

History of the Crusades. Episode 295. The Baltic Crusades. The Livonian Crusade Part LII. Internal Strife.

Hello again. Last time we saw how, while the Samogitian Crusade had ended, the potential for further rebellion in Samogitia remained, with the Samogitians having not really been brought under the Teutonic thumb, This week we are heading back to Livonia. Remember Livonia? We haven't been there since Episode 281, but now it's time to pop back over to Livonia and Estonia to see what has been taking place while we have been concentrating on matters in Lithuania, Poland, and Prussia.

Now, you might have noticed that the Livonian Chapter of the Teutonic Order haven't been playing a huge role in the military expeditions into Lithuania and Samogitia in recent times. The Master of Livonia and his knights have made an occasional appearance, but they haven't been regulars on the Crusader scene. In his book "The Livonian Crusade", William Urban points out that there were two reasons for this. The first reason was largely one of geography. Most crusaders who were traveling from Europe to engage in a crusading adventure in the Baltic region chose first to sail to Danzig, then travel overland to Konigsberg in Prussia, and from there into Samogitia and Lithuania via the Nemunas River. The days of Crusaders sailing to Riga and then travelling up the Daugava River to Dunaburg Castle and then into Lithuania were kind of over, and had been replaced by the quicker and more popular Danzig-Konigsberg-Kaunas route. As such, the Prussian Chapter of the Teutonic Order, and not the Livonian Chapter, were the instigators and promoters of Crusading expeditions heading into Samogitia and Lithuania, while the Livonian Chapter tended only to play a limited role.

The second reason why the Livonians ceased to become crusading regulars in this period was due to internal difficulties. William Urban describes these troubles as commencing just before the year 1380 and lasting until the year 1400, so pretty much until the end of the Samogitian Crusade. So the obvious question is, what were these internal difficulties? Well, they were predominantly caused by just one man that men being, not the Archbishop of Riga for a change, but the Bishop of Dorpat. The particular Bishop of Dorpat who was the source of all the trouble was a man called Dietrich Damerow, who took up office in the year 1379. The elevation of Dietrich Damerow to the position was a political appointment. It was due to a bit of sleight of hand by Pope Urban VI, who was determined to place a firebrand cleric into this out-of-the-way Bishopric.

Dietrich Damerow had already earned a reputation as an ambitious, argumentative sort of man, who had made himself an enemy of the Teutonic Order when he managed to place a spanner in the works by doggedly contesting his failure to be elected as Bishop of Pomesania In the year 1376. The Grand Master had already nominated a candidate to the position, but Dietrich Damerow failed to go quietly. Instead, he used every single legal avenue he could think of to protest every single aspect of the election process. He exhibited an extraordinary stubbornness, and managed to string out hearings into the matter for more than a year. In the end he lost, but in the process managed to get himself blacklisted by the Teutonic Order, which was determined that the argumentative, difficult, and contrary Dietrich would never get anywhere near the reins of power in a region in which the Order held any influence. Which meant that everyone was pretty surprised when, only a few years later, Dietrich was suddenly the new Bishop of Dorpat.

The person who was most surprised of all was the Grand Master of the Order, who wasn't actually notified of Dietrich's appointment until after he had been publicly named as being

the man selected to be the next Bishop of Dorpat. The Grand Master immediately got the ball rolling on selecting an alternate candidate for the position, and then began lobbying for their man to be installed in place of the despised Dietrich. After an awful lot of political wrangling, which even saw Grand Master Winrich von Kniprode at one stage trying to appoint his own nephew to the position of Bishop of Dorpat, Pope Urban eventually got his way. But the history of bad blood between Dietrich Damerow and the Teutonic Order set the scene for a continual showdown between the new Bishop of Dorpat and the Livonian Master of the Teutonic Order.

Now the Bishopric of Dorpat lay on the western side of Lake Peipus in what today is part of Estonia. The Bishopric had been traditionally rather an independent place, and had been settled by German nobleman and merchants who were happy to keep their distance from the Teutonic Order. The Livonian chapter of the Teutonic Order, however, had different ideas. Ideally, it would like to see the whole of Livonia fall under a sort of united feudal arrangement, with the Teutonic Order on top of the feudal pyramid, much like the situation in Prussia. The local German nobility of Dorpat opposed this move and if you think that Dietrich Damerow is going to exploit these positions for all he was worth, you would be exactly right.

