

## History of the Crusades. Episode 288. The Baltic Crusades. The Samogitian Crusade Part XX. Vytautas Strikes Back.

Hello again. Last week we saw Christianity extend across Lithuania, courtesy of Polish clerics. However, while Jogaila, the Supreme Prince of Lithuania and the King of Poland, was eager to keep the Queen of Poland and the Church in Poland on his side, by bringing Christianity to Lithuania as quickly as possible, the pace of the change and the sudden appearance of Polish people across Lithuania was causing some Lithuanians to question the wisdom of Jogaila's alliance with Poland and his conversion to Christianity. As a result, Vytautas, who it appears was doing everything above board and was keeping to himself in his new territory in the borderlands, obeying Jogaila and minding his own business, was becoming a sort of de-facto alternate leader to Jogaila. Unknowingly and perhaps even unwillingly, Vytautas was gaining an increasing number of supporters across Lithuania, Samogitia, and even in the Russian Principalities. At the same time, Vytautas was clashing heavily with Skirgaila, who was telling everyone who would listen that Vytautas was planning to overthrow Jogaila.

Meanwhile, the Teutonic Order's relationship with Jogaila and Skirgaila was also becoming increasingly antagonistic. The degree of antagonism currently being experienced between Jogaila and the Order is nicely illustrated by an entertaining incident related by William Urban in his book "The Samogitian Crusade". One of the more obvious ways open to Jogaila to irritate the Teutonic Order was to block the route overland to Prussia from the Holy Roman Empire. So Jogaila blocked the passage of all crusaders down Polish roads on their way to Prussia, meaning that they were all forced to deviate to a route through the Duchy of Stolp in Pomerania.

The Duchy of Stolp was only a small region, but it bordered Prussia and western Pomerania, so it became a vital thoroughfare used by crusaders who had alternate routes denied to them by Jogaila. So then Jogaila decided to try and block this route as well. Oddly for such a small duchy, the Duchy of Stolp had two Dukes, so Jogaila approached the two Dukes and dangled the possibility of them inheriting Mazovia in front of them. Of course, they could only make a play for Mazovia if they aligned themselves with Jogaila and blocked the passage of crusaders through their territory. When the Teutonic Order heard about Jogaila's offer, they stepped in with one of their own. Should the Dukes reject Jogaila's advances, then the Teutonic Order would offer them the possibility of inheriting the town of Dobrin in Mazovia. But wait, there was more. Not only would they be allowed to throw their hats into the ring to gain control over this vital border town at some stage in the future, the Teutonic Order was willing to give the dukes a significant amount of money right now. All they had to do was to turn their backs on Jogaila and continue to allow crusaders to travel through their Duchy. With a cash-strapped Jogaila unable to match the wads of money being thrown by the Order at the two Dukes, the two Dukes decided that it might be a good idea to ally themselves with the Teutonic Order.

Of course, Jogaila was not just going to let this slide. He came up with a plan to disrupt the passage of crusaders heading into the Duchy of Stolp by proving that it was too dangerous for crusaders to travel there on their way to Prussia. He decided to do this by arranging the kidnapping of a prominent crusader who was heading towards Stolp.

Now, the region next door to the Duchy of Stolp, the place you had to travel through to get to Stolp, was called the Bishopric or County of Cammin, or in Polish "Kamien Pomorski". In return for Jogaila confirming the Count of Cammin's claim to the town of Dobrin, the town

which the Teutonic Order had just promised to the Dukes of Stolp, the Count agreed to kidnap a prominent crusader who was about to travel through Cammin his way to Prussia via Stolp, that Crusader being young Duke Wilhelm of Geldern. The agreement was made and as the young Duke strode confidently through Cammin he was set upon by the Count and forty local noblemen. Two of the Duke's party were killed and young Duke Wilhelm was then carried off to the town of Falkenberg in Pomerania. Incidentally, Falkenburg is called "Ziocieniec" today.

