

History of the Crusades. Episode 321. The Baltic Crusades. The Lithuanian Conflict Part XXVI. The End.

Hello again. Last week we saw the Teutonic Order stumble into a thirteen year long war with the Prussian League, a conflict which was settled by the Second Peace of Thorn, a treaty negotiated between King Casimir IV of Poland and the Teutonic Order in the year 1466.

Under the terms of the Treaty, the Order ceded a bunch of territory in Western Prussia to the Kingdom of Poland. Effectively, Prussia was now divided down the middle, with the western half under the effective control of Poland, while the eastern half remained under the control of the Teutonic Order. The Grand Master of the Order, however, was required by the Treaty to swear a personal oath of loyalty to the King of Poland, so despite the fact that Eastern Prussia was, on paper at least, independent from Poland with the Grand Master administering it from his new base at Konigsberg, in reality Poland still loomed large in eastern Prussian affairs.

So what does this mean for the Baltic Crusades? Well, after the Second Peace of Thorn it was generally agreed that the Baltic Crusades were now over. But the Teutonic Order was quick to point out that it still needed to exist in order to confront two looming threats to Eastern European Latin Christianity, those threats being: the Ottoman Turks; and the Orthodox Christians of the Russian Principalities.

Now, as Eric Christiansen notes in his book "The Northern Crusades", with the benefit of hindsight, there were two courses of action which the Teutonic Order could have taken to resurrect and reform itself following its subjugation to Poland. The first possible reform was one that had already been flagged by Emperor Sigismund back in Episode 317 at the Great Conference of 1427. This reform entailed shifting the Teutonic Order out of Prussia and basing it closer to the action as regards the advance of the Ottoman Turks. While Poland had been against the idea when it had been considered at the Great Conference, the Kingdom of Poland actively advocated for this move following the Second Peace of Thorn. However, in order for such a fundamental reform to pass, it needed the agreement not only of the Grand Master of the Order, but also of the Masters of the German and Livonian Chapters of the Order. Unfortunately, the Masters of the German and Livonian Chapters of the Order, in the years following 1466, could barely be made to cooperate on even minor matters, and the likelihood that they would come together, to launch the Teutonic Order in a totally new direction with a new platform in a region far from Germany, was never realistically going to happen.

That left the second and final possible reform proposal, which was even more radical than the first. This reform would, in effect, see the Teutonic Order secularize itself. Its members would loosen their ties with the monastic origins of their Order and would be allowed to marry. They would then operate within Prussia as members of a secular ruling class. Again, this may have been a valid way forward, but it was just way too drastic a move for the leadership team of the Order to contemplate at this point in time.

So the Order limped on, with its reputation in shreds, attracting only the dregs of the noble classes to its ranks, while operating firmly under the thumb of the King of Poland, until the year 1511.

Now, in the year 1511 Europe was on the cusp of the Reformation. Martin Luther would actually launch his famous protest against the Catholic Church six years after this date, in 1517. General disquiet about some of the practices within the Church, including the selling of indulgences, which you may remember had also enraged Jan Hus, was growing, as was the rise of secularism in general. Into this strode Albrecht of Hohenzollern-Ansbach, a man with excellent connections and an idea to reform the Order and take it in a new direction.

In fact, to say that Albrecht was well connected is an understatement. He was not only on speaking terms with many of the men in the halls of power in Rome and within the Holy Roman Empire, he was related to the current King of Poland and the King of Bohemia and Hungary. So if anyone was in a position to drive the Order through change and through turbulent times, it was Albrecht. Behind the scenes lobbying for Albrecht and his plans had already cleared his path to power, so in the year 1511 Albrecht applied to become a member of the Teutonic Order. His application was accepted and he was elected to the vacant position of Grand Master later that same day.

Grand Master Albrecht's long-term plan for the Order was to move it away from Poland, towards the Holy Roman Empire, and to shake off its medieval monastic image, giving it a more secular appeal. He started off with a bang, by taking his vows then, after carefully ensuring he had the full support of the current Holy Roman Emperor, he refused to pledge homage to the King of Poland, as was required under the terms of the Second Peace of Thorn. This, not surprisingly, did not go down well in Poland, so Poland made preparations to go to war against Prussia. Things were starting to get a bit too real for the Holy Roman Emperor, who slowly backed out of his alliance with the Grand Master, and the Livonian Chapter of the Order also refused to have anything to do with what it believed to be a possibly disastrous looming conflict with Poland.

