

## History of the Crusades. Episode 234. The Baltic Crusades. The Prussian Crusade Part XI. The Four Bishoprics.

Hello again. Last week we saw the re-emergence, then the demise, of Bishop Christian, who, after four years in captivity managed to escape the clutches of the Prussian pagans, only to fall victim to Church politics. In his desire to emulate the success of Bishop Albert in Livonia, Bishop Christian clashed repeatedly with both the Teutonic Order and William of Modena, with the conflict resulting in William of Modena's decision to split Prussia into four separate bishoprics. Now, if you think that splitting Prussia into four smaller bishoprics is going to lessen the power of the Church in Prussia and contribute mightily towards the Teutonic Knights rising to a position of power within the Baltic Crusades unmatched by any other military Order in any other crusade, you would be right.

Now, due to some hard work by Master Poppo, the head of the Teutonic Order in Prussia, by the year 1242 pretty much all of Prussia had been conquered and now, with these newly Christianized lands neatly divided into four administrative districts, it was time to appoint some new Bishops to these positions. As we stated in last week's episode, Bishop Christian was offered the first choice, but he died before making his decision, so all four bishoprics were up for grabs. I guess it's not really surprising to learn that people didn't seem to be exactly knocking down doors in their haste to be appointed as a Prussian Bishop. Why? Well, because Prussia was still very much frontier country. Castles were hastily being built, and were popping up all over Prussia, but the reality on the ground was that there were still pockets of rebellious pagan Prussians here and there, trading networks were still being established, and, while peasants were being brought in from the Holy Roman Empire to work the land, much of it was still forested and uncleared, so really the income from the Bishoprics was never going to be huge. Add to this fact that the Bishops had to provide their own armies to defend their lands, and add also the possibility of political clashes with the other Bishoprics and the Teutonic Order, and add as well the possibility that once the Polish Piast Dukes stopped fighting amongst themselves in their civil war that they may turn their attentions to invading Prussia, then really, becoming a Prussian Bishop may have been viewed by many possible contenders as being more trouble than it was worth. Perhaps these factors, then, explain why the four Bishoprics ended up being a little difficult to fill.

Only one of them, the Bishopric of Kulm, was filled immediately, despite the fact that the new Pope, Pope Innocent IV, had expressed a desire to see all the new Bishoprics up and running as soon as possible. Kulm had been the first region to be Christianized. As such it was seen as being the least problematic as far as pagan uprisings were concerned, and it had the added bonus of the highest profile, with the town of Kulm being, for the moment at least, the unofficial capital city of Christianized Prussia. The person chosen to become the new Bishop

of Kulm was a man called Heidenreich, a Dominican Master of Theology who had been in Prussia on and off for the past ten years, holding the position of personal chaplain to William of Modena. He was personally consecrated by Pope Innocent in the year 1245 at Lyons, but it wasn't until 1251 that he managed to establish himself in the seat of his new diocese in Kulm. Unfortunately for Bishop Heidenreich, a massive pagan uprising in 1263 resulted in many of his subjects being violently killed. As William Urban reports in his book "The Prussian Crusade", and I quote "Bishop Heidenreich died in July of 1264, never having recovered from the shock." End quote.

The next position to be filled was in Pomesania. After some to-ing and fro-ing a Dominican friar named Ernst was consecrated in late 1246 or early 1247, but Bishop Ernst took a couple of years to decide where exactly in Pomesania the seat of his power should be. He finally decided to establish himself in the region around Marienwerder, but died in the year 1250, shortly after he made that decision. At the time of his death the Duke of Brandenburg was visiting Marienwerder on crusade, so it was decided that the Duke's nephew Albert would be raised to the position of Bishop. So, confusingly, we have another Bishop Albert enter the Baltic Crusades, with this Bishop Albert being the Bishop of Pomesania.

The next region to get a Bishop was Ermland. Apparently it's more accurate to call this region "Warmia", but over the centuries everyone has been calling it "Ermland", so "Ermland it is. A priest from the Teutonic Order named Anselm was elevated to the position of Bishop of Ermland, however Anselm seems to have been much in demand. He had also been appointed as Papal legate to Bohemia, and as a consequence he spent much of his time outside Prussia, a problem exacerbated by the fact that, according to William Urban, he decided to pop back to the Holy Roman Empire to visit his family for a little bit, and ended up staying there for five years.

