

## History of the Crusades. Episode 287. The Baltic Crusades. The Samogitian Crusade Part XIX. Samogitian Defiance.

Hello again. Last time we saw Jogaila unite the Kingdom of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania when he converted to Christianity, married the young Polish Queen, and was then crowned the King of Poland. So, in a shock move, one of the pagan nations which has been the subject of crusading campaigns by the Teutonic Order is now officially a Christian nation, with Jogaila promising to convert the Lithuanians to Christianity. Likewise, Jogaila was making encouraging noises about Samogitia also converting to Christianity. With the last two remaining pagan regions in the Baltics about to become full of happy, pious Latin Christians, Jogaila merrily pointed out to the Teutonic Order that the Baltic Crusades were over, and that the Order itself no longer had any reason to continue to exist.

However, just as fervently, the Grand Master of the Order, Konrad Zollner von Rothenstein, was telling anyone who would listen that the opposite was in fact happening. The Grand Master had been invited to Jogaila's wedding, but had turned down the invitation. Instead, he began to spread word that Jogaila's conversion to Christianity was a sham and that he seriously doubted that the pagan Lithuanians would be converting to Christianity any time soon. And as for Samogitia, well the Grand Master stated that Jogaila had absolutely no authority in Samogitia whatsoever. The only possible leader the Samogitians would accept was Vytautas, and not only was Vytautas spending all his time in his new home-sweet-home in the restless border lands far away from Samogitia, Vytautas had converted to Christianity but had then become a pagan again. So good luck with getting any of the Samogitians to convert.

In relation to Samogitia at least, the Grand Master had a point. It really didn't look like anyone was going to be getting Samogitia to convert to Christianity any time soon. As for bringing Christianity to Lithuania, Jogaila had sent a bunch of Franciscan friars to Vilnius, and Jogaila himself had publicly spoken to the people of Vilnius, telling them about the Christian religion and imparting some essential knowledge about Christianity 101. But although most of the citizens of Vilnius seemed content to obey Jogaila's directions for them to convert, there just wasn't enough priests in Lithuania to perform all the baptisms required, nor to educate the Lithuanians about their new faith. The handful of priests who had traveled from Poland to Lithuania with Jogaila, along with the Franciscan friars, didn't speak Lithuanian, so the task of the wholesale conversion of the Lithuanian population looked like it was going to be a lengthy and difficult exercise.

The position taken by the Teutonic Order though, in believing that Jogaila's conversion to Christianity was just a ruse, ended up being totally incorrect. Jogaila left threw himself enthusiastically into all aspects of the Latin Christian religion with the conviction of a true convert. In his book "The Samogitian Crusade", William Urban reports that Jogaila surrounded himself with clerics, and even ended up placing his own mother in a nunnery. He also ordered a raft of churches to be constructed across Lithuania, modeled on the Gothic style of churches which were found in Prussia. But that's where the influence of the Teutonic Order on Christianity in Lithuania ended. Jogaila made sure that Polish clerics, and not men from the Teutonic Order, brought Christianity to his people, and the Polish clerics were flexible enough to allow some local customs and sacred sites to be incorporated into the new Lithuanian form of Christianity, which was spreading very slowly across the vast country of Lithuania.

William Urban describes how in some rural regions of Lithuania, where paganism was strong and outside influences difficult to enforce, friars and priests would sometimes place small crucifixes on sacred trees and in sacred groves, so the people would get used to associating the symbols of Christianity with spiritual worship. On occasion, small chapels would be constructed inside pagan sites of worship in the forests, so again, slowly, bit by bit, Christianity began to spread across Lithuania.

Along with Christianity came the gradual westernization of Lithuania. Christianity brought increased trading opportunities and closer ties with their Latin Christian neighbors, so for Lithuania's noblemen, Christianity came to be associated with increased wealth, increased prestige, and access to the latest European weaponry and luxury items. As the nobility accepted the new religion, and as priests and friars became fluent in the Lithuanian language, Lithuania was well on its way to becoming a Christian nation.