Unfortunately for Grand Master Albrecht, the conflict did end up being disastrous. The Royal Polish armies enjoyed victory after victory against the Order, and the Grand Master was forced into an embarrassing back-down, eventually pledging loyalty to the King of Poland, following a truce brokered by the Emperor in 1522.

By the year 1522 though, the Reformation had exploded across Europe, and calls for reform across all Church bodies, including the military Orders, was causing restlessness and insubordination inside the Order's ranks. As a result, the Grand Master found himself facing serious internal and external calls for reform.

So with the Order threatening to tear itself apart, with some leaders favoring secularization and others wishing to preserve the Order's traditional religious foundations, Grand Master Albrecht made a bold decision. He met with Martin Luther at Wittenberg in 1522, then decided on his course of action. It was time, stated Grand Master Albrecht, for the Teutonic Order to modernize, and bring itself into line with current times. Therefore, he ordered all the Knights of the order to renounce their vows of chastity, meaning they were now free to marry. With the assistance of the current King of Poland, Grand Master Albrecht would now become Duke Albrecht and would rule over his territory in Prussia, not as the head of a military Order but as a secular Duke.

As Eric Christiansen states in his book "The Northern Crusades", by this stage, Albrecht had let many of the leadership roles inside the Order lapse, and the few vacancies that he did fill were taken up by men who would follow the Albrecht line. So if any of the Knights in

the Order objected to the Grand Master's plan, there was little they could do about it. The end of the Teutonic Order is described by Eric Christiansen as follows, and I quote "Albert had allowed all the great offices to fall vacant and had run down the total strength of the Knight Brothers in Prussia to 55. He summoned only a minority of these to Königsberg in May 1525 to approve his decision. Most of them were intimidated by the hostility of the burghers and egged on by Albert's entourage. Only seven stood by their vows. After a few days' hesitation, even these gave their consent and cut the crosses from their habits for fear of being lynched." End quote. So, the final bell has tolled for the Teutonic Order in Prussia.

However, the Order overall wasn't finished quite yet. In his book "The Teutonic Knights", William Urban points out that following the Second Peace of Thorn, the three administrative centres of the Teutonic Order (Prussia, Livonia, and Germany) had gradually drifted apart, until by the year 1473 they could accurately be described as being three separate and autonomous regions which were, in the words of William Urban, and I quote "connected only by a common heritage and occasional common interest" end quote. One result of this separation was that when the Prussian Chapter of the Order essentially ceased to exist, the Livonian and German Chapters were able to continue on by themselves.

The focus of the Livonian Chapter of the Order was on its Orthodox neighbors in the Russian Principalities. The Teutonic Order in Livonia shared power with a body called the Livonian Confederation. Essentially, the Livonian Confederation, much like the Prussian League, was a body of secular citizens who administered the region, while the Livonian Chapter of the Teutonic Order took charge of Livonia's foreign policy and its military campaigns.

The peak of the Livonian Chapter's success in this regard was its successful campaign against the Grand Duke of Moscow, Ivan III, at the beginning of the 1500's, under the leadership of the Livonian Master Wolter von Plettenberg. William Urban describes Master Wolter's victories against Moscow as heralding the start of five decades of peace in Livonia, but the peace was only in the form of a respite from external threats.

Internally, the Teutonic Order in Livonia was facing some serious challenges. The most pressing of these was the rise of Protestantism, as a result of the Reformation. Protestantism was sweeping across the Baltic region. Some factions within the Livonian Chapter of the Order began advocating for the Order to meet the challenges of the time by following the example of the Prussian Chapter of the Order and effectively turning themselves into secular landowners. Others suggested that the Livonian Order should turn into a Protestant body. However the traditionalists prevailed, and the Livonian Order remained a Catholic military organization within a sea of Protestant secularism.

Unfortunately for the Livonian Order, a serious external threat emerged in the 1550's in the form of the current Grand Duke of Moscow, Ivan IV, who later became known as Ivan the Terrible. While Ivan hadn't yet descended into the mentally unhinged perpetrator of atrocities which will earn him his nickname, he did take a look at neighboring Livonia, with the withering and divided bunch of old-school Teutonic Knights providing its military might, and he thought "Well, let's see whether Moscow can't push into Livonia and expand its territory a little."

This, as you might have guessed, was terrible news for the Livonian Order. While fifty years earlier Master Wolter had dealt the Duchy of Moscow a hiding in their last military encounter, times had changed for the Order, and not for the better. The Order's insistence on remaining a Catholic traditionalist military Order had adversely affected both its attempts to recruit new members and its ability to raise money to finance its military campaigns. As a result, the Order which faced Ivan the Terrible was a much weaker opponent than it had been fifty years earlier.

