

History of the Crusades. Episode 226. The Baltic Crusades. The Prussian Crusade Part VIII. Legalities.

Hello again. Last week we saw the Teutonic Knights establish a base for themselves in a castle they named "Vogelsang" across the river from the region around Kulm in Prussia. While the fact that only seven Teutonic Knights were based at Vogelsang meant that they could not currently use it to conquer Prussia, parties of Knights did regularly raid into Prussia, familiarizing themselves with the land and its people, and forcibly converting the occasional Prussian they came across. Last week we also saw William of Modena arrive in the northern part of Prussia and slowly work his way southwards towards Vogelsang, learning the language, chatting with the locals, and attempting to familiarize himself with the pagans that the Papacy would like brought under the wing of Rome.

Interestingly, William of Modena left Prussia in January 1230. Even more interestingly, the first place he seems to have traveled to when he returned to Central Europe was Italy, where he met up with Hermann von Salza. Now, there is no record of what took place at this meeting, but later in the year 1230, Hermann von Salza sent a small army of Teutonic Knights to Vogelsang under the command of another Hermann, a man called Hermann Balk. Now Hermann Balk seems to have been a capable and well-respected military commander, a man who was quite rational and reasonable in dealing with everyone, except pagans. When it came to pagans, he was merciless and entirely cold-hearted, so I guess he was the ideal man to place in command of an army, which was to be used to subdue the feisty and warlike pagans of Prussia.

Hermann Balk also seems to have been a stickler for detail, because one of the first things he wanted to do when he arrived at Vogelsang was to clarify the legal situation regarding conquests by the Teutonic Order inside Prussia. Now, of course, we all know the Golden Bull of Rimini, which was created in 1226, gave very generous terms to the Teutonic Knights in regards to any conquests they may make in Prussia. The Golden Bull, however, had been granted by the Holy Roman Emperor. What Hermann Balk was concerned about was whether Duke Konrad of Mazovia and Bishop Christian of Prussia would grant similar terms to the Knights, or whether the land conquered by the Knights in Prussia would be open to claims by Poland that it was, in fact, Polish territory.

Now, as we've seen before, Duke Konrad of Mazovia was at this time a busy man. At the moment, his primary concern is how to extend his influence into Russia, not Prussia. The situation following the Mongol victory in the battle of Kalka River, back in 1223, was still fragile. Duke Konrad had managed to conquer some land in one Russian Principality, and the Principality of Kiev with its thriving trading capital city, lay temptingly over the horizon. But to even consider such a conquest, he needed to focus all his energies and his military might on Russia, and not on Prussia. So I guess it's understandable that he may have been happy to see Prussia effectively handed over to the Teutonic Knights. As a consequence he issued a document, which was witnessed by Bishop Christian and formally approved by Pope Gregory IX.

However, rumor has it that the terms of this agreement weren't exactly what the Teutonic Knights were after. Handily for the Teutonic Order, the original document vanished, and the Teutonic Order very helpfully created a new document in the year 1234, which may have contained some clauses which weren't in the original document, and which just happened to be very favorable to the Order. There is no proof that this later document was

ever seen by Duke Konrad, but it was seen by Pope Gregory, who gave it his hearty stamp of approval.

Now, not surprisingly, This document and the means by which it came into existence, has been the subject of a great deal of controversy over the years, the main allegation being, of course, that the Teutonic Order, not happy with the terms of the original agreement, managed to purposefully lose or destroy the document, and then produced a replacement which was tweaked more to their liking. Here is the key passage of the second, amended document. Just remember that the reference in the document to the "Hospital of St Mary of the Germans" is a reference to the Teutonic Knights. Okay, so he's what the amended document says, and I quote: "We Konrad, Duke of Mazovia and Kujavia, record this for those present now and for the future, that for the good of our soul and our ancestors, we give to the Hospital of St Mary of the Germans, the land of Kulm, with all that pertains thereto in the waters, the fields and swamps, reserving nothing for ourselves or hoping for anything in the future and the village of Orlou that lies in Kujavia." End quote.

Not surprisingly, the fact that the document has Duke Konrad effectively saying to the Teutonic Order "Here, have Kulm. We don't want to have anything to do with it now or in the future," has raised a few eyebrows over the years. Historians who allege the Teutonic Order engaged in a bit of political forgery and sleight of hand, point to the fact that surely Duke Konrad would never have carelessly given away Polish rights to Kulm in such a comprehensive and complete manner.

Those who say the document must have been a genuine copy of the original say that, well, Konrad was more interested in Russia at this point in time, and maybe he saw gifting Kulm to the Order as a way of removing subduing Prussia from his to do list. They also point out that, if the Order had blatantly forged the document, surely Duke Konrad would have discovered the fact and made a fuss about it, which doesn't seem to have happened.

Anyway, the veracity of the document as a faithful reproduction of the original agreement made between Duke Konrad and the Order is still the subject of much dispute today, and the controversy doesn't look like ending any time soon. All we need to know, from our point of view, is that the second document was produced in 1234, and like the Golden Bull of Rimini, effectively gave the green light to the Teutonic Knights to move into Kulm, take it and keep it for themselves.

But we're not quite ready to go crusading yet. The Teutonic Order wanted to be one hundred percent sure of their legal entitlement to the lands they conquered in Prussia before embarking on a full blown crusade, so to ensure that they reduced the chances of another "King Andrew II of Hungary" type situation occurring, they waited until they obtained an official Papal Bull from Rome, authorizing the crusade. Pope Gregory came to the party and issued the official call to arms, stating in the document, and I quote "From the letters of our favored son, the nobleman the Duke of Mazovia, we have learned that because the pagan Prussians do not know the name of Christ, and do not want to know it, he has called the Hospital of Holy Mary of the Germans to his lands, to aid the Christians in his country." End quote.

