

History of the Crusades. Episode 293. The Baltic Crusades. The Samogitian Crusade Part XXV. The End of the Samogitian Crusade.

Hello again. Last week we saw the Teutonic Order throw everything at Vytautas, as it attempted to defeat him and take Samogitia and Lithuania for itself. A massive crusader force invaded Lithuania and attempted to take Vilnius, but the army was eventually forced to retreat after the city proved quite tricky to defeat.

The Crusader invasion and the second siege of Vilnius didn't end up scoring the Teutonic Order any territorial gains against Vytautas, but it did cause both Vytautas and the Grand Master of the Teutonic Order to ponder the reality of the situation they now found themselves in. Vytautas had to face up to the fact that the Teutonic Order had the resources and ability to send wave after wave of Crusader invasions into the territory under his control, and these forces were effective and skilled enough to have blocked Vytautas' march into Vilnius, even though Vytautas' army was as much as ten times as large as the Crusader force.

On the other side of the fence, the Teutonic Order was forced to face the fact that despite having raised the largest Crusader army in the history of the Order, the Order wasn't able to achieve an awful lot with this army. Vytautas seemed to be able to draw upon a seemingly endless supply of Lithuanian, Polish and Russian fighters to defend his territory, and taking Vilnius, the city which the Order would need to secure to defeat Vytautas, looked like it might be a conquest beyond the abilities of the Teutonic forces. So all of these sobering facts were leading both Vytautas and the Teutonic Order to consider embarking on peace negotiations.

The Teutonic Order had another two factors against it, which were also increasing the pressure to find a peaceful means of ending their dispute with Vytautas, those two factors being pressure from Rome and from the Holy Roman Emperor. The current Holy Roman Emperor was Wenceslas, or Wenzel, and he was doing a pretty average job of being Emperor. He had been elected as Holy Roman Emperor following the end of the reign of his father, the very busy, energetic, and politically astute Charles IV. Unfortunately, Charles' son and heir Wenceslas was lazy, of low energy, was politically uninterested, and preferred to spend most of his time in Bohemia, partying and living it up with his friends. When he made decisions, they were often made without advice, on the spur of the moment, and they frequently made no sense whatsoever. In his book "The Holy Roman Empire", Peter Wilson notes that Charles IV had enjoyed a successful reign, but had left the Empire facing a number of challenges. Peter Wilson states and I quote "Wenzel was not the man to meet those challenges. A typical spoilt child of a family on the make, Wenzel was overindulged and inexperienced. He tended to dodge responsibility by going hunting, while his ill health after 1388 was exacerbated by alcoholism. Wenzel spent only three years of his 22 year reign outside Bohemia, and a third of this time was in Nuremberg, being the Imperial capital easiest to reach from his Kingdom. He failed to visit Germany at all in the critical decade after 1387." End quote.

While Wenzel, or Wenceslas, tended to neglect his Imperial duties, he did manage to make it clear that he wasn't a fan of the Teutonic Order, and he formally commanded the order to cease its incursions into Vytautas' lands. To make things even more complicated for the Teutonic Order, the current Pope, Urban VI, had also made it clear that he believed the Teutonic Order should cease its invasions of Lithuania and Samogitia, and rumor had

it that the Pope was actually considering confiscating some of the Order's possessions in Italy if it failed to cease and desist its military actions against Vytautas.

Just when you think things couldn't get any more complicated politically for the Teutonic Order, the overwhelming inadequacy of Wenceslas, or Wenzel, as Emperor was causing power-brokers across the Empire to start quietly scouting around for a possible replacement. And the man apparently leading the contenders for this position was none other than our old friend Sigismund, the former Duke of Brandenburg and now King of Hungary, who had been married to Jadwiga's older sister Mary, who unfortunately has just died in childbirth. Sigismund was keen to boost his profile and his standing in Europe, and as a result he was making it known that he was about to muster a Crusade which would push the Turks back into the Asian steppe and would Hoover up all the fighting men of Germany, France and Hungary who would otherwise have provided possible volunteers for the Baltic crusades. So these were all good reasons why the Teutonic Order might be considering entering into peace talks with Vytautas.