And it showed on the battlefield. The armies of Ivan IV invaded Livonia and seemed unstoppable in the field, marching unchecked through Dorpat all the way to the key trading center of Narva in Estonia. Narva fell to the Russians, who then turned their attentions to Dorpat, which surrendered in 1558. The now desperate Livonian Order sidelined its Master and began to increasingly rely on a reformer and Protestant sympathizer within the Order, a man called Gotthard Kettler, the castellan of Fellin.

Gotthard Kettler brought a new energy to the Order's men in the field, but it was increasingly clear to everyone that the Livonian Order was just not up to the task of being Livonia's military muscle. Just to prove this point, the armies of Moscow renewed their advance at the beginning of 1559, moving out from Dorpat through central Livonia to Riga, then advancing into Semigallia and Kurland.

Things were now looking pretty serious, so Denmark, Sweden, Lithuania, and Poland all started making noises and moving to mobilize their armies to come to Livonia's aid. Which in turn prompted Ivan to offer a truce in March of 1559. Six months later, the Master of Livonia was forced from office and Gotthard Kettler strode into the position.

Master Gotthard was prevented from enacting his religious agenda inside the Order by the resumption of the war with Moscow. The final blow for the Livonian Order came with its defeat at the Battle of Ermes in August of 1560, when the cream of the Order's fighting men were wiped out by the Russians after having been surrounded in the field by the much larger Russian army.

This ended up being a fatal blow. The Order could now no longer carry out its duties as the military arm of Livonia. It managed to limp on for another year, confining its operations to Kurland. In the year 1561 Master Gotthard sent a representative to meet with ex-Grand Master Albrecht, now Duke Albrecht of Prussia. The outcome of the negotiations which followed was that the Livonian Order was secularized, with Master Gotthard becoming Duke Gotthard of Kurland. Effectively, the Livonian Order had ended, along similar lines as that previously followed by the Prussian Order.

So now the spotlight turns to the German Chapter of the Order. Following the demise of the Prussian and Livonian Chapters, the Master of the Order in Germany assumed the title of Grand Master, and the Order continued to exist in a reduced form, as a bunch of Catholic and occasionally Protestant fighters in service to the needs of the Holy Roman Empire.

In fact, the Teutonic Order has continually popped up, then disappeared again, over the centuries. It was officially abolished by Napoleon, but was revived again as a private Order for the Hapsburg family until the year 1923. According to William Urban, in his book "The Last Years of the Teutonic Knights", it was reconstituted as a preaching Order in 1929, before being dissolved and banned by Adolf Hitler in 1938. However, it was re-established

after World War Two. As William Urban states, and I quote "Today, the Teutonic Order provides priests for German speaking Catholic communities in non-German speaking countries, particularly in Italy and Slovenia. In this, it has returned to another major aspect of its original mission, the spiritual care of Germans who are being neglected by other Orders." End quote.

So the Teutonic Order has come full circle, and so have we. Here ends our rather lengthy examination of the Baltic Crusades.

Just before we close off on the Baltic Crusades, I'd like to do a shout-out and thanks to William Urban, whose extensive works, you may have noticed, I have relied heavily upon. Had he not been kind enough to sell me copies of some of his more obscure texts at a discounted rate, this series would have been much the poorer, so a huge "thank you" to William Urban, or Bill, as he likes to be called.

Now, as I have mentioned previously, I will now be taking an extended break, and will be back at sometime in the year 2020 with an entirely new series on an entirely new feed, covering the rise of Andalusia and the Spanish Reconquista. Once the new series is ready to launch, I will post a short notice on this feed explaining how you can access it.

Of course, if a lengthy delay is something you don't like the sound of, you can always sign up to become a patron of the podcast, at [patreon.com](https://patreon.com). The Patreon episodes will still be released once a fortnight during the extended break, and if you sign up and pledge \$1 per month you can also access the back catalogue of nearly 80 episodes, so that should tide you over for a while.

I would like to extend a huge thanks to all my Patreon supporters. Your support has meant that I can keep churning out these free episodes, without ads, into your ears, so I can't thank you enough.

OK, at the end of every series, the credits start to roll, so here they are. The credits:

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Well, that's it, folks. Picture a mental image of me standing to attention, thumping my heart a couple of times with my fist, then blowing you all a kiss and extending my fingers in a peace sign, because that's what I'm doing. Have a great holiday season, and I hope the year 2020 treats you well. See you in the next series, and bye for now.

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