

Episode 258

Episode 258. The Baltic Crusades. The Livonian Crusades Part 41. Archbishop Isarnus Of Riga.

Hello again. Last week we took a look at the civil war which had erupted in Livonia between the Teutonic Order on one side and the Archbishop of Riga and the merchants of Riga on the other side. At the end of last week's episode, Pope Boniface VIII has attempted to resolve the conflict by proxy, setting up a committee to hear evidence on the dispute and to make recommendations to resolve it. The committee ended up favouring the preservation of the status quo, an outcome which pleased the Teutonic Order but which mightily displeased the Archbishop of Riga, who stayed in Rome hoping for an opportunity to meet with the pope and change his mind. That opportunity never came, and the Archbishop was forced to leave Rome to make way for Pope Boniface's jubilee, and he died not long after.

Now, as we all know, Pope Boniface's Jubilee succeeded beyond his wildest dreams. Rome was packed to the rafters with senior Church figures from across Europe, and Church coffers were likewise filled to the brim. All this success just confirmed Pope Boniface's view that he was the most important man in Europe, not only on the ecclesiastical stage, but on the political stage as well. And he began work on his plans to ensure that Church policy prevailed across all political arenas.

Now, William Urban points out, in his book "The Livonian Crusade", that Pope Boniface was probably aware that his decision to put the Livonian dispute into a holding pattern had done little to actually resolve the dispute. Now, though, the pope was presented with a handy opportunity to influence matters in the Baltics, and perhaps more directly resolve the conflict, by appointing a competent and trustworthy individual to be the new Archbishop of Riga.

Now, Pope Boniface's choice for the position of Archbishop of Riga was an interesting one. He chose a Frenchman, called Isarnus Tacconi, and the new Archbishop of Riga set off for the Baltic region, arriving in Riga in the spring of 1301. Archbishop Isarnus was, interesting, from the city of Carcassonne. Back in Carcassonne, the Crusade against the Cathars had finished, but the Inquisition against the Cathars was in full swing. In fact, Bernard Delicieux was the prior of the Franciscan convent in Carcassonne at this time, and the two men, both senior clerics in the city of Carcassonne, may well have known each other. But that's just speculation on my part. The most interesting snippet of information about Isarnus Tacconi was not that he was from Carcassonne, but that he had served as Pope Boniface's personal chaplain.

Now, you can develop a couple of different assumptions around this fact. As his personal chaplain, Isarnus would have been a close confidante of Pope Boniface, and from hearing his confessions, Isarnus would have been privy to any deep, dark secrets which Pope Boniface possessed. So, does selecting this man to be the Archbishop of faraway Riga indicate that Pope Boniface was keen for Isarnus to be packed safely off to a place far away from where Pope Boniface was beginning his dizzying climb to attempt to become the most powerful man in Europe, or did Pope Boniface merely want to elevate the man whom he trusted explicitly to this position so that he could work his magic upon the troubled waters of Livonia? I guess we'll never know.

By most reports, though, Isarnus was an amiable and capable man. William Urban has this to say about him in his book "The Livonian Crusade" - and I quote – Isarnus was not consumed with the ambition for worldly success that ate at so many of his fellows. Rather he almost disdained power and fame. In short, he was a mild-mannered but determined fellow. A man without pretension or ambition. If anyone could have arranged a fair settlement in Riga, if the dispute had not rested on irreconcilable grounds, Isarnus was the person to bring the parties together again, and make the truce into a peace. As it was, despite the odds against him, he almost succeeded" - end quote.