But wait, there's more. William Urban reports in his book, "The Samogitian Crusade" that the Order had considered launching another invasion of Lithuania at the beginning of the year 1395, but the winter was unusually mild and was considered unsuitable for a Crusade. And for reasons which are unclear, the Dukes of Stolp had suddenly become opponents of the Order and had in fact, arrested three officials from the Order as they passed through Stolp on their way to Prussia.

So really, I guess it won't come as a surprise to anyone to learn that in the summer of 1395 peace talks commenced between the Order and Vytautas. Vytautas was, at this time, unsurprisingly very open to coming to an agreement with the Order which would allow him to keep ruling Lithuania, Samogitia, and his land in the Russian Principalities, without having to worry about defending his territory from invasions by the Teutonic Order. Vytautas was, after all, governing a massive amount of territory, and doing so all on his own. Unlike his father Kestutis or Jogaila, he isn't governing with the assistance of close relatives or brothers. He was doing it all entirely on his own, and while the peace talks are underway, Vytautas was spending all his spare time in the Russian Principalities, trying to free them from the grasp of Jogaila's various brothers, including his least favorite of Jogaila's brothers, his long time rival Skirgaila. Vytautas will end up being successful in this venture as, one by one, he booted Jogaila's brothers out of the Principalities and brought them under his direct rule, even managing to eliminate Skirgaila from the scene, which was achieved by Skirgaila conveniently dying, perhaps of the plague or perhaps by poison.

The peace talks continued on and off through the last half of 1395, throughout 1396, and into 1397. One of the reasons why an agreement was proving so difficult to achieve was the fact that Jogaila, of course, as the King of Poland, the state which was paired to Lithuania, would need to give his stamp of approval to any settlement. And even if both Grand Master Konrad von Jungingen and Vytautas managed to agree terms, which they did in mid-1396, Jogaila could still throw a spanner in the works and object to the terms, which he seemed to do on a regular basis.

In regards to the agreement reached between Vytautas and the Grand Master in 1396, Jogaila prevented it from being formalised on the basis that he disagreed with the requirement that Vytautas swear allegiance to the Holy Roman Emperor, although William Urban points out that the actual reason was probably more along the lines of Jogaila being

concerned that an end to the hostilities between Vytautas and the Order may upset his own plans for the region. Two years later, though in the year 1398, both Vytautas and the Grand Master were now seriously interested in coming to terms, and Vytautas had even reached the point where he was prepared to defy Jogaila to accept a peace deal.

So what had changed during the past two years? Well, Sigismund's Crusade against the Turks had been an absolute disaster. Thousands of crusaders who had answered his call to teach the Turks a lesson were now lying dead at Nicopolis, having been taught a lesson themselves by the Turkish fighters. The ripple effects of this terrible event were being felt across Europe, with a plummeting of support for Crusader expeditions. This event, along with the fact that attempts by the Teutonic Order to forcibly take Samogitia were going extremely badly, with the last major expedition having lost the Latin Christians 200 of their own lives and 500 of their horses, made the Grand Master realize that if there was any way he could take Samogitia by negotiation rather than by force, now was the time to seize that opportunity with both hands.

As for Vytautas, he was just coming down from a number of stunning victories he had scored against the Tartar Khan in the Russian Principalities. He had been so successful that there was now even a chance that he could defeat the current Khan and replace him with his own man, effectively meaning that the Khan would be a vassal of Vytautas. There were currently some major power-plays taking place inside Russia and Vytautas knew that, if he played his cards right, there was a chance that he could manipulate events to his advantage, making Vytautas the most powerful man in Eastern Europe and maximizing his territory in Russia.