When Grand Master Konrad Zollner von Rothenstein heard about the attack, he was outraged, and he immediately sent word to the Dukes of Stolp that they were to head to Falkenburg to rescue Duke Wilhelm. However, one of the Dukes of Stolp was currently away in the Kingdom of Denmark, and the other Duke didn't really want to get involved. So the Grand Master cancelled the winter Crusade he had lined up and instead sent the Crusader army to rescue young Duke Wilhelm. After a three day siege, the Crusaders took the town of Falkenburg and the Count of Cammin fled to the Kingdom of Poland.

That was the good news for the Grand Master. The bad news for the Grand Master was that young Duke Wilhelm refused to be rescued. Apparently young Duke Wilhelm was deep into chivalry and was also a stickler for rules. He had given his word to the Count that he would remain a prisoner. With the Count now vanished to somewhere inside Poland, the Count was unable to release young Duke Wilhelm from his oath, so young Duke Wilhelm advised the astonished Crusaders that he had no option but to stay right where he was, in prison in Falkenberg, until someone could locate the Count and get the Count to formally release the young Duke from his oath. The Crusaders then threw their hands into the air and trekked back to Prussia to report this odd turn of events to the Grand Master.

Grand Master Konrad Zollner von Rothenstein just didn't know what to do. The Count couldn't be located, and understandably the Holy Roman Emperor and the Dukes of Stolp declined to get involved. After a couple of months had passed, the Grand Master came up with a plan. He sent another army to Falkenburg and ordered them to forcibly transport young Duke Wilhelm to Prussia, still in his chains. In that way, the Grand Master reasoned, the Duke could say that he was still a prisoner. However, young Duke Wilhelm saw flaws in this argument and, not wanting to place his reputation as a chivalrous young man who took oaths extremely seriously at risk, he immediately requested that he be transported, still in his chains, back to his prison in Falkenburg, a request that was granted.

More time passed, then a light bulb went off inside the Grand Master's head and he settled upon a solution to the problem. He recalled that the Bishop of Pomesania had been given responsibility by Rome, ages ago, for ensuring the safety of crusaders traveling along the Baltic coastline. The Grand Master contacted the Bishop, and the Bishop tracked down the Count and the forty noblemen from Cammin, and advised them that they would all be excommunicated for violating Church policy, unless the Count immediately released Duke Wilhelm from his oath. The Count did so. Young Duke Wilhelm freed himself from his chains, stretched, and did a few warm up exercises in Falkenburg, before getting on his horse and continuing his journey to Prussia, where he fulfilled another vow, this vow being to go on Crusade. William Urban reports that Duke Wilhelm returned to Prussia three more times during the next decade to go crusading, so his experience mustn't have put him off the whole crusading caper.

Now, while these shenanigans were going on, the relationship between Skirgaila and Vytautas was deteriorating to new levels, and in the year 1389 Vytautas decided that he

had had enough. Since everyone seemed to believe that Vytautas had been gathering followers and scheming to overthrow Jogaila, Vytautas decided that, if that was the case, well he might as well just to gather some followers and scheme to overthrow Jogaila. So he released two prominent Teutonic prisoners from their Lithuanian cells and sent them to Prussia with a message for the Grand Master, that message being that Vytautas wished to reactivate the previous agreement that he had made with the Order. You may remember that the gist of that agreement effectively was that the entire region of Samogitia would be handed over to the Teutonic Order, the Lithuanians and Samogitians would be Christianized, and that Vytautas would rule Lithuania as a vassal of the Teutonic Order. The Grand Master agreed to Vytautas' proposition but added a further condition: that Vytautas provide a number of hostages to the Order, who would be held in castles across Prussia, and would face peril should Vytautas renege on his agreement, as he had done last time. In January of the year 1390, Vytautas traveled to Prussia along with a bunch of hostages, one of whom was his brother-in-law. He signed a treaty with the Grand Master at a place called Lyck, then parceled the hostages off to their new temporary homes in castles across Prussia.

