

## History of the Crusades. Episode 301. The Baltic Crusades. The Lithuanian Conflict Part VI. A Troubled Peace.

Hello again. Last week we saw Grand Master Ulrich von Jungingen make some unexpected moves in response to the latest uprising by the Samogitians. Seemingly in a panic about the fact that the Teutonic Order may be forced to try to quell the uprising with little or no assistance from Poland or Lithuania, Grand Master Ulrich scrambled to scrape up some troops to dispatch to Samogitia. However, following a snub from King Jogaila of Poland, Grand Master Ulrich abruptly switched his attention from Samogitia to Poland, and directed both the mercenaries he had hired and the Order's own fighting men to forget about Samogitia for the moment, and to instead invade Poland.

Now it's difficult to reach back in time more than 600 years and try to analyze the Grand Master's frame of mind at this point in time, but I'm going to give it a shot. In short, the Grand Master seems to have swept himself into a whirlpool, spinning out of control, around and around, while being drawn closer and closer to the thing he most fears. The thing the Grand Master most fears is being unable to keep Samogitia in line. Previous Samogitian uprisings have been defeated only with the assistance of Poland and Lithuania, but with every turn inside his whirlpool, the Grand Master seemingly manages to alienate and anger his former allies, making his darkest fears more likely.

Had the Grand Master been in a rational, logical state of mind, he would have been able to approach the problem objectively and would have realized that he needed to do everything in his power to get Poland and Lithuania on side, so the combined regional forces could bring Samogitia to heel.

Instead of acting objectively though, Grand Master Ulrich has been panicking, and in his panicked state he keeps pursuing policies which irritate and offend the Kingdom of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, reducing the likelihood of them coming to the Order's aid in Samogitia. So basically every shoot-from-the-hip, ill-thought-out move the Grand Master is making is causing his whirlpool to spin faster, and is drawing the Teutonic Order closer and closer towards the one thing it needs to avoid, that one thing being a war pitting the Teutonic Order against the combined strengths of its neighbors Samogitia, Poland, and Lithuania.

To start with though, the Grand Master's odd decision to invade the Kingdom of Poland looked like it may end up working in the Order's favor. As we mentioned in last week's episode, King Jogaila had decided to enjoy a bit of downtime while everything seemed to be quiet, so he had taken himself and a small group of men off into the Polish forests for a spot of hunting, without telling anyone where exactly he was going. As a result, by the time the King had been tracked down and had been given the shocking news that his Kingdom had been invaded, the Teutonic Order had been running rampant inside Poland for ten days. Castles were being besieged, the castle of Dobrin had been destroyed, and border towns were under attack.

King Jogaila did his best to muster a hurried counter-attack, but struggled to make any significant impact on the invading forces. So Jogaila ordered the Archbishop of Gniezno to approach the Grand Master with the offer of opening peace negotiations. The Grand Master was open to this suggestion, as the Samogitian rebels had just succeeded in taking the castle at Friedeburg after a lengthy siege, and the Grand Master wanted to free up his troops to leave Poland and travel to Samogitia to retake the castle.

A truce was eventually negotiated and was signed in October of 1409. One of the terms which Jogaila agreed to as part of the truce was as follows, and I quote "Also, we promise by our royal words that we will not give the Samogitians or any other non-Christians, or their helpers, advice, aid, or money, and also that we will not receive them in any way" end quote. So in effect, the King of Poland, in return for the Teutonic Order leaving Polish shores, has promised not to aid the Samogitians in any way in their conflict with the Teutonic Order.

Now, if you are relaxing back into your chair thinking "Wow, the Grand Master managed to put Poland back into its box in the nick of time", and that the Teutonic Order can now turn its attention to its two remaining foes, Lithuania and Samogitia, well I'm afraid your optimism is misplaced. The Grand Master is actually still inside the whirlpool of his own making, still spinning inexorably towards all-out warfare. Why? Well, because as William Urban points out in his book "The Last Years of the Teutonic Knights", the tool the Grand Master ought to have been putting to good use here was diplomacy. The Teutonic Order should have been reaching out to Poland with both hands, offering it nice concessions in the borderlands, and sweet-talking it around to agreeing to have the Teutonic Order's back in Samogitia. Instead by invading Poland and forcing Jogaila into a corner, the Grand Master has effectively hit Jogaila with a big stick and used aggression to force him to agree to stay out of Samogitia.