Okay, so now we have the green light from Rome. The only other box the Teutonic Order needed to tick was that of Bishop Christian. Unlike Duke Konrad, Bishop Christian, the man who had worked tirelessly, admittedly with little success, to Christianize his Bishopric, was not so eager to transfer all his rights over to the Teutonic Order. He was okay with the

Order going to Prussia and converting the Prussians, but he presented Hermann Balk with a list of conditions he wished to see satisfied before the Order could establish itself in Prussia. Hermann Balk wasn't at all impressed by the conditions, and spent over a year negotiating with Bishop Christian in an attempt to reach more favorable terms.

In the end, the two parties were forced to mediate the dispute at a meeting in Austria. The agreement they settled on was one where neither of them gained their desired outcome. Instead, a compromise was reached. Taking a leaf out of the Livonian book of land distribution, it was agreed that Bishop Christian would take two thirds of the land conquered by the Order, while the Order would keep the remaining one third. As you can imagine, this was not the outcome which Hermann Balk was looking for. He of course wanted the generous come-right-in-and-take-everything-you-see terms of the Golden Bull of Rimini and the agreement with Duke Konrad. But realizing that Bishop Christian wasn't going to budge from his stance, Hermann Balk threw his hands into the air and signed the agreement in Austria in the spring of 1231.

The delay caused by the finalizing of legalities, and by the wrangling of terms with the Bishop Christian, ended up serving the Teutonic Order well. It meant that they had ample time to prepare for the upcoming crusade. In addition to the usual preparations for a major military campaign, the Order also had time to extend the defenses at Vogelsang. A complete additional castle was constructed a short distance away from Vogelsang, on the Vistula River in a sheltered part of the river called Nessowe. This, in effect created a safe harbor where supplies could be shipped in from Mazovia, without fear from attacks by the pagans. Hermann Balk set up his command center in the castle and was able to spend time organizing the range of administrative tasks required in any major military campaign.

Interestingly, the delay also meant that the Dukes of Poland were free to join the campaign. Duke Konrad of Mazovia was now back from his campaigns in Russia, and the civil war that had rocked the Piast monarchy came to an end, when all parties signed a declaration of peace on New Year's Eve in the year 1232. So Duke Konrad traveled to Vogelsang to participate in the preparations for the campaign.

When Duke Konrad joined Hermann Balk in the field, they set about building a new castle. In the year 1231, Duke Konrad and Hermann Balk crossed the Vistula River and built a castle on the Prussian side of the river at Thorn. In his book "The Prussian Crusade", William Urban notes that the site the invaders chose for their castle was on top of a hill which was dominated by a large oak tree. The castle at Thorn was actually constructed around the oak tree. William Urban notes that it's not clear whether the tree played some role in the castle's defenses, possibly as an extra lookout, or whether the sole purpose of incorporating the tree into the castle was to annoy the pagans, who quite possibly venerated the tree. While the bulk of the forces for the upcoming crusade were still mustering, Duke Konrad and Hermann Balk put their new castles to good use, raiding deep into the region of Kulm and doing what crusaders do best, attacking pagans, sparing those who agreed to convert to Christianity and putting others to the sword.

Now, in his book *The Prussian Crusade*, William Urban provides an interesting analysis of the pagan resistance to these increased incursions by the crusaders. While it is true that the Prussians were more unified ethnically and linguistically than the pagans found across the regions of Livonia and Estonia, there was no real concept of "Prussia" as a nation, or "Prussia" as a cause to get behind, amongst the people who lived there. The Prussians were a warlike bunch of people, and they recognized and respected military might. Many

pagans, when confronted by the militarily superior, heavily armored Knights raiding into their villages from their impressively defended castles, were seemingly not totally unreluctant to switch their allegiance to the God and religion of this superior fighting force, and were likewise not totally resistant to picking up their weapons and fighting on the side of their new powerful comrades in arms, against their still pagan fellow Prussians.

Likewise, there didn't seem to be much solidarity in evidence amongst pagans who chose to resist the Crusaders, when it came to fighting converted Prussians. William Urban reports that the leader of the Prussian resistance at this time, a man called Pepin, didn't hesitate to kill converted Prussian fighters alongside the invading crusaders. In fact, apparently Pepin's father and father-in-law had both converted to Christianity, but this also didn't seem to affect Pepin's ability to kill pagan converts. His favored method of guerrilla warfare was to raid a converted Prussian village, kill all the villagers who refused to surrender to him and carry off all the remaining villagers to be resettled in the safely pagan parts of Prussia, far away from the region of Kulm.

In the end though, the best efforts of Pepin and those like him were to be of no avail. By the year 1232 most of the area around the stronghold of Kulm had been Christianized and Hermann Balk started rebuilding the fortifications at Kulm, which had been constructed under the orders of Bishop Christian back in 1215 and had later been demolished by the pagans.

So with Kulm in Christian hands and a nice set of castles newly built, it's time to see whether the whole of Prussia can be brought under the Christian yoke. For this, Hermann Balk and Duke Konrad are going to need a bigger army. Luckily for them, thousands of men are currently finalizing their preparations to join a Crusade to Prussia. Join me next week as we to join the Crusade, an impressive military campaign which will commence in Prussia in the year 1233. Until next week, bye for now.

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