerated reception during the interwar period. This could be the reason that the film project "*Riga – Banjul – Scarborough: Pursuing the Dreams of Latvians*",[22] a documentary about Duke Jakob's colonial endeavors shot partially in Tobago and the Gambia, did not meet unanimous support in Latvia (Cāzere, Vahšteins, and Blūms 2010, p. 83).[23] It examines the meanings of slavery and freedom and asks how to maintain one's identity in a multicultural world. The producers stated, "Interestingly, television stations in Latvia itself have refused to show this film. Perhaps the themes of Latvian self-esteem and self-respect are considered too controversial?" (Cāzere, Vahšteins, and Blūms 2010, p. 90). If so, this could be interpreted as an effort by the media to distance themselves from the national reception during the 1930s. Or has the reaction against the film to be seen as part of the criticism against the superficial celebrations performed by the Latvian exile community in recent years – and, as such, as a reaction against the exile cultures and their importance, in general? It is difficult to say.

Concluding Considerations

Although the Duchy of Courland managed to retain a stable presence on Tobago for little more than five years, the memories of this extraordinary colonial episode have endured three and a half centuries. Controversial aspects, most notably the

Couronian involvement in the transatlantic slave trade, have often been notably missing from the historical narratives. To Latvian patriots of the interwar period, as well as to Latvian exiles in the USA during the Soviet occupation, Duke Jakob's colonial endeavors illustrated the bravery and the resourcefulness of their ancestors. To Tobagonians, it seems to belong to a part of the island's past that is more of a prologue to their own history, but the short-lived colony is far from forgotten. Jakob's legacy remains, on Tobago and in Latvia, as a reminder that the history of a country, even a small Duchy like Courland and a small island like Tobago, cannot be comprehended only in a regional perspective, but must be understood also in its global dimension.

As the population of Courland in the time of Jakob Kettler consisted of a small German-speaking upper class and a majority of Latvian serfs, it was possible for both Latvians and Baltic Germans to claim the Couronian colonies as part of "their" past. In the nineteenth century, above all, Baltic German literates extolled the memory of the Couronian colonial adventure, repeatedly stressing the fact that their ancestors were those who had planned and executed the settlement of Tobago. At a time when Wilhelmine Germany aggressively strove to acquire colonies, the nationalistic elites were easily fascinated by a "German duke" like Jakob Kettler, who had been active overseas as early as two centuries before.

When Latvia became independent in 1918, Tobago became one of the symbols used in the identity construction of the young republic, especially after Ulmanis's coup in 1934. Although the Latvian serfs of the Couronian duke had possessed no influence whatsoever, they were, according to the patriots of the interwar period,[24] those who had constructed Couronian Tobago with their own hands. Enthusiastic stories, operas, and screenplays celebrated the deeds of the Latvian pioneers, painted a panorama with flourishing colonies, energetic inhabitants, and powerful fleets under Couronian banner, all having little to do with the precarious situation of the colonies and the difficult life of their population. During this time Latvian nationals even went as far as to demand that the – at that time – British island should be "given back" to Latvia.

In fact, both Baltic Germans and Latvians tended to stress the contribution of their own ancestors to the Couronian colonial history and were in no way disturbed by the fact that the colonial ambitions of the duke were implemented neither by the Latvians nor by the Baltic Germans, but instead mainly by Scandinavian mercenaries and Dutch sailors serving in the Couronian fleet.

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Notes

1 On Jakob's trade connections and his relationship to the Netherlands, cf. Anderson 1956, pp. 24–26; Gebel 2011.

2 Duke Jakob never came close to realizing his grandiose vision of Indian trade. A single Flemish ship in Couronian service sailed to India and Indonesia in 1654 (Anderson 1975), but the Duchy never managed to establish a presence in the Indian Ocean.

3 It is by no means certain why Duke Jakob chose Tobago as the site of his colony in the Caribbean (Jekabson-Lemanis 2000, p. 27). Allegedly the island was presented to him as a gift on the occasion of his baptism, by his godfather King James I of England, but there is no historical evidence to confirm this tale (Anderson 1961/62a, pp. 13–15), which is nevertheless occasionally found in literature. Jakob's close ties to the English court may, however, have played a role. Jakob was possibly informed on Tobago by Sir Thomas Roe, an English diplomat who had been resident on Trinidad and later briefly entered Couronian service. Another possible informer might have been Joachim Deninger, a Couronian adventurer who had served in a Dutch expedition to Brazil, and was probably familiar with the situation in the Caribbean. Deninger later served as Couronian governor in Gambia, before disappearing on a quest to find the fabled gold mines in the interior of western Africa (Anderson 1956, pp. 39–40).

4 The enterprising Courlanders were not the first Europeans to set foot on Tobago. Christopher Columbus might have sighted the island during one of his voyages (Phillips 2004, pp. 11–16; Boomert 2002, p. 83), but if he did so he had chosen not to go ashore. Compared to other Caribbean islands, Tobago had remained relatively undisturbed by European colonialism up to the seventeenth century. The Spaniards, based on the neighboring island of Trinidad, considered Tobago part of their sphere of influence, but undertook no serious efforts to colonize the island. They were, however, careful to prevent settlers or buccaneers of rivalling powers from gaining a foothold on Tobago, lest they could threaten Spanish trade routes. In 1636, the Spaniards dispatched an expedition to drive from Tobago the Dutch who had attempted to establish an outpost there (Boomert 2002, pp. 88–114). On other occasions, they were quite willing leave the matter to Tobago's indigenous inhabitants, who repeatedly frustrated English and Dutch colonization efforts during the 1630s.