Believing Jogaila to be sufficiently intimidated and brought into line, the Teutonic Order is now turning its gaze back to Samogitia. But if you think that Jogaila is the sort of man who can be forced into a course of action by a few hits with a big stick, then you haven't been paying attention. In fact, Jogaila isn't currently whimpering to himself in a corner, swearing to never cross those nasty Teutonic Knights ever again. No, Jogaila is currently calmly and strategically considering his options, and the best of those options is shaping up to look something like teaming up with Lithuania to give the Teutonic Order a battering of its own. As stated by William Urban, and I quote "The Grand Master's aggression was a fatal leap into the unknown, aligning two adversaries whose ability to work together had always been strongest at a distance. But now he had challenged two proud peoples to an unnecessary war, without a plan for achieving victory. In retrospect, one can see that Ulrich should have let sleeping dogs lie, but even when the hot-blooded Grand Master kicked them in the ribs, it was not immediately clear that the suddenly awakened enemies had sharp teeth". End quote.

Now, before we go on to discover whether Poland and Lithuania ended up having sharp teeth, we are going to take a closer look at the peace treaty which the Grand Master and Jogaila signed in October of 1409. Clearly, with the drums of war beginning to sound out in the distance, the strength and authority of the peace treaty of 1409 is going to be worth examining as we move forward. An expertly crafted, watertight peace agreement may well avert war, whereas a dodgy, one-sided agreement, of course, would not.

Now, unfortunately for everyone, the man who was tasked with mediating the conflict between the Teutonic Order and the Kingdom of Poland, and drafting a peace treaty, was King Wenceslas of Bohemia. You might remember Wenceslas, or Wenzel, from Episode 293. Back in Episode 293, Wenceslas was the Holy Roman Emperor and was doing a really bad job of it. He preferred to spend his days partying and having fun in Bohemia, and in the rare moments when he could be persuaded to turn his mind towards administering his Empire, Wenceslas often made decisions on the spur of the moment,

contrary to the recommendations of his advisers, without fully considering their implications. Well, fast-forward to the year 1409, and Wenceslas, although he is still the King of Bohemia, is no longer the Holy Roman Emperor. No, he had been forcibly removed from office ten years earlier for, in the words of William Urban, and I quote "general incompetence and extraordinary alcoholism" end quote.

The King of Bohemia now liked to think of himself as a reformed man, and he was pretty much willing to do anything to increase his prestige and authority, and to try to convince everyone that he was no longer the irresponsible, whiskey-soaked buffoon of ten years ago. So when everyone started looking around for an authoritative figure to attempt to quell the simmering tensions between Poland and the Teutonic Order, King Wenceslas was jumping up and down in Bohemia with his hand held high in the air, shouting "Pick me, pick me!"

And so they did pick him, although probably only because there was really no one else of the necessary authority available at that time. The Papacy was currently in an uproar, and although the Pope in Avignon and the Pope in Rome had both issued wishy-washy statements calling for peace in the region, their attentions were both focused on the fact that a third Pope, Alexander V, had just been elected by the Council of Pisa. Anyone can see that this is just way too many Popes, and none of them seemed to be keen to leave the other two Popes behind to travel to Poland to mediate a regional dispute. The next obvious choice for mediator was the Holy Roman Emperor. Trouble was, the current Emperor, Ruprecht, was in poor health and didn't feel up to taking the lengthy journey to Poland. So that just left Mr Eager-Beaver, King Wenceslas of Bohemia.

