

History of the Crusades. Episode 224. The Baltic Crusades. The Prussian Crusade Part VI. The Golden Bull of Rimini.

Hello again. Last week we examined the recent history of the Teutonic Order, and the activities it had undertaken since Hermann von Salza became its Grand Master in the year 1210. In particular, we saw how the Teutonic Knights were invited to occupy a small part of Transylvania by King Andrew II of Hungary. The venture started off in a promising way, with the Order building defensive structures to protect against invading pagans, and German peasants moving in to work the land. However, it all started to unravel when the Order repeatedly pushed into lands outside its original charter, and when Hermann von Salza tried to stave off future problems with King Andrew's successor by placing the lands occupied by the Order under Papal control, King Andrew expelled the Order from Hungary.

So in summary, the Hungarian experience saw a European ruler invite the Teutonic Order to take up arms against local pagans in return for land and income. That experience had gone very badly for the Teutonic Order. A huge amount of effort, blood and money had been expended by the Order in Hungary, and it all pretty much came to nothing. In his book "The Teutonic Knights, A Military History", William Urban states that the Hungarian experience shook the confidence of the Order, was a blot on the Order's reputation, and may have even resulted in financial losses in the form of withdrawals of donations and other financial support to the Order from prominent European backers.

Now the Grand Master of the Order, Hermann von Salza, is being presented with a formal offer from Duke Konrad of Mazovia which looks suspiciously similar to the offer made by King Andrew. Duke Konrad of Mazovia, with the support of Bishop Christian of Prussia, is offering to give land and income to the Order in the region of Kulm in Prussia, in return for the Order providing arms and men to fight the Prussian pagans. Not surprisingly, this offer set alarm bells ringing for Hermann von Salza. Since the offer made by Duke Konrad was freakishly similar to the one made by King Andrew, the Grand Master needed to do everything in his power to ensure that this time the experience wouldn't blow up in his face.

There were, of course, some differences. Duke Konrad wasn't a king and probably wouldn't have the manpower to expel the Order from Prussia once it was established. However, in his book "The Prussian Crusade", William Urban points out that Hermann von Salza probably would have been mindful of the fact that, while Duke Konrad may not be able to physically expel the Order from Prussia, Mazovia would be able to block supplies and reinforcements from getting to Kulm in the event of a dispute with the Order. Also, the unstable nature of central rule in the Kingdom of Poland meant that he had to consider the chance that maybe Duke Konrad would emerge victorious in an internal struggle with his fellow Piast rulers, and rise to the position of King of Poland. He then would likely have the ability to expel the Order from Prussia in the same manner as King Andrew of Hungary.

So to try and reduce the chance of things going horribly wrong, Hermann von Salza was looking to ensure that the written invitation made and signed by Duke Konrad was watertight and legally sound in the offers it was making. Now unfortunately, no copy of the invitation currently exists, but William Urban states that Hermann von Salza located two weak points within it. Firstly, there was nothing in the document preventing Duke Konrad from changing his mind and revoking the offer, at any time in the future. And secondly, the promises it made were not extensive enough to justify the Teutonic Order placing its reputations, and its finances, at risk once again.

So Hermann von Salza decided to approach his friend and supporter Emperor Frederick II, with a view to getting a more concrete and more extensive agreement than the one offered by the Duke. Wait, I hear you say, What has this got to do with the Holy Roman Empire? The Kingdom of Poland is adjacent to the lands occupied by the Prussians, surely only the Kingdom of Poland has the legal power to make pronouncements on land grants in Prussia? Well, not so, according to Emperor Frederick II.

Now, we must remember that Emperor Frederick II is Stupor Mundi, the "Wonder of the World". A man with massive ambitions and with no small view of the world and his own place within it. Emperor Frederick viewed himself as the true successor to the Emperors of Rome. Accordingly, to him at least, he was the overlord of pretty much everywhere in the known world, so of course he has the legal power to award land and rights to the Order in Prussia. William Urban points out that technically Emperor Frederick was overlord of the Kingdom of Poland, even if the Piast rulers might not have viewed things quite in that way, so yes, legally, the emperor probably did have the ability to wield power over lands in Prussia.

The only thing holding Emperor Frederick back was the thought that granting rights and land to the Teutonic Order in Prussia may make the Order lose their focus on the big picture and the big picture for Emperor Frederick was always the Holy Land. There was little point in being Emperor of Everywhere if you didn't have the Holy Land under your control, so William Urban points out that it is likely Emperor Frederick sought some kind of undertaking from Hermann von Salza that his experiment in Prussia wouldn't result in him diverting resources from the Holy Land, and it's likely that the Grand Master provided this undertaking.

This issue would also be one at the forefront of the Grand Master's considerations. Acquiring power and influence in the Holy Land had always been the Order's primary objective, but with more prestigious orders already firmly established there, and with the Fifth Crusade having recently failed spectacularly without achieving any of its objectives, well, maybe it was time to diversify. Maybe it was time to take a couple of eggs out of the Middle Eastern basket and use them to build the Order's presence in Europe.

