

Episode 263

The Baltic Crusades. The Livonian Crusade Part 43. Papal Investigations.

Hello again. Last week we took the Samogitian Crusade to the year 1316, with the Teutonic Order making use of visiting crusaders to attack Samogitian holdings along the lower reaches of the Nemunas River. This week we are heading back to Livonia.

If you stretch your minds all the way back to Episode 259, you might remember that Archbishop Friedrich had immediately taken the side of the citizens of Riga as soon as he took up his role as Archbishop. He wrote a letter to Pope Clement V which was pointedly one-sided, supporting the Rigans in their conflict against the Livonian Chapter of the Teutonic Order. Archbishop Friedrich sent his letter to Avignon but, having received no response after a year or so, he set off to Avignon himself to follow up on the concerns he raised.

We left Archbishop Friedrich in Avignon in the year 1307, having been told that he would need to wait for two years until Pope Clement had time to consider the matter. In the end, Archbishop Friedrich spent three years in Avignon waiting for his issue to move up the papal to-do list. He found himself some accommodation, made new friends and contacts among the churchmen and theologians in the town and, according to William Urban in his book "The Livonian Crusade" he also made a bunch of Bohemian friends, began a collection of beautiful objects and wrote a piece about the legend of St Francis.

Finally in June of 1310 Pope Clement handed down his decision and it was a cracker. If Archbishop's Friedrich's letter had lit a small fire inside the Livonian Chapter of the Order, well it was as if Pope Clement had poured petrol all over the Teutonic Order, lit a match, then watched the whole military order explode into a bonfire of cataclysmic proportions.

It seemed that, having seen the Templar Knights wiped out by allegations of heresy, there was no love at all left in Avignon for the Teutonic Order. So the Pope accepted all of Archbishop Friedrich's allegations, then merrily endorsed complaints made by Poland about the Order's takeover of Pomerelia, then he went further and even alleged that the Order had massacred 10,000 citizens during its occupation of Danzig, an allegation which William Urban points out is a little unfair because the entire population of Danzig at that time was nowhere near that size.

Just to prove to you that Pope Clement wasn't holding back in the firestorm he unleashed onto the Order, here's the first paragraph of the Pope's long and rather harsh declaration, and I quote. "The Master and brothers of the Hospital of St Mary of the Germans, who have been placed in the seas of Riga, Livonia and Prussia to protect the Church and churchmen and members of the Catholic faith from the incursions of the pagans and schismatics, and to spread the name and practice of the Catholic faith there, have instead, to the harm of our redeemer, to the discredit of our faith and faithful, become internal enemies and allies of its enemies, not rising in the name of Christ against the enemies of the faith, but in their support, which is stupefying to hear." End quote. Ouch.

Pope Clement then appointed a cleric from Ravenna, Francis of Moliano, to travel from Livonia to collect testimony and evidence for a trial, which William Urban speculates was probably intended to replicate that which had taken place against the Templars. Archbishop Friedrich then returned triumphantly to Riga to inform everyone of the

imminent arrival of the Papal commission, and to prepare lists of witnesses and other evidence which may interest Francis of Moliano when he arrived in Livonia. Sensibly the civil war was placed on hold for the length of the papal investigation, but Master Gerhard was so appalled by the stance taken by Pope Clement and was so concerned that the papal actions may end up reflecting the incredibly unfair and unjust actions taken against the Templars that he ordered every single Teutonic knight to boycott the hearings, and in fact, as William Urban points out, he must have managed to convince all allies and supporters of the Teutonic Order to stay away as well because, in the report which was eventually prepared by Francis of Moliano, there is not one single testimony that says anything even slightly positive about the Teutonic Order.

Now, Master Gerhard had sound legal reasons for pursuing this approach to the inquiry. He fully expected the inquiry to find 100% in favor of the citizens of Riga in their conflict with the Order, and he figured that participating in the inquiry would not alter that fact. However, if the final report revealed that the Teutonic Order's side of the story remained completely unheard, then that would give the Master grounds to appeal directly to the Pope to have the findings of the report overturned.

In the end Master Gerhard's strategy proved sound, but in the long, long run his strategy ultimately backfired somewhat because a document full of uncontested evidence about the horrible, horrible deeds of the knights of the Order became part of the historical record, at considerable expense to the Order's reputation.

While the people associated with the Teutonic Order kept well away from Francis Moliano and his retinue of very busy scribes, the citizens of Riga revelled in their chance to unleash against their enemy. They described in lurid detail the physical assaults and attacks on the citizens by the knights in the streets of Riga. They described the dastardly and underhand way in which the Order managed to acquire the monastery at Dunamunde, and some more elderly witnesses even managed to bring up details of the kidnapping of Archbishop Suerbeer way back in 1268.

Of course most of the evidence given was untested. Some was hearsay and some was seriously dodgy. One witness alleged that the knights from the order had sold weapons to the pagans. The Papal scribe noted this allegation, then wrote, and I quote "Asked how he came to know this he answered that he had heard it said by someone who had heard it from someone else who had heard it from a servant of the knights that the servant had sold arms in Dorpat and he said it was common knowledge that the knights wanted to sell arms and other merchandise to the pagans." End quote.

So, just so we're clear, evidence here is being given that the knights sold weapons to the pagans because the witness said he heard this from someone who heard it from someone else who had heard it from a servant of the knights. Hmm, OK, well let's just say that there is no way that this would hold up in court today. In fact it seems that it didn't hold up in the Papal commission convened in Riga in 1312 either, because this particular allegation was later dropped.

