

History of the Crusades. Episode 278. The Baltic Crusades. The Samogitian Crusade Part XI. Dobrin.

Hello again. Last week we returned to the Baltic Crusades, more specifically to the regions of Poland, Prussia, and Lithuania. Lithuania, seemingly less affected by the plague than surrounding countries, has been acting aggressively, conducting frequent raids into Prussia and Poland. Grand Master Winrich von Kniprode is keen to take the fight to the Lithuanians, but he just can't muster up enough crusaders to deal a large enough blow to them. King Casimir is keen to push the boundaries of his kingdom across the regions of Volhynia and Galicia, to provide a buffer zone against both the Lithuanians and the Russians, but he has been struggling to raise enough cash to finance the near-constant military campaigns that the Tartar and Lithuanian invasions are provoking. So, as we saw at the conclusion of last week's episode, the Teutonic Order agreed to purchase the Polish town of Dobrin, or Dobrzyn, in Mazovia on a temporary basis, so that King Casimir could resume his pushback against the invasions.

Now, while the decision by King Casimir to mortgage Dobrin to the Teutonic Order seems to indicate that the Kingdom of Poland and the Teutonic Knights enjoyed a strong, mutually beneficial alliance, the truth was, that tension was brewing between the two powers behind the scenes. The trouble had started in Mazovia, the region located between the Kingdom of Poland proper and Prussia. The Dukes of Mazovia were independent sort of operators, who were only loosely under the control of the Polish crown. They had never really made aggressive moves towards Prussia. There were vast stretches of Mazovia which were covered in dense forests. Both the Dukes of Mazovia and men from the Teutonic Order had isolated outposts, which were garrisoned, inside these forests, to protect the region from pagan invasions. The trouble was, no-one was really sure where the exact boundaries between Prussia and Mazovia were located, and the regions patrolled by the men from the Teutonic Order and from the Dukes of Mazovia tended to overlap. This didn't pose a significant problem until the early 1350s, when King Casimir decided to re-establish his feudal rights over the Duchy of Mazovia. Two prominent local Dukes died in Mazovia in the years 1351 and 1353, neither leaving any heirs, and King Casimir decided to fill the resulting power vacuum by enforcing his feudal overlordship across the region.

While the Teutonic Order had worked relatively closely and cooperatively with the Dukes of Mazovia, Grand Master Winrich von Kniprode really wasn't thrilled to see King Casimir flexing his muscles, and extending his authority right up to the southern border of Prussia. And this is where the town of Dobrin, or Dobrzyn, steps forward into the limelight. Why? Well basically, Dobrin was situated right on the border between Prussia and Mazovia. It was located on the banks of the Drweca River. The southern bank of the river was in Mazovia, while the northern

bank was considered to be part of Prussia. You could pop into a boat at Dobrin and float downriver a relatively short way until the Drweca joined the Vistula, then bang, you're at Thorn, so you can see that Dobrin would be a very handy place to build a hugely strong Teutonic castle. Which is why the Order built a hugely strong Teutonic castle on their side of the river, so, in Prussia, on the opposite bank of the river from the Mazovian town of Dobrin. Oh, and keep in mind that the Drweca River is only a narrow, winding sort of river. A simple short bridge would have done the job to provide a river crossing. In fact, on Google Earth at least, the river looks so narrow and shallow that it seems like you could dive in from one bank, swim a couple of strokes, then climb out on the opposite side. So you can see why the Teutonic Order was pretty interested in having the southern portion of the town, the portion that was a short leap across the river from their castle, in their hands.

Previously, Grand Master Winrich von Kniprode had decided to attempt to resolve the boundary issues between Mazovia and Prussia by means of diplomacy, and he opened talks with King Casimir to see if the two men could come to some sort of amicable agreement. But King Casimir just didn't seem that interested. As William Urban states in his book "The Samogitian Crusade" and I quote, "Casimir had a flair for ignoring important business", end quote. After having given the Polish King ample time to engage in negotiations, the Grand Master eventually ran out of patience. In the year 1355, he negotiated a temporary truce with the Lithuanian leader Kestutis, then as soon as he had ensured that he wouldn't be distracted by any Lithuanian invasions into Teutonic territory, he made his move. He seized the town of Dobrin by force.