Still, he did better than the final Bishop to be appointed, the Bishop of Samland. A man called Heinrich von Streitberg was appointed to the position in 1254, and for the next twenty years Bishop Heinrich was the Bishop of Samland, although for most of that period of twenty years he managed to be anywhere other than in Samland. Samland was one of the last regions in Prussia to be Christianized, and attacks on the Christians of Samland by the pagans of Samland were frequent and often very effective. It didn't help either that Bishop Heinrich seemed to be in almost constant conflict with the Teutonic Knights. His successor, Christian von Muhlhausen, was himself a Teutonic Knight, which meant he was on more friendly terms with the Order. But that didn't prevent Bishop Christian also being absent from Samland for most of his twenty year reign. This was mainly due to the fact that he was juggling two jobs. In addition to being Bishop of Samland he was also an active member of the court of Count Albrecht of Thuringia, and was often away on diplomatic duties, serving the interests of his

Count. To make amends for the fact that he was spending so much time away from his Bishopric, Bishop Christian appointed five men from Muhlhausen as canons of his church, but, although the five men all accepted the positions, none of them ended up setting foot in Samland. So, it's safe to say that the local Christians of Samland, and many Christians across Prussia in fact, weren't exactly feeling the love from their Bishops.

So, while the Church is struggling to find its feet across the four new bishoprics, how are the Teutonic Knights faring in Prussia? Well, pretty well actually. As Eric Christiansen points out in his book "The Northern Crusades", the Teutonic Order essentially made two conquests of Prussia, both of which were occurring simultaneously: one against the pagan Prussians, and the other against possible Christian competitors. So, with the original Bishop Christian out of the way and his replacements looking pretty ineffective, who were these possible Christian competitors against whom the Teutonic Order was waging war? Well, for the most part, it was other European powers who wished to take advantage of the trading opportunities which were presenting themselves as Prussia became Christianized, and as its towns, particularly its port towns, became places from which and to which you could safely trade.

Now, much of this conflict by the Teutonic Order against Christian mercantile interests was diplomatic in nature, but some of it did actually erupt into actual warfare. So, let's take a quick look at what is taking place. From a trading point of view, the towns springing up along the Vistula River and the ports springing up near the delta where the Vistula branched out along the coastline and emptied out into the Baltic Sea, were always going to be highly sought after, along with any towns which could be used as a port along the Baltic coastline. The first settlements established by the Teutonic Order in Prussia, the towns of Kulm and Thorn, were both located on the upper reaches of the Vistula, and now the land further down the river was also in Christian hands, and the Order was busy building forts and establishing bases from which the region could be secured and defended from pagans. The fortress at Marienwerder was built in the year 1233, on one of the many tributaries of the Vistula as it branched off into many different waterways as it neared the Baltic coastline, although keep in mind that the town was still some way from the coast. William Urban, for instance, describes Marienwerder in his book "The Teutonic Knights" as being about halfway between the township of Thorn in the upper reaches of the river and the sea. Now, one of the Crusader armies which helped secure the site of Marienwerder, and which assisted in building the fortress there, was led by a man named Duke Swietopelk of Pomerelia. Keep Duke Swietopelk in mind, as he's going to be popping up again shortly.

A few years later, in the year 1237, the town of Elbing was established on an eastern tributary of the Vistula River, neat the site of the old Prussian settlement of Truso. Elbing ended up being a very significant settlement. Unlike the settlement of Kulm, which the Grand Master of

the Order had declared to be the capital of Prussia, but which was struggling to attract trade and citizens, the settlement of Elbing was a success from the moment it was established. It quickly became Prussia's principal trading port and held that status for the next century or so.

In his book "The German Hansa", Philippe Dollinger makes an interesting observation about these towns which are springing up in Prussia. Because they were under the wing of the Teutonic Order they were distinctly militaristic in nature. Unlike the higgledy-piggledy character of many other towns in medieval Europe, the ones established by the Teutonic Order were very orderly, with, and I quote, "their streets forming an impeccable checkerboard pattern" end quote. The towns were initially created with military defense in mind, and Philippe Dollinger observes that they retained their distinct military character for a long period of time.

