

## History of the Crusades. Episode 251. The Baltic Crusades. The Livonian Crusade Part XXXVIII. The Late 1270's.

Hello again. Last week we took a look at Livonia in the early '70s, and saw a new Master, Master Ernst, take up the role of Master of the Teutonic Order in Livonia. We also saw general crusading apathy descend over Europe, fueled by the repeated failure of the Latin Christians to retake Jerusalem in the Holy Land. The few men of central Europe who were still keen to go on crusade in the Baltic region tended to go to Prussia instead of Livonia or Estonia, so Master Ernst is going to have to rely on local man power in his battles against the pagans.

Master Ernst arrived in Livonia in the summer of 1274. Shortly prior to his arrival, the Teutonic Order in Livonia had scored a morale-boosting victory against the Lithuanians. They had intercepted a large Lithuanian raiding party as it was returning from a successful foray into Livonian territory. The Knights of the Order managed to kill around 600 Lithuanians, and had relieved them of the Livonian booty they had scored. This victory gave the newly arrived Master Ernst an idea. He didn't really have the manpower to invade Semigallia and Samogitia, what with the lack of crusading and all, but perhaps he could harry the Lithuanians enough to keep them out of Semigallia and Samogitia.

The leader of Lithuania at this time was no longer known as a King, and of course he wasn't Christian, so he was generally given the label of the "Grand Duke of Lithuania". The Grand Duke of Lithuania at this time was sending men to the aid of Semigallia and Samogitia, and was also sending raiding parties to Prussia to aid the stumbling remnants of the Second Prussian Insurrectionists. Master Ernst's plan was to keep the Lithuanians fully occupied in Lithuania, which would in turn keep them out of Semigallia and Samogitia, and keep them out of Prussia, which would enable the Prussian Chapter of the Teutonic Order to concentrate on eliminating the pagan threats inside their borders, instead of having to divert resources to deal with invading Lithuanians.

It was a good plan, and Master Ernst got straight to work. He decided to rebuild a stronghold at a place called Dunamunde, in the uppermost reaches of the Daugava River, where the territory bordered Lithuania. Now, just so you know, Dunamunde is going to become an important castle and an important settlement. Today, Dunamunde is called Daugavpils, which means Daugava Castle, or "Castle on the Daugava" in Latvian. Today it is Latvia's second largest city, after Riga. It lies 230 km upriver from Riga, and is currently 25 km from the Lithuanian border. Unfortunately there is nothing left of the castle today, except its foundations, as it was destroyed by the Russians in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century. But we're getting ahead of ourselves. Master Ernst spent four years supervising the building of the very impressive

Dunamunde Castle, which was situated high on a bank overlooking the Daugava.

Now, the Lithuanians watched the castle being built with a great deal of dismay. As William Urban states in his book "The Baltic Crusade", and I quote "In 1275 when the Lithuanians saw this castle restored on the bluff overlooking the river, they understood its significance, and knew that they must either destroy it, or face certain defeat." End quote. So, the Grand Duke gathered a large force of Lithuanian fighters and a contingent of Russian fighters, and headed to Dunamunde to destroy the castle...which turned out to be easier said than done. The Lithuanians had caught on pretty quickly to the finer points of Latin Christian siege warfare, and had four catapult machines which were operational around the castle. As the four machines lobbed stones at the castle day and night, and as Russian archers shot at any defenders they saw manning the castle walls, the commander of the castle must have been more than a little concerned.

But he didn't need to be. The archers inside the castle fired back at both the Lithuanians and the Russians, and the sturdy stone walls of the building stood up remarkably well to the constant bombardment. The stones from the catapults dislodged a number of wooden planks around the structure, which the defenders were able to replace easily enough, but didn't make much of an impact at all on the stone walls. Eventually, after four weeks of continual attacks, the Grand Duke of Lithuania, a man called Thoreiden, called off the attack.