But not so Samogitia. Samogitia was resisting the rising tide of Christianity rather strongly. Unlike Lithuania, Samogitia didn't recognize Jogaila as its overlord, and although some Samogitians recognized the now-Christian Jogaila as their leader, and even more Samogitians looked to the now-Christian-again Vytautas for leadership, Samogitia as a whole preferred to view itself as an independent pagan region. Of course, the reality was that pagan Samogitia was now utterly alone. A defiantly pagan people in the middle of the now Christian Baltic region, they had no allies whom they could depend upon to protect their autonomy and their right to worship as they pleased. Despite the total hopelessness of the situation, the Samogitians seemed reluctant to succumb to the inevitable and peacefully accept baptism. No, as the majority of Samogitians failed to get onboard the Christian train, and as that train tooted triumphantly around Kurland, Semigallia, Livonia, Samland, and now even Lithuania, the Samogitians stood their ground and shook their heads.

The failure of the Samogitians to surrender to the inevitable was, of course, excellent news for the Teutonic Order. When it became clear that the peaceful conversion of Samogitia just wasn't going to happen, well then, the only other option was conversion by force and for conversion by force you, of course needed a Crusade and a military Order to lead that Crusade, so the Teutonic Order was back in business. The Grand Master sent word out across Europe that a massive army of crusaders would gather in Prussia in the winter of 1386 to 1387, then will head over to Samogitia to encourage the pagan Samogitians to convert.

As the date for the commencement of the Crusade rolled around, crusaders from Holland, France and various parts of the Holy Roman Empire made their way to Prussia. However, the whole expedition ended up being a total flop. The Marshall of the Teutonic forces led a small scouting party into Samogitia ahead of the main force, but then reported back that the weather was too warm, and that the rivers and swamps had not frozen sufficiently to accommodate the warhorses of the Crusader army, so everyone threw their hands into the air in dismay, then packed up and went home. Talks between Jogaila, archbishops, and barons from Poland, and representatives from the Teutonic Order, were held on and off for the next couple of years to try to resolve the Samogitian situation by negotiation.

Meanwhile, the political situation in Lithuania and Samogitia developed into a complex and unstable powder keg. All of Jogaila's skills as a strategist and diplomat would be needed to try and steer his country through the troubled waters which now surrounded it. The problems, to some degree, all stemmed from Jogaila harnessing Lithuania to Poland. The

Lithuanians were a pagan people until recently, and were fiercely independent. It's not difficult to see that, with their leader suddenly becoming the King of Poland and with Polish clerics, traders and merchants now roaming Lithuania, and with the constant pressure from Jogaila and Poland for the Lithuanians to convert to Christianity, some Lithuanians becoming increasingly unhappy with the new state of affairs. In fact, some Lithuanians were becoming so unhappy that they began to look for alternatives to the current leadership structure, and the person who they all began to look to was Vytautas.

By the beginning of the year 1389 the political situation in Lithuania was looking a little something like this. Jogaila, being the King of Poland, was unable to spend all of his time in Lithuania, so he delegated a lot of power to Skirgaila, who ruled all the lands which Vytautas had originally been promised, and he was also, on paper at least, the ruler of Samogitia. There were two problems with this. Firstly, since Skirgaila was also required to oversee the rule of his brothers in the Russian Principalities and make sure they weren't stepping out of line, Skirgaila was stretched very thinly, and it was difficult for him to manage all the problems which seemed to be popping up everywhere across Lithuania, Samogitia and the Russian Principalities. The second problem was that, although Skirgaila was a charismatic and entertaining drinking partner, as a leader he tended to be impetuous, reckless and at times, mostly after one of his legendary drinking sessions, he would act violently for no apparent reason. And this wasn't a good time for an impetuous man to be in charge. One of the things Skirgaila was meant to be doing was encouraging the spread of Christianity across Lithuania and Samogitia, but increasingly this was leading to anti-Polish, anti-Christianity feelings, and the more Skirgaila attempted to impose Christianity on the Lithuanians and Samogitians, the more anti-Polish the people became. And as the people became more anti-Polish, they became more pro-Vytautas.