Now, just so you can get the geography of Prussia settled in your heads, here is a description of how Prussia is sitting at the moment, after it has been officially Christianized. The Vistula River runs to the Baltic coastline in a south-to-north manner. In the upper reaches of the river, the southernmost Prussian settlement on the river is Thorn. If you head any further up the Vistula you enter Polish territory, more accurately the lands belonging to the Duke of Masovia. Further down the river from Thorn, as you head towards the Baltic Sea, is Kulm, and the region around the settlements of Kulm and Thorn, in the upper reaches of the Vistula, is now the Bishopric of Kulm.

As we head downriver towards the coast we leave the Bishopric of Kulm and find ourselves in the Bishopric of Pomesania. Now, just remember that the region of Prussia is to be found to the east of the Vistula. If you cross over the Vistula from Prussian Pomesania, you find yourself in the similarly named but totally different territory of Pomerelia, a Polish Duchy which is, also confusingly, referred to as Pomerania, or Eastern Pomerania. So, crossing back over the Vistula from Polish Pomerelia back into Prussia, the Bishopric of Pomesania continues right down to the Baltic coastline where, as we have mentioned, the Vistula branches out as it nears the coast.

If you head eastwards along the coast you leave Pomesania and come to the Bishopric of Ermland, and if you keep going eastwards you leave Ermland and enter the Bishopric of Samland. If you keep heading eastwards from Samland you enter Samogitia and then Semigallia, the lands associated with the still-pagan Lithuanians. Now, I hope this has given you some idea of the geography of the lands we are dealing with. There's a useful, but not perfect, map of 13<sup>th</sup> Century Prussia available on Wikipedia and I'll post it to the Facebook page and the website.

OK, where were we? Oh yes, the Teutonic Order has been establishing trading posts on their side of the Vistula River: nice orderly towns with nice neat streets. Now, this is all well and good, and everyone, with the exception of course of the local Prussians, is content and happy to see these Christian trading towns do so well. Fast forward a few years though, and the new Prussian trading centers were actually doing really well. Really really well. In fact they were doing so well that they started taking trade away from the more established trading centers to the west of Prussia.

Now, remember Duke Swietopelk from Pomerelia, whose name we bookmarked a short time ago? Well, he had happily led a Crusaders army over the Vistula to assist to subdue the Prussian pagans, but now it was safe to say he was beginning to regret having done so. His main town Gdansk, or as the Germans called it Danzig, was located just down the coastline from Christianized Prussia, and much of the trade which used to flow through Gdansk and then up the Vistula to towns located in Pomerelia to towns located on the western bank of the river, was now flowing through the Prussian towns of Elbing, Torun and Marienwerder, and then making its way up the Vistula to towns on the eastern bank of the river, towns located in Prussia.

What did Duke Swietopelk do to address this problem? Well, he allied himself with some local angry Prussians, and in the year 1242 he invaded Prussia and set about doing his best to destroy all the new Prussian trading settlements. His actions sparked a war which lasted for the next decade. The local Prussians quickly learnt from their new Western ally, how to exploit the vulnerabilities of the Teutonic Knights. The Knights warhorses, armor and their proficiency with the crossbow, meant that they had the advantage on open ground, or where they could easily retreat to a fortress. So the Prussians learned to lure these knights into the forest, or to work to ambush a small number of knights who could then be defeated.

Duke Swietopelk threw everything at this conflict. He built over twenty warships which he used to patrol the Vistula, and he built a number of his own forts inside Prussia to counter those already constructed by the Teutonic Order. For a while it looked like victory could go either way, but outside pressure finally swung the conflict in favor of the Order. A contingent of other Polish Dukes, quite possibly alarmed by the prospect of Duke Swietopelk extending Pomerelian territory into Prussia, threw their support behind the Teutonic Order, and the Papacy, who really would have preferred to see the Christians fight the pagans instead of each other, actually preached a Crusade against Duke Swietopelk. Duke Swietopelk then saw the writing on the wall, and withdrew back to Pomerelia, but not before Rome managed to wring a number of concessions from the Teutonic Order, in an attempt to try and empower the four Bishoprics, a ploy which the Teutonic Order managed to successfully counter over

time.

So the four Bishoprics have been established, but the Teutonic Order is currently standing as the powerhouse organization in Prussia. Join me next week as we take time out from the Crusades to examine a threat that has been looming over the region now for some time, and it's about to strike. That's right, the Mongols are coming to eastern Europe. Until next week, bye for now.

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