5 Jekabson-Lemanis (2000, p. 31) dates this expedition to 1639.

6 *Himmel, gib dem* Helden-Held *Glück und Wind zur fernen Reise. / Daß Er sich der* Neuen Welt *als ein neuer Föbus weise, / Daß es möge wohlgelingen, was Er dorten wohlbestellt, / Und wir bey der Rück-Kunfft singen: Sey willkommen*, Helden-Held!

7 Isolated groups of Couronian survivors were also reported from Barbados, Venezuela and possibly from Suriname (cf. Lichtveld 1978, pp. 8–9).

8 The only serious attempt to recover Tobago during the eighteenth century was ordered by Maurice de Saxe, a German-French adventurer and favorite of Tsarina

Anna who ruled as Duke of Courland for a brief period between 1726 and 1727. Maurice prepared an expedition to Tobago, but was overthrown shortly afterwards and the expedition was cancelled (Tambs 1970, p. 360).

9 No other aspect of the Couronian settlement at Tobago has stirred that many emotions (cf. Merritt 2010, pp. 497–98). Patriotic Latvian scholars of the interwar period strove to depict Neu-Kurland as a prospering settlement inhabited by thousands of Latvian pioneers. In 1970, the eminent German historian Hermann Kellenbenz claimed that the majority of smallholders in Couronian Tobago were Latvian peasants who had been forcibly resettled (Kellenbenz 1970, p. 389). A generation earlier, German scholar Otto Heinz Mattiesen, the author of an important monograph on Couronian colonial policy published in 1940, complied with the Nazi ideology of the time and envisioned the Tobago colony as a manifestation of German pioneering spirit. Therefore, he categorically denied any involvement of ethnic Latvians (Mattiesen 1940, pp. 483–84). The truth might have been in between these extreme stances. Latvian émigré historian Edgar Anderson, the leading researcher on Couronian Tobago in the post-war period, argued that they were undoubtedly several Latvian-speaking settlers on Tobago, though not in a particularly significant number (Anderson 1961/62b, p. 132; Anderson 1956, p. 147). On Anderson and his position vis-à-vis Latvian and German nationalist interpretations cf. Merritt 2010, pp. 496–97.

10 The term "Carib" is used in this paper as a historical designation in the context of European colonialism. At the time of the first European-Amerindian encounters, Tobago was inhabited by groups of Kalina, so-called "mainland Caribs" (cf. Saunders 2005, p. 149). The Kalina are linguistically different from the Kalinago, the "island Caribs" of the Windward Islands, but both groups considered each other as kinsmen and tended to be on friendly terms (cf. Boomert 2010, p. 109; Boomert 2002; p. 77). European explorers and ethnographers simplified the complex reality of Amerindian ethnic identities (Boomert 2002, pp. 79–80) and divided the inhabitants of the Caribbean islands into two categories, "Caribs" and "Arawaks".

11 Interestingly enough, Mollens's account of the Amerindians is diametrically opposed to the common stereotype of the same period. Usually, European sources of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries describe Caribs as fierce and warlike. Once the image of the hostile Carib had been commonly accepted, any Amerindians who resisted attack or enslavement, regardless of their language, allegiance and ethnic background, were labeled as "Caribs" (Boomert 2002, pp. 75–76; Robe 1972, pp. 45–46). The word "cannibalism" derives from *caniba*, the term used by the Taino of the Greater Antilles to describe the Kalinago (cf. Saunders 2005, pp. 48–49; Rivera-Pagán 2003, pp. 225–29; Allaire 1997, p. 179). It was subsequently adopted in European languages, reflecting the common early modern stereotype of anthropophagous "savages".

12 The letters have been published by Mattiesen (1940, pp. 699–700), who interprets them with blatant racism.

13 Fort Jacobus was erected at the site of the ill-fated Fort Nieuw Vlissingen, built by the Dutch in 1628 and destroyed by indigenous resistance, instigated by the Spanish, two years later.

14 Jekabson-Lemanis (2000, p. 37) gives a far greater population. However, she does not provide any reference and her claim seems to be based on the exaggerated estimations of Latvian historians in the interwar period.

15 The following survey is somewhat preliminary; other approaches, such as an analysis of local schoolbooks and public libraries as well as interviews, could provide a deeper understanding of the role of the Couronian past in Tobago.

16 The sign provides a slightly exaggerated depiction of the Couronian colony. There is no documentary evidence that Couronian settlements ever existed at King Peter's Bay or at Castara.

17 Indigo is of significance in many cultures worldwide and came to be associated with wealth and power. The use of the color purple extracted from the indigo plant is associated with biblical times and wealth. The indigenous tribes of the Americas used it for painting and for mummy shrouds. In north and west Africa indigo-dyed cloth symbolized wealth and fertility.

18 See, for example, the concert in 1942 (Jērums 1942, p. 4).

19 The quoted text was published in a local newspaper in Gulbene, a small town in Vidzeme.

20 "For centuries the Courlanders have appreciated their culture and traditions. They do not only love to work much, but also to relax thoroughly and to eat deliciously. The Courlanders are self-conscious Latvians, proud of their culture and values" (Tourismusverband Kurland 2009).

21 Within Latvia, the region of Latgale in the eastern part of the country is a special case. The differences between the Latgalian language and standard Latvian and the catholic tradition of Latgale have resulted in a particularly strong regional identity.

22 Film team: Kārlis Vahšteins – project director, scriptwriter, narrator; Ingrīda Cāzere – scriptwriter and narrator; Armands Zvirbulis – director; Andris Bētiņš – cameraman.

23 The film, which exists in three versions (Latvian, English, and Spanish) slightly adapted to their respective audiences, was produced between 2005 and 2008 and has been shown in Trinidad and Tobago, the United States, Canada, Latvia, and at the MUCES international film festival in Segovia, Spain.

24 This image was particularly popularized by the writings of Jānis Juškevics (cf. Anderson 1956, p. 371).

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