The former Khan, Tokhtamysh, had been a vassal of the Great Khan Tamerlane, but had unwisely attempted to assert his independence. Tamerlane had sent his army to teach Tokhtamysh a lesson, which had resulted in Tokhtamysh fleeing to Lithuania, and Tamerlane installing a new, more subservient Khan in his place. Tokhtamysh had vowed to Vytautas that if Vytautas could assist him to defeat Tamerlane's replacement Khan, then Tokhtamysh would go back to his old job of being Khan, but would effectively be ruling on Vytautas' behalf. So, all Vytautas needed to do to win himself a staggering amount of territory and become an extremely powerful man was to gather a huge army of Lithuanian, Polish and Russian fighters, and go and defeat the new Khan. Easy!

But gathering the army wasn't proving to be easy at all. Before committing Polish troops to the expedition, Queen Jadwiga made an unexpected demand. She stated that, in her view, parts of western Russia legally belonged to Poland, and those lands should now be under Polish administration, and taxes paid by the citizens of those lands should be going into coffers inside the Kingdom of Poland and not to Lithuania. Vytautas really, really didn't want to make this concession and he expected that Jogaila may have been behind the Queen's demands. But on the other hand, he really, really needed Polish assistance if he was to have a decent crack at defeating the Khan, unless he could find a talented bunch of fighters to replace the Polish troops. Vytautas had fought with the Teutonic Order on numerous occasions and knew the capabilities of their fighters. So if he could come to terms with the Teutonic Order, then perhaps he could use Teutonic fighters in his campaign against the Khan.

So Vytautas quietly sent word to the Grand Master that he should send a delegation of knights to Gardinas to try to secure an agreement. Vytautas' wife Anna, who by now had a well-earned reputation as a talented facilitator and negotiator, assisted the two sides to

come to a temporary agreement. Here are the terms which were proposed. Number one, Vytautas would drop all his claims to Samogitia. Number two, Vytautas would attempt to get Jogaila to agree with the terms of peace. Number three, Vytautas would commission the building of two or three castles at mutually agreed locations in the borderlands. Number four, both sides would release all the prisoners they held. Number five, Vytautas would surrender his claim to Pskov, while the Grand Master would surrender any future claim to Novgorod. Number six, Vytautas promised to protect Christians and to carry out his duties to the Church and the Holy Roman Empire. And finally, Number seven, both parties agreed to be allies, even to the extent that they would come to the other's assistance if they were threatened by any third party, including the Kingdom of Poland.

Now, William Urban points out that both parties thought that they were getting an excellent deal from this agreement. The Grand Master believed that he had won all the concessions he wished to extract from Vytautas, while Vytautas saw the agreement as giving him the green light to switch his attention away from Samogitia, and instead focus on taking on and defeating the latest Khan in Russia.

So with everyone agreeing to the terms, a formal document was drawn up and was signed with much fanfare in September of 1398 on an island in the Nemunas River called Sallinwerder. The Treaty of Sallinwerder ended up forming the basis of a military alliance between Lithuania and the Teutonic Order, and it also spelled the end of pagan independence for Samogitia. Grand Master Jungingen immediately called on Vytautas to build two castles at Gotteswerder in accordance with the agreement, and he also undertook repairs at two other strongholds. Then Vytautas headed off to the Black Sea to commence planning for his Russian campaign, and the Marshall of the Prussian Teutonic forces and the Master of Livonia both invaded Samogitia, with the aim of finally, at long last, defeating the last bastion of paganism in the Baltic region.

It was generally thought that the Samogitians, who were now totally without allies, could only do their best to fight for their freedom before surrendering inevitably to the Latin Christians. Except that's not what happened. No, two events, both taking place far away from Samogitia, flipped things on their heads, meaning that although the Samogitian Crusade was now officially over, the pagan Samogitians would live to fight another day. How on earth did this happen? Well, you'll have to tune in next week to find out. Until next week, bye for now.

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