This was particularly vexing for Thoreiden. Not only did it mean, as the Teutonic Order had already figured out, that he would be forced to keep many of his troops close to home to ward off possible attacks into Lithuania from the castle, it seriously undermined his expansion into Russian territory. It turns out that the Grand Duke of Lithuania was a busy man, not only with the Lithuanians raiding into Livonia and Prussia, and assisting their pagan allies the Semigallians and the Samogitians, the Grand Duke had also pushed into Russian territory, and had secured a number of Russian towns. However he had been experiencing some difficulties controlling the Russian towns. Now, with the loss of prestige arising from the failed combined Russian and Lithuanian attack on Dunamunde, the Russian towns were likely to be even more difficult to control.

In contrast, Master Ernst was thrilled with the turn of events. Deciding to fully capitalize on the Order's successful defense of Dunamunde Castle, he started making preparations to invade Lithuania, using Dunamunde as a base. However, the plans had to be placed on hold due to issues with one of Livonia's other troublesome neighbors, Russia.

Tensions between the Latin Christians and the Russian Principalities had been building steadily, and by the year 1277 it looked likely to boil over into a full-blown war. In a sign of the

rising power and influence of the merchants in Livonia, the trouble brewing with Russia, the trouble for which the Teutonic Order was now preparing to possibly go to war, was based on poor trading relations which the merchants were experiencing with their Russian counterparts. The merchants formally complained about their treatment, and the Master of the Teutonic Order, the Archbishop, and the Bishops, all stood behind them in support, recommending that they retaliate by boycotting the Russian trading center of Novgorod, and replacing it with their own trading center in Riga. This suggestion ended up not being followed, but William Urban points out the fact that it was being seriously considered seems to have spooked the Russians into putting their animosities to one side, and seeking terms. And that's exactly what happened. The merchants in both regions were able to come to an agreement, trading embargoes on both sides were lifted, and Master Ernst was able to return to his plan to invade Lithuania.

Master Ernst was able to gather a significant Latin Christian army at Dunamunde in March of 1279, for his raid into Lithuania. Danish fighters from Estonia, vassals of the Archbishop and Bishops, along with fighters from Kurland and Semigallia made up for the absence of crusaders. The army set off in the cold and icy weather, and ventured deep into Lithuania. Now, William Urban points out that this was risky venture for the Order, despite the size of their army. However the raid proceeded to go pretty well, with the Latin Christians plundering and burning their way through a number of Lithuanian settlements, without facing significant resistance from Lithuanian fighters. However, the Lithuanian fighters were biding their time, deciding to watch and observe the large army from a distance, rather than facing it head on in battle. This turned out to be a really good move.

As the Latin Christians returned to the safety of a forested region near the Daugava, Master Ernst felt close enough to home to send the Danish and Church militias back over the Daugava with their booty. As a significant portion of the army waved goodbye and headed back home, the Lithuanians waited until they were far enough away that they couldn't be recalled to battle, then they struck.

Master Ernst had remaining in his now rather small army, the fighters from the Teutonic Order as well as some Semigallians and Kurs. Master Ernst arranged his forces into battle formation, then they charged at the approaching Lithuanians. The charge scattered the Lithuanians, but under the command of their Grand Duke, they regrouped and fought hard. The Livonian Rhymed Chronicle reports, and I quote, "One saw on either side both Christian and heathen that many dauntless warriors, daring and outstanding men, fell in grim death. The snow turned red from blood." End quote.

The Order took heavy losses, with many Knights killed, and that was too much for the Semigallians, who decided to pack up and head back to Semigallia. The sight of a sizable

portion of the Master's army leaving the battlefield, spurred the Lithuanians to greater heights, and they attacked with renewed vigor. The Order's banner fell, and then the Lithuanians gained the upper hand. Master Ernst was slain along with 71 Knights from the Teutonic Order. To make matters worse, the battle was fought towards the end of the day, not at the beginning of the day, which was more common. As a result, when it was clear that the day was lost, night fell shortly thereafter, and the temperature plummeted. Consequently many wounded men froze to death before they could reach the safety and warmth of Dunamunde Castle. In fact, the Livonian Rhymed Chronicle reports that the night was so cold that not only wounded men, but some able-bodied men who had survived the battle froze to death, and not just on the Latin Christian side. The Chronicle reports deaths on the Lithuanian side that night from the cold, as well.

