

History of the Crusades. Episode 289. The Baltic Crusades. The Samogitian Crusade Part XXI. The Crusade of Henry Bolingbroke.

Hello again. Last week we saw the conflict between Jogaila and Vytautas kick off once again, with Vytautas allying himself to the Teutonic Order to have another crack at ousting Jogaila and ruling Lithuania as a vassal of the Order. The Grand Master has now voiced his opinion that, despite being Christianized, Jogaila is an enemy of the Church, and enemies of the Church can be subject to a Crusade, So Grand Master Konrad Zollner von Rothenstein sent word across Europe that a new Crusade would muster, and in the year 1390 this new force would head to Lithuania to oust enemy-of-the-Church Jogaila and install friend-of-the-Church Vytautas as the ruler of Lithuania.

Now, luckily for us, one of the many warriors in Europe who decided to volunteer for this Crusade was a nobleman called Henry Bolingbroke. Why is this lucky for us? Well, because he took along with him some English bookkeepers who kept extremely detailed and thorough accounts of every single penny spent preparing for the Crusade and spent during the Crusade, along with meticulous notes of what each expenditure was for. As a result, historians have been able to piece together an unusually comprehensive picture of Henry Bolingbroke's Crusade. So let's follow him on his journey from England to Lithuania in the year 1390.

At the time of his departure from England on Crusade, Henry Bolingbroke was 23 years old and had already enjoyed considerable success on the battlefield. He was part of the house of Lancaster, being the son of John of Gaunt, and he would probably be surprised to learn, if you spoke to him in the year 1390, that in nine years time he will knock his cousin off the throne and have himself installed as the King of England, becoming King Henry IV. Young Henry Bolingbroke had successfully led a crack group of English archers in various battles against the French during the Hundred Years War, and now he was determined to take his archers to Lithuania to see how they fared on Crusade.

Incidentally, should you wish to know more about the Hundred Years War, go sign up to our Patreon page. You will get access to a series I recently completed on Joan of Arc and the Hundred Years War, and after you finished listening to that you can start listening to our new series, a follow up to the Hundred Years War, the English Civil War known as the Wars of the Roses. Just listen to the promo at the end of this episode on how to sign up.

Where were we? Ah yes. Henry and his men sailed to Danzig, where they purchased all the supplies they would need for an overland journey from Danzig to Konigsberg. In his book "The Samogitian Crusade", William Urban describes how the bookkeepers recorded purchases of war horses, riding horses and pack animals, enough hay and straw to cover the animals' requirements, horseshoes, saddles, girths and bridles for the horses, and cloth to make new outfits for the riders. They also purchased winter clothing, some blue banners, and some gifts which Henry Bolingbroke could present to his hosts along the road to Konigsberg. William Urban notes that the records indicated that Henry had brought with him a sumptuous silk and gold tapestry from Cyprus, which he would hang near his table when he was dining, and that he also carried pots of paint so that the Lancaster coat of arms could be painted on the doors of various hostels and inns where he was staying. Henry and his party also rented thirteen wagons in Danzig, which were needed to transport all the supplies they had gathered.

Once all the supplies were loaded onto the wagons, Henry and his men set off for Königsberg. Henry's entire party amounted to around three hundred men, eighty of whom were skilled archers and the rest of whom were fighting men and servants including, of course, some very meticulous bookkeepers.

They arrived safely at Königsberg, only to find that Grand Master Konrad Zollner von Rothenstein was gravely ill, so gravely ill, in fact, that he would die in a few weeks time, which is a shame, firstly, because Grand Master Konrad Zollner von Rothenstein will not get to participate in the Crusade he had initiated, and secondly because I will no longer be able to keep saying "Grand Master Konrad Zollner von Rothenstein".