Despite being stuck out in the borderlands, Vytautas was enjoying widespread support, and by the beginning of 1389 rumors were circulating that an uprising was about to take place, with the aim of seizing Vilnius in Vytautas' name. Similar problems were arising in the Russian Principalities. Skirgaila had taken his convert-everyone-to-Latin-Christianity mission to the Orthodox Russians, and the Orthodox Russians were not happy. To Skirgaila's horror, anti-Polish, anti-Latin Christian sentiments were now being echoed in the Russian principalities, and Vytautas' name began to be spoken of amongst Orthodox leaders as a possible alternative to the Jogaila-Skirgaila leadership team. In early 1389 Skirgaila had had enough. He informed Jogaila that Vytautas was a traitor who wished to bring paganism back to Lithuania, and that Vytautas planned to oust Jogaila and rule Lithuania in his place.

To add to Jogaila's headaches, Jogaila was also having disagreements with his Queen. Jadwiga was firmly on the side of the Polish clerics. She wanted to see Christianity brought to the people of Lithuania and Samogitia as quickly as possible, and she couldn't understand why it was taking Jogaila so long to achieve this. She also couldn't understand Jogaila's antagonism towards the Teutonic Order. Jogaila had a number of Teutonic Knights whom he had taken as prisoners, and Grand Master Konrad Zollner von Rothenstein had been angrily demanding their release. However, the Grand Master had never acknowledged Jogaila's conversion to Christianity, and in the many letters he wrote to the King of Poland / Grand Prince of Lithuania, he always addressed Jogaila with the informal, familiar, title of "Du", which Jogaila probably correctly viewed as an insult.

In addition the Teutonic Order hadn't given up its claim to Samogitia. Every time peace talks were held, the Grand Master would commence the negotiations by demanding that

Jogaila recognized the Order's ownership of Samogitia, which of course Jogaila would never do. With the support of Queen Jadwiga, Polish clerics and noblemen had attempted, without success, to bring Jogaila and the Teutonic Order to some sort of understanding, but instead their relationship appeared to be steadily deteriorating. So, to put it mildly, Jogaila was in a bit of a bind. If he complied with the wishes of his wife the Queen of Poland, and of the Polish Church, and pushed the Lithuanian people to acquiesce to the Polish clerics who were stationed all across Lithuania, then he risked losing the support of his countrymen, and risked driving them into the arms of Vytautas.

Despite Skirgaila's loud accusations, Vytautas didn't seem to be actively doing anything to foment this unrest. He seemed to be doing exactly what Jogaila wanted him to do. He was spending all of his time overseeing the borderlands which Jogaila had allocated to him, and he had recently managed to capture the town of Wizna, which he promptly handed over to the Duke of Mazovia, a move which pleased Jogaila's Polish subjects. There really didn't seem to be any active measures being taken by Vytautas to gain support amongst the anti-Polish, anti-Christian, anti-Jogaila elements of Lithuanian society, but nevertheless the support seemed to be occurring all by itself. The situation was similar for Skirgaila. He was proving mightily popular amongst powerful segments of the Polish Church for pushing Latin Christianity onto the Orthodox citizens of the Russian Principalities, but the same move was actually undermining support for Jogaila in the Principalities.

So what did Jogaila do? Well, in May of 1389, he ordered Skirgaila and Vytautas to meet with him to try to sort out their differences. Vytautas ended up making all the right conciliatory noises and promises, but Skirgaila stomped about in a rage, and after the meeting he sent word to Jogaila that he needed to be on guard against treachery by Vytautas. To make matters worse, the close relationship which Skirgaila once had with the Teutonic Order looked like it had now changed. Not only had he fallen out with the Grand Master and the Prussian Chapter of the Order, even the Livonian Chapter, with which he had always been on friendly terms, now seemed to regard him as their enemy.

And I'm afraid things are only going to get worse for Jogaila. Join me next week as the Teutonic Order makes a secret deal with Vytautas, a deal which aims to defeat Skirgaila, and provide Vytautas with all of Skirgaila's Lithuanian lands. Until next week, bye for now.

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