So, how did events play out for the new Archbishop of Riga? Well, shortly after he arrived in Livonia he took possession of the properties which the order had been holding in trust for the Archbishopric, and he extended the hand of conciliation to Master Gottfried. Now, it seems that Master Gottfried was also a reasonable sort of person, and the two men held a number of meetings during which good will flowed, and many sensible words were spoken. In fact, it wasn't just the Master of the Teutonic Order in Livonia who was impressed by this close associate of Pope Boniface, who seemed to be genuinely interested in reaching a resolution to the conflict on Livonia which would bring a just result, not merely to the merchants and the Church but to the Teutonic Order as well. In fact, William Urban reports that the people of Riga, the men of the Church, and the knights of the Teutonic order, were all so optimistic that the new Archbishop was the right man to settle all their problems that everyone agreed that Archbishop Isarnus ought to be allowed to arbitrate the dispute which has erupted into civil war in Livonia.

Now this is really quite astonishing. The Archbishop of Riga, not Isarnus personally, but the office of Archbishop, was one of the warring parties involved in the conflict. Yet now everyone was agreeing that the new Archbishop ought to investigate the matter thoroughly, hear all sides to the dispute, then bring down a judgment as to who was right and who was wrong. It was equivalent really to plucking a football player out of a game and turning him into a referee - not just an ordinary referee either, but someone who would eventually determine which of the teams, one of which he was actually a member, would win the match. Not surprisingly, this did not go well. The Archbishop did a good job of thoroughly investigating every aspect of the dispute, and in the summer of 1302 he was ready to hand down his verdict.

What was the verdict? Well, it seemed pretty reasonable and conservative. The Teutonic Order was to give up a bunch of castles they had taken in Estonia, and return them to the Bishop of the region. Any other damages were to be compensated via fines, which would be determined after Archbishop Isarnus returned from Rome. The Archbishop made no judgment about who was to blame for the conflict, and everyone was meant to forgive everyone else, and form a peaceful oath ahead. The Livonian Chapter of the Livonian Order was not at all happy about this outcome, but their disappointment wasn't shared by Grand Master Gottfried.

Now, Grand Master Gottfried visited Livonia in the year 1302 and astonishingly, William Urban reports that this was the one and only time that a Grand Master would ever set foot in Livonia. Apparently, Grand Masters tended to stray no further than Prussia, when visiting the Baltic regions, so having Grand Master Gottfried visit Livonia was a pretty big deal. The Grand Master rode to Livonia from Prussia, accompanied by around 500 riders, including 50 Teutonic Knights. They rode to Memel then proceeded along the coast line to

Dunamunde Castle, which lay at the mouth of the Daugava River, then rode upriver to Riga.

Now, at this point, some of you might be scratching your heads when I mentioned that Dunamunde lay at the mouth of the Daugava where it emptied into the Baltic Sea. That's because the last few times I mentioned Dunamunde, I stated that it was way upriver, about 200 km away near Lithuania. It turns out that I have been muddling my Dunas. "Duna" is the German name for what is now called the Daugava River. "Munde" meant "mouth" in German, so not surprisingly the castle built at the mouth of the Daugava where it meets the coastline, is called Dunamunde. The castle up the other end of the Daugava, way inland near Lithuania, is called Dunaberg Castle. "Duna" of course referring to the river, and "Berg" meaning mountain, as the castle was located high on a rocky outcrop overlooking the river. So it's really rather straight forward and simple. Somehow though, when I was writing the episode about the establishment of Dunaberg Castle, my brain auto-corrected it to Dunamunde Castle. So for a while there we had two Dunamundes, when of course the castle near Lithuania isn't called Dunamunde at all, but Dunaberg. Sorry about that.

Now, just so we are all clear about this, especially for those who use this podcast to fall asleep to at night – yes I know who you all are – if you've just awakened from a snooze, Dunamunde is the castle at the mouth of the Daugava, while Dunaberg is the castle a few hundred km inland, near Lithuania. OK are we all good? Excellent.

So, where were we? Ah yes, Grand Master Gottfried has just made the astonishing trek all the way to Riga. He ended up spending more than two months in Livonia, touring the Order's castles and holding, meeting with the Order's men, and gaining some personal knowledge about the Order's most remote region. He also spoke extensively with Archbishop Isarnus, and ended up endorsing the Archbishop's investigation of the Livonian conflict, and the recommendations he made. In a nutshell, the Grand Master agreed that the Order should hand back the castles in Estonia, and that all parties to the dispute – the Teutonic Order, the merchants, and the bishops - should work to put the whole matter behind them, and move towards forging a lasting peace.