Anyway, Henry purchased enough supplies in Königsberg to provide food for himself and his men during his Crusade. Courtesy of the bookkeepers, I can tell you that he ordered his servants to purchase chickens, cattle which he intended to take with him to kill for meat, three hundred casks of wine and, wait for it, forty eight tons of beer. Yes, you heard that right. In his book "The Samogitian Crusade", William Urban reports that Henry's servants purchased forty eight tons of beer, which, incidentally, was enough to provide all his men with eight bottles of beer per day for the duration of the military campaign. You should perhaps keep in mind that the beer was meant to provide the men with all their hydration needs for the expedition, as water was generally avoided due to possible contaminants. But still, that's a lot of beer.

It seems that Henry hit it off well with the Marshall of the Teutonic Order, Engelhard Rabe, and Henry was invited to join the Marshall and his entourage as they travelled to their first destination, the town of Georgenberg on the Nemunas River. The siege of the fortress at Georgenberg was well underway when word came in that Grand Master Konrad Zollner von Rothenstein had passed away, so a war council was called so that the Crusaders could determine the best course of action to take. Now the usual course of action following the death of a Grand Master was that members of the senior leadership team would immediately head to Prussia to take part in a meeting of the General Chapter of the Order, in which a new Grand Master would be elected. But William Urban reports that Marshall Engelhard didn't want to down tools and head back to Prussia. He was optimistic that the large Crusader army, which was currently besieging a town in Samogitia could actually achieve something of worth if they continued their mission, and, he pondered, since everyone, including Jogaila and Skirgaila would be expecting him to abandon the siege and head back to Prussia, now would actually be the perfect time to do exactly the opposite. If they abandoned the siege of Georgenberg but instead headed to Vilnius and not Prussia, perhaps they could take Jogaila and Skirgaila by surprise, and take Vilnius for the Crusaders. This seemed like a good plan, so the Crusaders packed up, then headed eastwards through Samogitia on their way to Lithuania.

However, they hadn't taken Jogaila and Skirgaila by surprise. In fact, Skirgaila at this very moment was leading an army of fighters from the Russian Principalities, and was traveling with them through Samogitia on his way to bolstering Jogaila's forces in Lithuania. Skirgaila realized what was happening and ordered his Russian fighters to scramble to various river crossings to prevent the Crusaders from crossing out of Samogitia. The Crusaders quickly discovered that all the popular river crossing points were now guarded by aggressive-looking groups of Russian warriors, so the Marshall sent scouts further afield to look for alternate routes. The scouts reported back with the happy news that river crossings to the north seemed to be Russian-free, so the Marshall came up with a plan to let his ships and the unused war horses and servants travel slowly up the Nemunas River,

while the fastest, most skilled, and fittest fighters raced northwards to the unmanned river crossing. The Marshal had received word that Skirgaila was currently at Kaunas, and the Marshall's plan was for the core of the Crusader army to cross the river and race as quickly as they could through the forests to Kaunas, where they would surprise Skirgaila and his Russians.

The plan was a good one, and the outcome was favorable to the Crusaders. While they didn't manage to capture Skirgaila, they did manage to kill a bunch of Russian fighters, and they captured three dukes and eleven noblemen who they sent to Prussia to be ransomed. They also seized two hundred horses.

The Marshall and his forces then waited at Kaunas for their supply ships, horses and servants to arrive up the Nemunas. Once they were rested and resupplied, the Marshall then led the Crusader forces to Vilnius. The Crusader forces arrived at Vilnius and met up with Vytautas' army. The first Lithuanians they encountered were some converted Christian inhabitants of Vilnius, who proceeded out of a church in the outer suburbs of Vilnius and headed towards the Crusader forces in a formal procession. The congregation may have been intending to welcome the Crusader and Teutonic forces to Vilnius as fellow Christians, but they didn't get a chance to say their piece because the advancing Crusaders attacked the unarmed procession, killing one of them and sending the others racing back to the safety of the main castle in the town.

