

Episode 257.

The Baltic Crusades. The Livonian Crusade Part 40. Civil War.

Hello again. Last week, we saw Semogalia submit to Latin Christian rule, leaving Samogitia as the only pagan region blocking the formation of a land corridor between Prussia and Livonia. However, in a shock development, we also saw relations between the citizens of Riga and the Livonian Chapter of the Teutonic Order deteriorate to dangerous levels. By the end of last week's episode, the citizens of Riga had decided to protect their interests by forming an alliance with the pagans Lithuanians, and Rome had intervened, brokering a truce between the warring parties.

Now, effectively this episode is the moment in which the curtain rises on the second half of the Baltic Crusades. The Baltic Crusades to date have been largely based on offensive campaigns, with the Teutonic Order and visiting crusaders concentrating on attacking and subduing pagans in the region. Now, however, the nature of the crusade changes, from being largely offensive to largely defensive, aimed at protecting the Latin Christian states which have been established, from enemies without and within. Since this marks a turning point in proceedings, let's just catch our breath a minute, and take a look at the current state of play in Livonia.

Now, the political situation in Livonia and Estonia at this time is rather complex. The main ecclesiastical centers of power in the region reside in the Archbishop of Riga in Livonia and the Bishop of Dorpat and the bishop of Oesel-Wiek in Estonia, all of which, in theory at least, are separate from and operate independently of the Teutonic Order. The Latin Christians in Estonia are subjects of the Danish Crown, although in reality Estonia is largely self governing. The largest cities in Livonia and Estonia, the cities of Riga, Reval and Dorpat, Riga being in Livonia and Reval and Dorpat being in Estonia, are mostly independent and are allied with the newly developing Hanseatic League.

Just to make things more confusing, the bishop of Kurland was not independent, and instead was answerable to the Teutonic Order, and the bishop of Reval was also not independent, but he was answerable to the King of Denmark. Add into this mix the feudal obligations of the citizens of Livonia and Estonia and the residual tribal obligations of the natives who resided there, and the situation is really quite complex, with lots of competing interests and obligations. So perhaps it's not that surprising that conflict erupted between the merchants and citizens of Riga and the Teutonic-Order at the close of the thirteenth century.

Now, just quickly before we get back to the civil war, this episode also starts us off on a new textbook. We have now finished with William Urban's book, "The Baltic Crusade", and have switched to its sequel, a book entitled "The Livonian Crusade". Now, In this book, there is a really nice dedication, which I'd like to read out to you. Most authors dedicate their books to family members or people who have assisted them along the way, but William Urban's dedication in his book "The Livonian Crusade" is a little different. I'll read it out to you. It states, and I quote, "Dedicated to the hope that the lessons of history will be remembered, while ancient hatreds are forgotten; that we may learn better ways to preserve the peace, extend justice and bring knowledge and hope to this less than perfect world, without becoming more evil or doing more harm than the men and ideas we seek to combat." End quote. Really, I couldn't have put it better myself. And if the "History of the

Crusades” podcast was to have a dedication or an overall aim, it would be something along those lines. So, well said William Urban. Okay, back into the fray.

Now, we saw in last week's episode that the conflict between the Teutonic Order in Livonia and the merchants of Riga, which had been brewing for some time, descended into actual physical fighting, with merchants killing Teutonic knights and Teutonic knights killing Latin Christian citizens in Livonia's capital city. To top it all off the Master of the Teutonic Order in Livonia, Master Bruno, had led his forces to one of the castles under the control of the Archbishop of Riga, the castle at Treiden, and had besieged it. The Archbishop, who had been sheltering inside the castle, was forced to surrender and was taken prisoner by the Order. In the end, he was imprisoned for thirty three days on a diet of bread and water, and the Teutonic Order took full advantage of his weakened and imprisoned state by confiscating money and assets belonging to the church, and forcing the Archbishop's vassals to retract their oaths of loyalty to the Archbishop, and instead swear fealty to the Teutonic Order. Those who failed to do so had their land and property confiscated.