Now, as William Urban points out, this was quite a bold and uncharacteristic move by the Teutonic Order. The Teutonic Order was meant to be fighting pagans and supporting Latin Christians in the Baltic region. Yet here, by seizing a town by force, a town which had been mortgaged to the Order but which was still clearly Polish territory, the Order was fighting Latin Christians while making peace with the pagans. To make the optics of the situation even worse, at the time when the Order seized Dobrin, King Casimir was off on Crusade, leading a Crusade, in fact, against the Lithuanian pagans, the same pagans which the Grand Master had struck a deal with to free him up to attack King Casimir's holdings. An absolutely furious King Casimir stormed back to Poland from Lithuania as soon as he received news of the attack.

If you are scratching your head trying to work out what on earth Grand Master Winrich von Kniprode thought he was doing here, well William Urban provides us with the answer. According to William Urban, the Grand Master's strategy ran along the following lines. Yes, one of the core functions of the Teutonic Order was to crusade against the pagans and bring Latin Christianity to the entire Baltic region, but in order to carry out this mission, the Order's base, Prussia, needed to be secure. Without Prussia there would be no Crusade against the

Lithuanians or the Samogitians. Therefore, the Grand Master's priority was to ensure the safety and security of Prussia, first and foremost. Once that was achieved, he could then turn the Order's attentions towards its Crusade against the pagans. Taking over the Mazovian town of Dobrin in a permanent manner ensured the ongoing security of the castle the Order had constructed opposite the town, so it needed to happen. It would also focus King Casimir's mind on the importance of resolving border disputes between Mazovia and Prussia, so after the orders forces seized the town, the Grand Master sat back to see what would happen next.

What happened next was that King Casimir wrote a stinging letter of complaint to the current Pope, Pope Innocent VI, outlining all the arguments that we have just put forward, and emphasizing the fact that the Grand Master of the Teutonic Order took advantage of the fact that King Casimir was away on Crusade to seize a Latin Christian town. Pope Innocent wrote to the Grand Master, sternly rebuking him for using the Order's forces, not to assist King Casimir in his crusade against Lithuania, but to seize a Polish town. Grand Master Winrich von Kniprode apparently sent a pretty lame response back to Avignon in reply to the concerns raised. Pope Innocent then decided to flex his muscles a little, and attempt to pull the Teutonic Order back into line, and ensure that it knew its place, which was, in Pope Innocence's mind, firmly under the Papal thumb.

Now there's one thing you need to keep in mind about Pope Innocent VI, which goes some way to explaining why he felt he had the authority and confidence to mete some Papal discipline out to the Order. You see, while traditionally Popes tended to knock heads with the Holy Roman Emperor, Pope Innocent VI actually enjoyed really close and cordial relations with the current holy Roman Emperor, Charles IV of Bohemia. You see, Charles IV of Bohemia had been educated in France, and he had been the student of the man who would one day become Pope Innocent VI, and even though they were no longer student and teacher but were Emperor and Pope, they sort of continued the student-teacher dynamic. Emperor Charles IV basically didn't carry out any major moves as Emperor before first checking with Pope Innocent if it was okay to do so. So even though Charles was now the Holy Roman Emperor, he was still very much under the thumb of his former teacher, Pope Innocent VI.

Now, before we proceed further, I should probably just clarify that, yes, Emperor Charles IV of Bohemia is also the King of Bohemia. If you are thinking "Wait, isn't blind old King John the King of Bohemia?" Well, no. Blind old King John was Charles' father and the blind King of Bohemia had died fighting the English at the Battle of Crecy, back in the year 1346. Patreon subscribers will, of course, know about the Battle of Crecy from our series on the Hundred Years War. Now apparently blind King John was told that the battle was all but lost, and, perhaps frustrated by this, he told members of his guard that he wished to join the battle and

kill some Englishmen himself. I have no doubt that King John's men did their best to talk King John out of this insane plan, but King John wouldn't be budged. He ordered them to guide him into the thick of the action, then the blind King went berserk, flailing out with his sword at everything and everyone, and apparently he did manage to land a couple of effective blows before he was inevitably cut down himself, and killed.