There were two fortified positions inside Vilnius, the main castle and a building known as the "Old Castle", which was a wooden fort. William Urban reports that the city's defenders made no attempt to secure the outer suburbs of the city, but the Polish and Lithuanian fighters stood their ground inside both the Old Castle and the main castle. The Crusaders decided to attack the Old Castle first. They had with them some cannon as well as catapult machines, and they bombarded the walls around the Old Castle until a breach appeared. An English Crusader was the first person through the gap in the wall, then the entire Crusader army poured into the Old Castle, managing to kill around 1,000 fighters and civilians who had taken refuge inside the building.

The Crusaders were eventually forced to retreat when a fire engulfed the wooden fortress. The Lithuanian and Russian fighters also fled from the fire, but a Polish chronicler reported that some Polish troops remained behind, covering gaps in the walls with animal skins, which caused missiles from the catapult machines to bounce harmlessly away. At considerable risk to their own safety, the Polish troops managed to keep holding their position.

The most prominent victim of the Crusader assault on the Old Castle at Vilnius was Jogaila's brother Kaributas. According to William Urban, Jogaila maintained until the end of his days that the Crusaders had beheaded Kaributas, but the Teutonic Order was adamant that Kaributas had died in battle, and that they were not even aware that he had died until five days later, when they discovered his body.

While the Polish troops were holding out at the Old Castle, the attention of the Crusaders and Teutonic Order and the army commanded by Vytautas turned to the new castle. Now, unfortunately for the Crusaders, the new castle was a much stronger structure, was easier to defend and was decked out with a number of cannon on top of its defensive walls. As William Urban points out, the Crusaders were mindful of the fact that it was too dangerous to storm the walls of a castle defended by cannon, so when the best efforts of the archers

to clear the walls of defenders proved to be inadequate, work started on undermining one of the walls. This grueling, backbreaking, and dangerous work was going extremely slowly. The weather was starting to turn cold, wet, and uncomfortable, and the Crusaders were running short of gunpowder. Even worse, a truce between the warring sides was due to take effect on the 30th of September, so for all these reasons, Marshall Engelhard decided that it was time to call it a day, and he ordered the Crusader army to withdraw back to Prussia.

Despite failing to take Vilnius, the expedition was considered overall to be a successful one. The Crusaders had managed to remain in hostile territory for five weeks, and had they had more time, and more gunpowder, and had the weather been kinder, they may well have been able to take Lithuania's premier city.

Henry Bolingbroke didn't return to England immediately, but remained behind in Konigsberg over the winter. To this day, no one knows exactly why he did this. He isn't recorded as having participated in any winter military campaigns, and the best historians can come up with is that he may have been engaged in some trade negotiations during the winter months.

Thankfully, his bookkeepers stayed with him in Konigsberg and kept up their good work, so we can tell you that during the winter months Henry and his servants purchased beef, chicken, pork and vast quantities of beer to see them through the winter months. Henry also treated himself to quantities of pastries and sweets, and purchased some furs and winter clothing. He spent quite a bit of money on candles to brighten his winter evenings, and he spent his spare time listening to minstrels, attending Mass, and at various other entertainments. He went hunting on numerous occasions and was given three bear cubs by a local woodsman on one successful hunting trip. In February, Henry made himself useful by traveling to Danzig and commencing negotiations with representatives from Jogaila concerning the ransom of two men who were captured in Vilnius.

Finally, in April, Henry Bolingbroke's crusading expedition came to an end, and he sailed back home to England, taking with him two gifts, a table engraved with a map of Prussia, which was a Christmas present from the Bishop of Samland, and some hunting falcons from the recently elected new Grand Master, a man called Konrad von Wallenrode. You may be interested to know that the bookkeepers tallied up Henry's expenses, and we can report that the Crusade of Henry Bolingbroke ended up costing him the tidy sum of two thousand pounds, or three thousand marks, a significant amount of money.

So did the Crusade to Vilnius achieve anything of significance? Not really. It didn't manage to overthrow Jogaila or Skirgaila, and Vytautas is still waiting in the wings for his chance to take over the rulership of Lithuania. So the conflict between Jogaila and Vytautas continues. Join me next week as we see how the new Grand Master, Konrad von Wallenrode, tackles the problem. Until next week, bye for now.

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