Now, as we stated in last week's episode, news of this abysmal state of affairs eventually made its way to Rome into the ears of Pope Boniface VIII, and Pope Boniface VIII was not happy. Now we all remember our old friend Pope Boniface VIII from his appearance in the Crusade against the Cathars. Yes, this is that Pope Boniface, the same Pope Boniface who held the notion that he as leader of the church towered way above all other rulers, and that the Kings of Europe ought to submit to Papal authority and direction. This led to an epic clash between Pope Boniface and King Philip IV of France, otherwise known as Philip the Fair, which eventually resulted in Pope Boniface being squashed like a bug under the foot of the mighty crown of France. But we are getting ahead of ourselves, as at this point in time Pope Boniface hasn't yet been squashed like a bug, and he is most put out by the goings on in the Baltic region.

He has ordered the Master of the Teutonic Order in Livonia, as well as the Grand Master of the Teutonic Order and three castellans in Livonia to travel to Rome within the next six months to explain their conduct, while the Archbishop of Riga and the Bishop of Dorpat have also been ordered to attend, to present their side of the argument. Now it was pretty clear to everyone that the Teutonic Knights had behaved really quite badly during the conflict, and that killing Latin Christians and imprisoning and starving the Archbishop of Riga really amounted to quite a significant overreach. So basically, it was in the interests of the Teutonic Order to delay this meeting for as long as possible.

The Teutonic Order had a man in Rome, a mission from the order who was permanently stationed there, and he was able to report on the current state of affairs inside the papacy. The current state of affairs was that Pope Boniface was a very busy man. We are currently in the year 1299, and Pope Boniface is just beginning to build his power base. He is becoming actively interested in the internal politics of key states in Europe, and in three years time will issue his famous, or perhaps infamous, Papal Bull “Unam sanctum”, which will state that every human is to be rightly subject to papal authority. Even kings.

So, does Pope Boniface have the time and interest at this moment to adjudicate over a spat in the tiny, non-powerful Baltic state of Livonia? Not really. And will he notice if the Teutonic Order keeps coming up with excuses as to why they can't spare the time to travel to Rome again? Not really. And, all credit due to the Teutonic Order, they did have a pretty good reason why they couldn't send their leadership team away from the region to make the lengthy journey to Rome. That pretty good reason being: war with Lithuania.

Now, we mentioned in last week's episode that, in desperation, the citizens of Riga had turned to Lithuania for assistance in their clash with the Teutonic Order. To say that the alliance between the pagan Lithuanians and the merchants of Riga was a strange and unlikely one is an understatement. The Lithuanians were still defiantly pagan at this stage, and had absolutely no intention of converting to Christianity. This was a very inconvenient fact for the citizens of Riga, so it appears that the Lithuanian leaders were convinced to make a sort of a public declaration that they were willing to consider conversion. This worked for both the Lithuanians and the Rigans on a number of levels.

It meant that the Rigans could ally themselves with the Lithuanians without totally blowing their case for papal support, and it also worked to undermine the Teutonic Order's position of being on the side of the defenders of the faith. It also placed a question mark over the need for future crusades to the Baltic region. However, in his book "The Livonian Crusade", William Urban points out that the Lithuanian promise of conversion was, in fact, a sham and was just a useful political card that was played due to the advantages it presented to both the Rigans and the Lithuanians.

The Teutonic Order responded to news of this alliance by calling out the fake promise of conversion for what it was, and the Order labeled the citizens of Riga and the men of the Church who had allied themselves to the Lithuanians, as traitors to the Christian cause. The citizens of Riga then fired back, stating that the reason the Lithuanians didn't wish to convert was because the awful role models offered by the Teutonic Knights and crusaders made them reject Christianity and all it stood for.

With verbal salvos having been fired by both sides, it was now time for actual salvos to be fired. In the year 1298 the Lithuanians invaded Livonia on behalf of their new allies, the Christians of Riga. They captured a small Teutonic castle and executed its garrison. Then, after a week of action, the Lithuanians turned around and headed back home. However, they were intercepted by the Knights of the Teutonic Order led by Master Bruno. It seems that in the first wave of attacks, the Master and the small army he led emerged as victors, with over eight hundred Lithuanians slain by the order. However, the loss of so many men seems to have spurred the remainder of the Lithuanian army into a frenzy of rage. They counter attacked the Order's army in a ferocious fashion, and by the end of the day's battle, Master Bruno lay dead on the battlefield, along with 22 Teutonic knights and 1500 Latin Christian fighting men.

This, of course, was a massive setback for the Teutonic Order, and had them scrambling to secure their positions in Livonia. It also made the power-brokers and political players in central Europe sit up and take notice of the citizens of Riga as a genuine contender for seizing power in Livonia. As such, the King of Denmark made a bold move by forming an alliance with the Rigans. Actually though, the move wasn't as bold as it might sound.