Now the Teutonic Order was pretty keen to see Wenceslas appointed as mediator. Wenceslas' younger brother, Sigismund of Hungary, was one of the Order's most loyal supporters, and the Grand Master was hoping that Sigismund's influence could sway the King of Bohemia to their cause. Likewise, Jogaila also wasn't too unhappy to see the King of Bohemia appointed. The Kingdom of Poland currently enjoyed a mutually beneficial military alliance with Bohemia, so Jogaila hoped that Wenceslas would be sympathetic to the Polish position. So, with everyone happy about the new arrangements, representatives from both the Teutonic Order and the Kingdom of Poland travelled to Prague to present King Wenceslas with both oral and written arguments outlining their side of the dispute.

Unfortunately though, while Wenceslas may have been an enthusiastic conciliator, arbiter, and overseer of peace talks to start with, as negotiations continued and the arguments became more complex and convoluted, the Wenceslas of old, the bad Emperor Wenceslas, began making an appearance. As a consequence, Wenceslas began to fail to show up at meetings, and began staring off into the distance when he did manage to drag himself to the negotiating table, wondering when all this boring peace-making stuff was going to end so he could get back to the serious business of having fun being the King of Bohemia.

So in what was undoubtedly the best move for everyone involved, the two sides eventually decided to meet for five days alone, and without the guidance of their regal overseer they managed to reach an agreement. They left Prague in October of 1409 with a temporary truce, which was set to operate until mid 1410. However, one clause of the agreement stipulated that Wenceslas had the authority to propose terms for a permanent peace settlement. As William Urban points out, the fact that the temporary truce flagged Wenceslas as the man who could formulate a permanent truce, and I quote "practically

guaranteed that both sides would flatter the King and offer him bribes" end quote. And that's exactly what happened.

The Teutonic Order was by far the most generous in this regard. William Urban reports that Grand Master Ulrich von Jungingen sent King Wenceslas the sum of 60,000 Gulden, while also sending him a detailed written outline of the Order's grievances against Poland, along with a brief history of the Samogitian Crusade. The Order also thought it prudent to point out to the King that the Lithuanians were pagan sympathizers whose word couldn't be relied upon, and that many Lithuanian Christians were of the Russian Orthodox faith. To seal the case for the Teutonic Order, Grand Master Ulrich dispatched a delegation to the Kingdom of Hungary, where his close ally, Wenceslas' younger brother Sigismund, ruled, and in return for a promise by the Order to pay Sigismund a large sum of money towards the purchase of Neumark in the Prussian borderlands, the Order was given an assurance that King Wenceslas last would come down in the Order's favor.

And that's exactly what happened. On the eighth of February 1410, King Wenceslas of Bohemia handed down his final determination on the matter. In a nutshell, he pretty much decreed that everything should return to the state of play before the Teutonic Order invaded Poland, so in effect the Teutonic Order was not punished for invading Poland. All the complaints by Poland and Lithuania against the Order were discarded, and all the territory in the contested borderlands was deemed to rightfully belong to the Teutonic Order. Oh, and Poland and Lithuania were directed to keep themselves well out of Samogitian affairs.

So Grand Master Ulrich von Jungingen collapsed back into his chair with relief, thankful that his whirlpool had finally stopped spinning, that the war against Lithuania and Poland had been averted, and that he could now focus all his attention on restraining the Samogitians.

Polish delegates spent the next month in Prague, trying in vain to get Wenceslas to change his position. In the end, King Wenceslas ran out of patience with them, and declared that if Poland didn't like the terms of the new peace agreement, then the Kingdom of Bohemia itself would declare war on Poland, regardless of what the Teutonic Order decided to do. The Polish delegates then angrily stormed back to Poland.

Now I guess it's not going to come as a surprise to anyone if I tell you that actually, Grand Master Ulrich's whirlpool of doom is still spinning, and the one-sided, ill-conceived peace treaty imposed by King Wenceslas isn't going to be worth the paper it's written on. Ominously, back in Poland, Jogaila is gathering his armies.

Join me next week as we commence a series of episodes on the one, the only, the epic Battle of Tannenberg. Until next week, Bye for now.

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