This placed the Grand Master at odds with the members of the Livonian Chapter of the Order, who didn't agree with the Archbishop's findings at all. Grand Master Gottfried was aware of these mutterings of discontent, and he called a meeting to discuss the situation as soon as he returned to Prussia. William Urban has a very nice summary of this meeting, which I shall defer to. OK, here is a quote from William Urban's book "The Livonian Crusade".

And I quote. "The meeting was a mistake, at least it did not sooth the injured feelings of the north-eastern brethren, but rather provided an opportunity to express their outrage. Gottfried Von Hohenlohe clearly had not expected such a stormy session, and at one point he became so angry that he offered his resignation. To his surprise the knights, officers and priests accepted". End quote.

Oops. So, poor Grand Master Gottfried, fresh from touring Livonia, convenes a meeting to resolve disquiet in the Order about the situation in Livonia, and the meeting goes so spectacularly pear-shaped that, but the end of the meeting, not only is the Livonian issue unresolved, Grand Master Gottfried is no longer the Grand Master. Ouch. So, Grand Master Gottfried has exited the stage. And in case any of you are wondering what became

of him, he returned to the Holy Roman Empire, and grumbled continuously to anyone who would listen about the terrible way in which he had been treated by the Order, until his death six years later, in 1308.

A new Grand Master was promptly elected – a man called Siegfried von Feuchtwangen. If the name Feuchtwangen rings a bell, that's because Siegfried is related to Conrad Von Feuchtwangen, who served as one of the many Master Conrads in the Baltic region, and who also rose to the position of Grand Master. Unsurprisingly, the new Grand Master – Grand Master Siegfried – decided to take a hard line on the conflict in Livonia, which of course pleased the Livonian Knights no end. Grand Master Siegfried may have pondered whether or not to take his grievances about Archbishop Isarnus to Rome to discuss them with Pope Boniface. But it was fortunate that he didn't, because around about this time, Pope Boniface was kidnapped under the orders of King Phillip of France, and emerged a shell of his former self, dying a month later.

Just before his kidnapping and rapid decline took place, however, Pope Boniface had ordered the Archbishop of Lund and the Archbishop of Riga to swap places. This seems like an extraordinary move, but it was actually quite a good idea. The position of the Archbishop of Lund was a powerful one, with the Archbishop of Lund being the most powerful cleric in the Kingdom of Denmark. The Kingdom of Denmark had experienced more than its fair share of internal strife during the past few decades, and the current Archbishop of Lund, and aristocrat who was in conflict with the Danish crown, has been exacerbating the problem by loudly and belligerently stirring up trouble. In stark contrast, Pope Boniface now seemed to be coming to the view that Archbishop Isarnus of Riga was perhaps a bit too much of a peacemaker. It wasn't too much of a leap, then, to think that Isarnus peacemaking and negotiating skills would be a perfect fit for Denmark, while the belligerent Archbishop of Lund could kick a few heads in Livonia, and perhaps force the Teutonic Order into line. So he ordered them to stand up, and swap places. You probably won't be too surprised to hear that the belligerent Archbishop of Lund was none too happy about being pushed around in this manner. He refused to take up the challenging role in Livonia, and instead filled a vacancy closer to home in Bremen.

But the obedient, obliging Archbishop Isarnus traveled to Lundt, and had just settled in when Pope Boniface asked him to return to Riga to try to resolved things there a bit first, before heading back to his permanent posting in Denmark. And then the Pope got himself kidnapped, and subsequently died. Is the Teutonic Order going to take full advantage of the fact that there is now no Pope and that there is no permanent Archbishop of Riga? Yes. Yes it will.

Join me next week as the civil strife inside Livonia continues. Until next week, bye for now.

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