The agreement struck between the Rigans and the Kingdom of Denmark was quite one sided, on the side of Denmark. The Danish Crown was promised the entire region of Semigallia in return for their assistance. What was the assistance that Denmark was required to provide? Well, they weren't required to send men, weapons, or money to Riga, or to support the Rigans in battle. Nope, all they had to do to secure themselves the region of Semigallia was to ensure that their vassals in Estonia remained neutral in the conflict, and didn't come to the assistance of the Teutonic Order.

Now, the Teutonic Order in Livonia at this point in time was in all sorts of bother. Not only were they at war with the citizens of Riga and the Lithuanians, the Samogitians had decided to take advantage of the Order's recent setback by raiding into Kurland, and the Russians decided to join the action as well. As William Urban points out, it's not at all surprising that the Russians chose to join the fight, as the current ruler of Pskov was actually a Lithuanian. And, all this was happening while the Order in Livonia was Master-less.

Gottfried Rogge was raised to the position of Master of Livonia, which was unfortunate in a way, because the Grand Master of the Order at this time is also, confusingly, named Gottfried. Anyway, Grand Master Gottfried decided to come to the assistance of Master Gottfried, and immediately ordered a contingent of Knights from Prussia, along with an army of fighting men, to travel to Livonia to assist in Master Gottfried's battles against the pesky Lithuanians, the pesky citizens of Riga, the pesky Samogitians, and the pesky Russians. The Prussian army ended up confronting the Lithuanian and Rigan forces at a place called New Mill, which was located on the eastern end of a lake to the north of Riga.

Now, mills were vitally important to the Livonian economy, and the buildings themselves were often fortified to protect them from being attacked. The Rigans and Lithuanians had seized this particular mill, and the Prussians gathered themselves into battle formation, and attacked the building and its occupants. By all reports, the Rigans and Lithuanians fought valiantly, but they were overpowered by the heavy cavalry of the Prussian Teutonic Knights, and ended up abandoning the mill, fleeing from the scene of the battle, leaving their weapons, siege, equipment, and even boats behind in their haste to escape.

Now that he had the upper hand Master Gottfried wasted no time in formalizing a truce between the Rigans and the Teutonic Order, partly because he needed a break in the fighting to deal with the other hostile forces facing Livonia, but mostly because it meant he could wave the truce at Pope Boniface, and pretend that the dispute between the Rigans and the order was resolving itself, and that there was therefore no longer any need for the leadership team from the Teutonic Order to travel to Rome to explain themselves. Further to this end, Master Gottfried freed the Archbishop of Riga from captivity and returned all the church property which the order had confiscated from him, except for his castles.

The first thing the Archbishop did as soon as he was released was to race off to Rome, so he could tell Pope Boniface in person all about the horrible men from the Teutonic Order and their wicked, wicked ways. Luckily for the Teutonic Order, the Pope was far too busy, placing his fingers in the much bigger pies of France and the Italian states, to concern himself directly with the conflict in the Baltic region. So he delegated his authority to a committee of cardinals who were ordered to convene hearings to receive arguments from both sides of the conflict, then make a recommendation to the Pope.

The committee commenced its hearings, with both the Archbishop of Riga and Grand Master Gottfried presenting statements and supporting evidence to the court. In the end, the committee and Pope Boniface ended up deciding to maintain the status quo in Livonia. William Urban points out in his book "The Livonian Crusade" that Pope Boniface was likely mindful of the fact that if he found in favor of the Archbishop and the citizens of Riga, it may result in the eventual destruction of the Livonian Chapter of Teutonic Order, leaving Livonia itself at risk of being overrun by pagans. So the pope decreed that all the disputed territory and castles in Livonia must, for the time being at least, remain in the hands of the Teutonic Order. The Archbishop of Riga, hoping to convince the pope to change his mind

remained in Rome until the year 1300, when he found himself booted out of his lodgings due to the unprecedented demand for accommodation in the city, caused by Pope Boniface's jubilee. He returned to his home in Schwerin, where he later died.

So the first round of the civil war in Livonia goes to the Teutonic Order. But the conflict hasn't ended yet. Join me next week as Pope Boniface, jubilant from his successful Jubilee, attempts to intervene to resolve the dispute. Until next week, bye for now.

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