I guess I don't have to tell you that the loss of Master Ernst and so many Latin Christian fighters was nothing short of catastrophic for the Order in Livonia. As William Urban states and I quote, "The Christians had gambled by raiding so deeply into Lithuania, and the result was a great disaster. On that March day of 1279, the Teutonic Knights lost all that the gains they had achieved during the preceding six years." End quote.

Grand Master Hartmann convened a meeting to receive reports about the losses suffered by the Order, and to determine the best way forward. Usefully, the Master of the Order in Prussia had also recently died, so the Grand Chapter of the Order decided to merge the two administrative centers of Prussia and Livonia, meaning that a single Master would be appointed to oversee the Order's activities in both Livonia and Prussia. Having a single Master meant that attacks against the Samogitians, Semigallians and Lithuanians could be better coordinated, and could draw upon the combined resources of both Chapters, hopefully reducing the future likelihood of devastating defeats such as the one just handed out to the Order by Lithuania.

Konrad of Feuchtwangen was appointed as the new Master of Prussia and Livonia. A military man with crusading experience in the Holy Land, Master Konrad was itching to have a crack, not at crusading against the Muslims of the Middle East, but the pagans of the Baltic region, and he was dispatched to Prussia to prepare the Order to regroup to battle the enemies of the Church. There was, at the same time, an attempt to recruit crusaders from the Holy Roman Empire and the Kingdom of Denmark, but, everybody say it with me now, internal conflict within the Holy Roman Empire and the Kingdom of Denmark meant that most fighting men of any consequence chose to stay close to home, so only a smattering of low-born crusaders of limited means made their way to Prussia to join Master Konrad's crusade.

Master Konrad arrived in Prussia, and settled in to the Master's residence at Elbing. Then he

summoned all the Order's military commanders from across Livonia and Prussia to a great council, so that he could receive reports about pagan activities in the land corridor between Prussia and Livonia. The worst reports came out of Semigallia. A representative from the Order in Livonia reported that the Semigallians had recently scored a number of victories against the Order, and had recently captured a major Latin Christian stronghold, the castle at Terwerten. With Terwerten out of Christian hands, the Order and its fighters had been forced to retreat to their castle at Goldingen in Kurland, and fighters from Goldingen were forced to travel a significant distance to take the fight to the Semigallians.

Perhaps hearing about the serious threat the pagans posed in Semigallia served as a bit of a reality check for Master Konrad, as the beating of his war-drum seemed to slow down at this time, and then began to falter. He spent the winter of 1279-1280 in Prussia, and by the summer of 1280 the commanders of the Order's forces started getting a little restless, wondering whether their new Master was ever going to leave his residence in Elbing and lead them to war. As a compromise Master Konrad decided to go on a tour of his new domain, leaving Prussia behind to visit Riga and Dunamunde, and inspect castles, meet with vassals, shake hands, slap backs, and be wined and dined across the length and breadth of Livonia and Estonia.

So is Master Konrad ever going to get around to uniting the Order's forces and leading them into battle against the Semigallians? Well, I'm afraid you'll need to wait a while to find out. As you may have noticed, we need to catch up with events in the Prussian Crusade before we follow the exploits of the new Master of Prussia and Livonia. Join me next week, as we return to Prussia for the Third Prussian Insurrection. Yes, you heard that right: the Third Prussian Insurrection. Until next week, bye for now.

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[Addendum: The castle referred to here as "Dunamunde" is the historical "Dunaburg" castle. Although the names are somewhat similar, Dunamunde is located near the mouth of the Daugava River, while Dunaburg is located in the upper reaches of the Daugava River.]

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