In fact, tensions between the Archbishop of Riga and the Bishops of Livonia and Estonia, all of whom of course were supported by the Papacy, and the Livonian Chapter of the Teutonic Order were already high prior to Dietrich's arrival on the scene, with various players moving to work the conflict between the competing powers to their advantage. An example of this can be found in the case of Bishop Heinrich, the Bishop of Oesel-Wiek. Bishop Heinrich had been the Bishop of Schleswig before he was moved sideways into the Bishopric of Oesel-Wiek in 1374. Bishop Heinrich had rather refined tastes, and had enjoyed an extravagant lifestyle during his tenure as the Bishop of the wealthy region of Schleswig. Having been transferred to the much more remote, less refined, and poorer Bishopric of Oesel-Wiek, Heinrich was determined to maintain the lifestyle to which he had become accustomed. Trouble was, his new diocese just didn't generate enough income to cover his expenses, so to solve this pesky problem Bishop Heinrich decided to start selling Church property to pay his creditors. The alarmed clerics within the Bishopric realized that in the long term this would reduce Church income, and was, all in all, a terrible administrative decision. However, by this time Bishop Heinrich had formed an alliance with the Archbishop of Riga, so the desperate clerics turned to the Master of Livonia for help.

The Master of Livonia sprang into action and ordered the castellan of Reval, along with an armed escort, to go to the assistance of the clerics and to help them deal with their Bishop. The armed men accompanied the clerics to the Bishop's residence, arrested Bishop Heinrich, and carried him off to a castle on the island of Oesel. Two days after arriving at the castle, Bishop Heinrich was found dead in the toilet. The Archbishop of Riga opened a murder investigation, but was unable to come up with enough evidence to put anyone on trial. So these were the sort of shenanigans which were taking place before the new Bishop of Dorpat, Dietrich Damerow, even arrived on the scene.

The new Bishop Dietrich eventually did arrive on the scene, after a period of exile, in the year 1387. By this time, Bishop Dietrich had been the Bishop of Dorpat for over seven years, but had never actually traveled to Dorpat to take up his appointment. Why hadn't he done this? Well, because he had failed to recognize the authority of the Master of Livonia, and as a result the Teutonic Order had refused to let him enter Livonia. However, in the year 1385, the all-round Crusader hero and superstar Robin von Eltz was elected as

Master of Livonia, and everyone, and I mean everyone, absolutely loved Robin von Eltz. Even apparently Bishop Dietrich, who decided to submit to the authority of Master Robin von Eltz, and was then allowed to travel to Dorpat, but only after he had signed a humiliating statement in which Bishop Dietrich was forced to declare that he thought the members of the Teutonic Order were all totally awesome and that all the nasty things that Dietrich, the Pope, and their allies had been saying about the Teutonic Order had been all totally false.

Here is an extract from the highly entertaining declaration made by Bishop Dietrich, and I quote: "We wish to state that those pious and religious men, the Master, Castellans, and Brothers of the Order of the Hospital of St Mary of the Germans in Jerusalem, in the land of Livonia, have always been and are of good name, good repute, and respectable, and are distinguished by their many merits, as is evident by their works. We deny knowledge of those perverse disseminators of trouble who have written to our vassals and to our Lord the Supreme Pontiff, in our name and in that of the citizens of Dorpat and our vassals, repeating many shameful and defamatory falsehoods about the Master, Castellans, and Knights, harming and be-sniveling their good name, fame and public record." End quote.

So I guess that, now Bishop Dietrich has signed this declaration, he will travel to Dorpat and quietly settle into his new role, keeping to himself and keeping out of trouble. Well, no, that's not what happened. To be fair, Bishop Dietrich did seem to start off on the right note, but things began to unravel after the death of Master Robin von Eltz in 1388, only three years into his role as Master of Livonia. A new Master, Wennemar von Brüggennai, was then elevated to the role, and one of Master Wennemar's first actions was to upset the fragile peace between the Archbishop of Riga and the Teutonic Order.

The current Archbishop of Riga was a man called Johann, and Archbishop Johann had been keeping his head down and doing his best to stay out of conflict with the Order. Master Wennemar however, decided to move in and occupy the island of Uexkull in the Daugava River. I should point out that the Master was legally entitled to do this. A vassal of the Order had been occupying the island but had been unable to pay his debts, so the Teutonic Order moved in and took over the island. Trouble was, this island was vital to the trade which moved up and down the Daugava River, trade which was the lifeblood of the city of Riga. With the Teutonic Order now occupying the castle on the island, it effectively controlled the flow of river traffic coming up and down the Daugava south of Riga. This act prompted Archbishop Johann to stop keeping his head down, and instead pop his head up and look for ways in which he could deal a few blows to the Order, and of course the new Bishop of Dorpat was more than happy to workshop with the Archbishop to come up with some strategies for this.