William Urban speculates that both men may have seen the advantages which may present themselves from the Holy Roman Empire placing the Teutonic Order into Prussia. For Emperor Frederick, there was always the possibility that the venture would be wildly successful, bringing money to the Empire, raising the Empire's prestige in the eyes of the Church, and even providing a foothold for the expansion of Imperial territory into the East. For the Grand Master, the venture provided a way to recoup the prestige and money lost in the failed Hungarian venture, and also provide a handy life raft for the Order in case the ship of the Order's presence in the Holy Land started to take water and sink.

So a legal document was drawn up. To raise it in importance, Emperor Frederick attached a large Golden Seal to the document, which ended up giving it its name, the Golden Bull of Rimini. Now, to say this is an important document is an understatement.

In fact, talking about important documents in his book "The Prussian Crusade", William Urban makes an interesting point. He states that at this period in time all documents were treated with reverence and respect. Today we probably agree to terms and conditions and even sign contracts without even bothering to read the words we are being asked to sign. Back in medieval times however, when most of the population was illiterate and the written

word was reserved for men of the Church and the most learned in society, and when the production of a document took a great deal of time and effort to achieve, respect for the written word, according to William Urban, sometimes approached respect for the sacred. So every single word in the Golden Bull of Rimini would have been minutely considered and analyzed, and then placed carefully in its rightful position. A scribe would have meticulously crafted the written words onto the document, which was then sealed with a large golden wax imprint.

So what were the important words set out in this impressive looking document? Well, in it Emperor Frederick allowed Hermann von Salsa and the Teutonic Order to accept the offer made by Duke Konrad for them to acquire Kulm in Prussia in return for subduing the pagans there. Importantly, the document also authorized the Order to, and I quote "keep any other lands they might acquire." End quote. This seemingly harmless phrase will become important later on in the Crusade. The core of the document sets out the rights of the Order to acquire land in Prussia and describes what they can legally do with this conquest.

Now, I'm going to read out part of this document. Why? Well, firstly, because I come from a legal background and find it interesting. And secondly, because it basically provides the legal foundation for the Prussian Crusade, and its importance can't really be overstated. So, warning, this is quite long. Here we go. And I quote.

"By our authority, we grant to the Grand Master permission to invade Prussia with his men, the Teutonic Knights and their allies. We grant and confirm to the Grand Master, his successors, and the Teutonic Knights in perpetuity, the aforementioned land received from the Duke and promise to give not only whatever lands, God willing, that they might conquer in Prussia, but also the royal rights in mountains, fields, rivers, swamps and seas, free and immune from any service or tax whatsoever. Moreover, we concede that in all lands conquered by them or acquired or which will be acquired, they may possess high justice, the right to hunt, to cut wood, to establish markets, to coin money, to raise taxes, to travel on rivers and seas as is just, to mine gold, silver, iron and other metals as well as salt that may be found in that region. We concede also the right to establish officials and judges for the people who are converted as well, as for those who remain in superstition to try, sentence and punish or condemned criminals for the maintenance of good order. They may hear civil and criminal cases and judge according to sound reason. By our grace, we add to this that the Grand Master and his successors may have and exercise those rights and jurisdictions in that land that other Princes in the empire are known to have in the widest latitude, so that good habits and practices may be imposed, that hearings and assizes can be held, such as will increase the faith of the believers and allow everyone to enjoy tranquil peace. We prohibit any Prince, Duke, Mark, Count, Ministerial, Knight or Advocate or any other person, high or low, lay or cleric, to attempt any violation of this grant and confirmation, and whoever does will pay a fine of one hundred gold pounds." End quote.

Okay, you still with me? So what does all this mean? Well, in a nutshell, it means, once the Teutonic Order moves into Prussia, good luck getting them out again. Basically, the document does its best to prevent a "King Andrew II of Hungary" issue from arising once again. It says to anyone who might lay claim to land in Prussia in the future: No, sorry if the Teutonic Order has conquered that land, it's theirs, and if you attempt to boot them out or lay claim to it yourself, well, you'll need to hand over one hundred gold pounds, thank you very much.

Now one of the many interesting things about this document was that the people who were going to be most affected by it, the Polish rulers, particularly Duke Konrad of Mazovia, and the Prussians themselves, didn't get to have any input into what the document contained, and also didn't get to sign it.

For the Prussians, that was understandable. They were just going to attempt to kill or enslave anyone who set foot in their region. And anyway, what's a document? What are these squiggly lines everywhere? They couldn't read, and even if they could, they would likely have been uninterested. They would deal with the invaders like they always had, with force and warfare, and not with legalities.

But for the Polish Dukes and the Polish monarchy, and even the main players inside the Holy Roman Empire, this document effectively locked them out of any future claims to land conquered by the Order in Prussia. Were they okay with that? Apparently they were. The Golden Bull of Rimini was signed and endorsed by such luminaries as the Archbishop of Magdeburg and Albrecht, Duke of Saxony.

So by March in the year 1226 the document had been drawn up and signed, and the Grand Master of the Teutonic Order, Hermann von Salsa, satisfied that the Golden Bull of Rimini vanquished the ghost of Transylvania past, felt empowered to commit his Order to launch a Crusade into Prussia. So join me next week as, after a six episode build up, we finally set out on the Prussian Crusade. Until next week, bye for now.

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