So where were we? Ah, yes, King John's son Charles is now the King of Bohemia, and he is also the Holy Roman Emperor, who is apparently happy to do the bidding of Pope Innocent in Avignon. So the confusing dynamics in the quadrangle of relations between the Pope, the Teutonic Order, the Holy Roman Emperor, and the King of Poland go a little something like this. The Pope is confident that he can force the Teutonic Order into line because he has the backing of the Holy Roman Emperor. In the dispute between Poland and the Order, the Pope is firmly backing Poland. The Pope has failed to appreciate however, the strong bond, which exists between the Teutonic Order and the Holy Roman Emperor. The Order therefore has enough confidence to stand firm in its conflict with Poland. As a result, the Order's lawyers, who are in Avignon to defend the Grand Master's actions before the Papal court, are unceasingly polite and are careful to ensure that they act with appropriate deference to the Pope, but at the same time, they never ever concede even one point against them. They stand firm in maintaining that their seizure of Dobrin was justified, and they occasionally throw a curveball into the arena by making accusations that the King of Poland has in the past acted against Church policies, and had once threatened to ally himself with both the Lithuanians and the Tartar Khans to strengthen his political hand.

The end result of all of this was that the Pope was unable to prevent the Teutonic Order and the King of Poland from becoming antagonists instead of allies. And this was one factor which contributed to a significant drop in crusading campaigns against the pagans in the Baltic region for the next few years. Another significant factor was a resumption in the battles between England and France in the Hundred Years War. So the next Crusade didn't get underway until the winter of 1357 to 1358, during a short cessation of activities in the Hundred Years War, which occurred when the French king was taken prisoner by the English, following the English victory at Poitiers.

While negotiations were taking place to secure the King's ransom and release, a number of French noblemen, including the Count of Foix, along with two Counts from the Kingdom of Germany, collected a bunch of English, French, German and Scottish crusaders, and made the journey to Prussia, intending to join the Teutonic Order on a Crusade to Samogitia. The Crusade began successfully enough, but things fell apart when the Crusader camp was attacked by a bunch of pagans who burned tents, stole clothes and anything of value, and destroyed everything else, while the Crusaders were out for the day, crusading. The

Crusaders were so outraged to return to their camp and find all their stuff trashed, stolen or destroyed that they immediately made plans to return to Prussia, taking their frustrations out on any pagans they came across during their journey back to Latin Christendom.

Now, after everyone had returned back to their homes, a two year truce was called, in which no crusading expeditions would venture into Lithuania or Samogitia. The truce was called by Pope Innocent and Emperor Charles IV of Bohemia, with the aim of peacefully seeking the conversion of the pagans to Christianity. The truce was to operate from the years 1358 to 1360.

Why had the Pope and the Emperor formed the view that the pagans were suddenly open to conversion? Well, because King Casimir of Poland had informed the Pope that he had heard rumours that Kestutis and Algirdas were pondering the possibility of converting to Christianity. Around about the same time, a Knight from the Teutonic Order had informed Emperor Charles that he had heard exactly the same rumour. So in April of 1358, Emperor Charles wrote to both Kestutis and Algirdas, inviting them to be baptized as Christians. In response, Kestutis and Algirdas authorized one of their brothers, Karijotas, who had developed impressive skills as a negotiator in his dealings with the Tartar Khans, to travel to Nuremberg to speak personally with the Emperor.

In July of the year 1358 Karijotas met with the Emperor and confirmed that his two brothers were considering converting to Christianity. Karijotas then invited the Holy Roman Emperor to send a delegation of men to Vilnius, to discuss and negotiate terms of conversion with the Lithuanians. Emperor Charles appointed the Archbishop of Prague to lead the delegation, and the Archbishop, along with an entourage which included a number of noblemen from across the Holy Roman Empire, traveled to Konigsberg in Prussia, arriving in October of 1358. They left Prussia shortly afterwards, informing officials from the Teutonic Order that they would travel to Vilnius to meet with the Lithuanian leaders. They would then return to Konigsberg to report on the outcome of the negotiations, and hoped to do this by sometime in December.

So the Teutonic Order, the Pope, and the Emperor will all be waiting with bated breath to see whether the Archbishop of Prague can convert the Lithuanians, bringing an end to the Crusades in the Baltic region. Woohoo! Join me next time as we too get to find out what transpired when the Archbishop of Prague and his party traveled to Lithuania. Until next week, bye for now.

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