A number of serious allegations remained, though, including that the Order illegally destroyed the bridge built by the merchants of Riga (the act which sparked the civil war), the violence of the acts of the knights of the Order in the conflict with Riga was highlighted and their purchase of the monastery at Dornamunde was also criticized. Cranky about the

Order's total lack of cooperation with the Papal inquiry, Francis of Moliano excommunicated a bunch of the Order's office holders before he departed from Riga.

The report prepared by Francis of Moliano on the basis of the evidence he gathered was pretty much what everyone expected it to be: a blistering indictment of the Teutonic Order in Livonia and the illegal and unreasonable acts that they had perpetrated against the citizens of Riga.

Archbishop Friedrich sat back and waited for the Papal fire to blaze down over the guilty knights, and it is likely he fully expected to see the Order obliterated and consigned to the dustbin of history in the same way as the Order of the Templars. But it wasn't to be.

The Teutonic Order appeared to have had some sound legal minds in their camp, and they immediately began working to walk back the report. In an opening move a representative from the Order made the valid point in an oral presentation to Pope Clement in Avignon that the excommunications should never have been handed down by Francis of Moliano. Master Gerhard had made it clear that he was intending to appeal any findings in the report, and therefore Frances had no grounds upon which to hand out punishments since the matter was still ongoing. Pope Clement was forced to agree and he ordered a cardinal to lift the excommunications and hold the Order under bond until all the issues were finalized.

Then the Procurator, the Order's legal man in Avignon, embarked upon a prolonged mission to frustrate, delay and complicate matters until the case became a tangled mess of legal confusion which no-one could seemingly untangle. Here's William Urban's description of what took place, and I quote:

"The Procurator managed to delay the proceedings again and again and eventually the case became merged into other law suits, until there was complete confusion of conflicting charges and counter-charges, practically beyond the ability of any prosecutor to handle. Skillful bribery was a part of this, as the Procurator gave large sums to several important officials who sat on the matter." End quote.

And to make matters even more difficult for Pope Clement the Order provided a number of witnesses who appeared before the adjudicators culminating in Bishop Dietrich I of Dorpat, who traveled all the way to Avignon in the year 1312 to provide evidence in the Order's favor.

In the end, with the whole case having developed into a complicated legal and public relations headache for Pope Clement, the Pope called for a formal truce between the warring parties. The truce was signed in the year 1313 and, as William Urban reports, it effectively left Master Gerhard in control of the situation.

The Order sprang into action and immediately set to work rebuilding its fortification at Dunamunde, while Archbishop Friedrich and the citizens of Riga wandered around in a dazed state of shock, hardly able to believe what had just happened.

This was a kind of double blow for the merchants of Riga. Not only had the Papal investigations into the actions of the Order, which had begun so promisingly, fizzled out into nothing, they now no longer had the military support of the Lithuanians. The

Samogitian Crusade was well underway by this point in time, and the Lithuanians were using all their resources to fight the Prussian branch of the Order.

Archbishop Friedrich hadn't even bothered to travel to Avignon for the determination of the Papal case against the Order. He was so absolutely certain that Pope Clement would rain a holy fire of destruction down upon the Order that he thought he would save himself the journey and just wait in Riga for the verdict. However, when it became clear that the opposite had happened, that somehow the Order had managed to wriggle out of what had seemed a foregone conclusion against them, and were now not only still in existence but were merrily rebuilding their fortifications at Dunamunde, Archbishop Friedrich decided it was time to travel to Avignon and get this whole thing sorted out once and for all. So Archbishop Friedrich sailed for Avignon, and just so you don't get the impression that this will all be wrapped up quickly and effectively, Archbishop Friedrich won't return to Riga until more than a decade has passed.

Things went well for Archbishop to start with, although admittedly there was the odd hiccup. Pope Clement was sympathetic to the Archbishop's request that his complaints against the Order be heard, and he allowed Friedrich to add an additional charge, namely that a castellan in Oesel had, under the direction of the Teutonic Order, executed some of Riga's citizens by ordering them to be hanged. In an admirable move, to ensure that he had all the evidence presented to him, Pope Clement ordered that the castellan in question travel from Oesel to Avignon to answer the charge. However when the castellan appeared before the Pope to present his evidence, things quickly went southwards in an entertaining manner. In his book "The Livonian Crusade", William Urban provides this excerpt from the proceedings, and I quote:

"The Archbishop, in the public hearing of the Consistory, said "Holy Father, there is the castellan who hangs my citizens of Riga by the neck without reason." To which the castellan responded "Holy Father, that is not so. That is a lie. Those were pirates who were raiding the province of Kilekunde that I captured and judged according to the law of the land, and hanged, as they deserved, by their legs." And Pope Clement said "Oh that we could have such justice here." And he ordered the Archbishop to perpetual silence about the matter." End quote.

Oops. So Archbishop Friedrich has made an allegation against the Order which turns out to be totally untrue when tested, causing much eye-rolling and sighing by the Pope. For the next goodly while this is how things are to play out in Avignon. Pope Clement and his successor Pope John XXII both acknowledge that Archbishop Friedrich harbors strong feeling against the Order, and they realize that he will be tireless in his pursuit of them. However they are also realists. Livonia is a long way away, and in the eyes of the Papacy, it really needs a religious military order to oversee activities there. So, in a nutshell, the Popes were happy for Archbishop Friedrich to remain in Avignon, meeting with his Bohemian friends, adding to his collections of beautiful objects, and lobbying everyone he could find in the vain hope to see the Teutonic Order fall down the same hole as that which swallowed the Templars.

Meanwhile the Papacy was happy just to leave the situation in Livonia in a holding pattern. The end result of this was that Archbishop Friedrich will remain fruitlessly in Avignon for many years, while the civil war in Livonia kicks off once again without him.

Join me next week as we too leave Livonia in a holding pattern around the year 1316, and return to the Samogitian Crusade. Until next week, bye for now.

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