Then Vytautas collected a large Prussian army, which the Grand Master had mustered on his behalf, and left Prussia at the head of the army, bound for the Lithuanian town of Gardinas. The Marshall of the Teutonic forces had also mustered an army of crusaders and was also heading to Gardinas. The combined forces led by Vytautas and the Marshall took the castle at Gardinas.

Having conquered one Lithuanian city, they decided to have a crack at the big prize, marching to the Lithuanian capital city Vilnius. However, Jogaila's brother Kaributas had received word of the treachery of Vytautas and of the Prussian army taking Gardinas, so he had expelled all of Vytautas' supporters from Vilnius, and had readied the town's defenses. Finding Vilnius fully defended and prepared for a lengthy siege, the Crusaders decided to leave Vilnius, and instead they headed to Kaunas, burning, pillaging, and wrecking as much stuff as they could on their way. When they arrived at Kaunas they found it abandoned. The garrison of the castle at Kaunas had apparently decided to burn the castle to the ground and abandon it, rather than see it taken by the Crusaders.

Now this military invasion of now-sort-of-Christian Lithuania, which was being ruled by the definitely Christian Supreme Prince of Lithuania and King of Poland, wasn't exactly being viewed in a positive light in Rome. A number of minor Papal officials happened to be in Vilnius and had fled prior to the approach of the Teutonic forces. These officials immediately made their way to Prussia to have a stern word with the Grand Master.

But Grand Master Konrad Zollner von Rothenstein was in no mood to make soothing noises at the representatives from Rome. He forcefully told the men that the whole purpose of the Teutonic Order was to battle against the enemies of Christendom. The Lithuanians still held a number of Teutonic prisoners whom they had failed to release, and Jogaila had reneged on past agreements with the Order and had tried to prevent crusaders from traveling to Prussia. As such, Jogaila was clearly an enemy of the Church and it was well past time for him to be removed to make way for a proper Christian leader like Vytautas. Therefore, stated the Grand Master, the Teutonic Order was not interested in opening peace talks with Jogaila or Skirgaila, and instead it was fully intending to assist Vytautas to rise to power, to bring a proper and more thorough Teutonic type of Christianity to Lithuania and Samogitia.

So, well I guess everyone now knows where they stand. Skirgaila gathered an army and went to attempt to win back the town of Gardinas from the Order, and when later Jogaila joined him with his own army, they were successful. After a six week long siege Gardinas fell, despite the best efforts of the Marshall and Vytautas to disrupt the siege. So Vytautas has now lost the only foothold he had scored for himself in Lithuania. As William Urban points out in his book "The Samogitian Crusade", this may well have spelled the end for Vytautas and his attempt to take Lithuania, but it didn't.

Vytautas was, however, sent scrambling for local support. His alliance with the Teutonic Order had weakened his popularity amongst his own people once before and to try to prevent that from happening again, Vytautas went into overdrive, actively seeking support amongst the local families in Samogitia and Lithuania. To secure their support he promised they would have input into his decision-making processes. He vowed that he would set up meetings with local noblemen before making significant decisions about their regions, and that the noblemen themselves would be able to countersign important agreements and affix their seals to documents. This seems to have done the trick. In May of the year 1390, thirty prominent noblemen, mostly from Samogitia, traveled to Konigsberg to conclude a treaty with the Grand Master. Under the terms of the treaty, they pledged their allegiance to Vytautas and agreed to fight with the Crusader and Teutonic forces on Vytautas' behalf. They even agreed to become vassals of the Teutonic Order should Vytautas succeed in his mission to become the ruler of Samogitia and Lithuania.

So, with enough support on the ground to make a campaign viable, Grand Master Konrad Zollner von Rothenstein decided that all he needed to do now was to send word far and wide across Europe that a massive Crusade was going to head to Lithuania from Prussia in the winter of 1390 to 1391. Among the many, many men who responded to this call to arms was one Henry Bolingbroke, and this Henry Bolingbroke was actually, definitely the Henry Bolingbroke who ended up becoming King Henry IV. Join me next week as we follow the future King of England, Henry Bolingbroke, on his Crusade to Lithuania. Until next week, bye for now.

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