What followed was a steadily escalating series of confrontations between the Archbishop of Riga and the Bishop of Dorpat, and the Teutonic Order, which resulted in civil unrest and rioting breaking out on the streets of Riga in the year 1391, causing the Archbishop and his core group of supportive clerics to flee from Riga in fear of their lives. Archbishop Johann ended up seeking shelter in Lubeck, where he remained for a year, sending stinging letters to the Pope complaining of the violent citizens of Riga and the nasty men of the Teutonic Order, until Rome, forced into action, declared that the Livonian Chapter of the Teutonic Order must return the island of Uexkull to the Archbishop.

Master Wennemar responded to this by ordering his men to move into the Archbishopric of Riga and to forcibly occupy all of its castles. The Master then wrote to Pope Boniface IX,

telling him that the Order had occupied the Rigan See because, in the absence of Archbishop Johann, the Order viewed the position of Archbishop to be vacant. The Master then stated that he thought it would be a good idea to appoint someone a little bit more sensible this time, someone who understood that the Teutonic Order was the preeminent power in the region.

Then pretty much the wheels fell off the Livonian wagon, as everyone, from Master Wennemar to Archbishop Johann to Bishop Dietrich, spent every waking hour and all their resources trying to secure their positions, meaning that petitions and hearings began clogging up the Papal courts, and power-players from across Europe had their arms twisted in an attempt by the various parties to gain leverage, with even Vytautas and Jogaila being dragged into the dispute. The fight continued for a couple of years, until Pope Boniface snapped, and in the year 1393 he transferred Archbishop Johann to the Patriarchate of Alexandria, a ceremonial posting far away from the Baltic region, where Johann could no longer wield any effective power.

But wait, Pope Boniface isn't done yet. Revealing that he had by now pretty much exhausted his patience, and held a dim view of Bishop Dietrich and Archbishop Johann and their scheming ways, the Pope appointed Johann von Wallenrode as the new Archbishop of Riga. If you are thinking that the name Wallenrode rings a bell, that's because young Johann von Wallenrode was the nephew of the now-deceased former Grand Master of the Teutonic Order, Konrad von Wallenrode. The members of the Teutonic Order fell over themselves with delight, optimistic that at long last, with a Wallenrode as Archbishop, the pesky clerics of Livonia and Estonia would finally fall into line under the Teutonic Order.

But they had forgotten about Bishop Dietrich. Bishop Dietrich encouraged other clerics in Livonia to take a stand against the Pope's decision, which they did. They nominated their own candidate for the position of Archbishop of Riga, a 14 year old boy called Otto of Pomerania. Then they went knocking on the doors of all the enemies of the Teutonic Order across Europe, to try to see if they could gain enough support to lobby Pope Boniface to reverse his decision. The culmination of this plotting saw young Otto of Pomerania traveled to Dorpat in 1395, and then Dietrich, the Bishop of Dorpat, joined in a military alliance with Vytautas and Duke Albrecht of Mecklenburg-Stargard in support of the deposed Archbishop Johann.

This posed enough of a threat to the Teutonic Order that the current Grand Master, Konrad von Jungingen, invaded the Archbishopric of Dorpat. While he didn't attempt to defeat the region militarily, he did manage to get many of the noble families in Dorpat to become vassals of the Order, by promising them favorable amendments to inheritance laws. Bishop Dietrich feebly tried to counter this, but found himself out of options and out of funds. He became bankrupt soon after, resigned as Bishop of Dorpat in July of the year 1400, and moved to Riga, where he died eight years later.

So if you were wondering why the Livonian chapter of the Teutonic Order wasn't regularly able to spare the time and resources to participate in campaigns in Lithuania and Samogitia, now you know. It was because they had a bunch of headaches at home to deal with. The end result is: Livonia still isn't entirely united under the banner of the Teutonic Order. Their man is now the Archbishop of Riga and they have managed to dispatch Bishop Dietrich, but the country is still far from being united.

And, talk about not being united, we're now all caught up on our timeline. So join me next week as we start our new series on the Lithuanian conflict, by heading to Gotland, of all places. Until next week, bye for now.

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