

Episode 265

The Baltic Crusades. The Livonian Crusade Part 44. The Civil War rolls on.

Hello again. Last time we saw the crusade on the Prussian side of the equation switch from a focus on Lithuania to a focus on Samogitia following the death of the possibly overconfident Heinrich von Plotzke in an ambush deep in the heart of Lithuania. A large crusading army ended up campaigning in Samogitia, a campaign which was so successful that it managed to destroy just about all the Samogitian settlements and strongholds along the lower reaches of the Nemunas River and in the central regions of Samogitia. The crusaders intended to follow up on their successes the next winter, but the weather was unusually cold, prompting Master Friedrich of Prussia to call off the expedition.

The Samogitians took full advantage of this. Realizing that the cold-averse Latin Christians were staying in front of their firesides in Prussia, the Samogitians struck at a number of isolated Latin Christian strongholds and settlements across Kurland, Samland and Semogalia, defeating the city of Memel and causing upwards of 20,000 Latin Christian deaths. We left the region reeling from the Samogitian onslaught in the year 1323. Now we will return to Livonia to advance the timeline a little further there.

Now, you might remember back in Episode 263 that, in a shock move, the Teutonic Order managed to block what seemed to have been a foregone legal determination against them, by delaying, bribing and generally creating legal confusion and bewilderment in the halls of Avignon. In the end Pope Clement attempted to put an end to the dispute by declaring that the warring parties were both to sign a truce, an event that duly took place in the year 1313. This effectively restored the status quo and, feeling back in control of the situation, Master Gerhard of the Livonian chapter of the Teutonic Order immediately set to work, rebuilding the fortifications at Dunamunde. A shocked Archbishop Friedrich then set sail for Avignon, and attempted repeatedly, without success, to convince the Pope to send the Livonian chapter of the Teutonic Order down the same dark path as that walked previously by the Templars.

The Papacy at this stage was in a bit of a bind. Sympathetic to Archbishop Friedrich's position, it allowed the investigation against the Teutonic Order's actions in Livonia to continue, but the issue limped on with frequent adjournments, delays and postponements. The simple fact was that the Papacy realized that it couldn't really afford to alienate the Order. Livonia was an isolated, troubled Latin Christian outpost and militarily the Pope knew that he needed as many Latin Christian feet on the ground as possible to stop Livonia slipping out of Latin Christian hands. In his book "The Livonian Crusade" William Urban states that Archbishop Friedrich's tireless and unrelenting efforts to bump the matter up the papal to-do list and to push the investigations to a conclusion indicates that the Archbishop himself was unaware of the political and military realities which stood in his way, or if he did understand the impediments before him, he was confident that if he just persisted enough, they could be overcome. So, year after year, Archbishop Friedrich lobbied the Papacy for a judgment against the Teutonic Knights, and year after year the Papacy allowed the investigations to limp slowly along without allowing them to come to a conclusion.

Back in Livonia the truce which had been signed in the year 1313 lasted for two years. In the interim, in the year 1314, Pope Clement died. A new pope, John XXII, was elected in

1316, but he immediately found himself bogged down by disputes in Italy and in the Holy Roman Empire, so the Livonian matter dropped further and further down his to-do list.

In the year 1315 the Baltic region was hit by a terrible famine. Crops failed resulting in skyrocketing prices, and the deaths of large numbers of livestock who could no longer be fed with stores set by for the winter months. Grain had to be imported from the Holy Roman Empire at massively inflated prices, which the common people couldn't afford, so desperate citizens turned to piracy and even cannibalism in an attempt to survive. Master Gerhard of the Teutonic Order in Livonia failed to take pity on the starving citizens of Riga. Instead he decided to kick them while they were down, by using the Order's fortifications at Dunamunde to prevent ships carrying grain from preventing up the Daugava River to the city.

In the year 1316 the Rigans decided to matters into their own hands. They gathered an army and attacked Dunamunde. They stormed the Order's fortifications, destroyed just about everything except for the keep, then marched back to Riga. Without the means to enforce the blockade the Order was forced to stand by and watch while merchant ships once again were able to freely sail up river to Riga.

Now, by this time in our narrative, Gediminas had taken over leadership of Lithuania, and as we've mentioned in Episode 264 at the beginning of his rule he established ties with a number of Russian principalities, assisting them to push back against the dominance of the Mongol rulers. Gediminas used his new Russian allies to assist him in renewing Lithuanian influence in Livonia. At the request of the Rigans, Gediminas led a number of raids into Livonia and encouraged fighters from Polotsk to do the same, attacking Teutonic targets and possessions there and racing back across the border before the Teutonic knights could mount a counter offensive.

Unable to effectively block the raiding Lithuanians and their Russian allies, Master Gerhard instead moved to take full advantage of Archbishop Friedrich's prolonged absence. He forced vassals of the Archbishopric to sign an alliance against the people against he termed as "outsiders", and did his best to divert money generated within the Archbishopric into the coffers of the Teutonic Order. Feeling isolated and unsupported by their Archbishop, and feeling also that they couldn't rely on Papal support at this point in time, many of the Archbishop's vassals reluctantly acquiesced to the Order's demands. However, eventually this move would backfire on the Order as it would be brought to the Pope's attention as another dark deed perpetrated by the Order.

In fact, in the year 1318 Pope John declared the alliance which the Archbishop's vassals had signed to be null and void, and he summoned Master Gerhard and the castellans of Dunamunde, Fellin and Wenden to Avignon to explain themselves. The Teutonic Order seemed to have a knack for legal argument - a skill which seems to have eluded Archbishop Friedrich completely - because the men all duly appeared before Pope John in May 1319 and Pope John brought down a ruling in the Order's favor. The Order was allowed to retain possession of Dunamunde and the rest of the dispute was left in a holding pattern. Pope John then attempted to wipe his hands of the whole matter by declaring that any future disputes were not to be taken to Avignon but were to be heard by the Archbishop of Salzburg. A deeply satisfied Master Gerhard traveled back to Livonia and poor Archbishop Friedrich was left blinking slowly in Avignon, wondering what had just happened.

Archbishop Friedrich soon pulled himself together though and re-found his no doubt clearly misplaced optimism. He decided to remain in Avignon, confident that, if he was just persistent enough he could convince Pope John to place the dispute in Livonia back on his to-do list, and to give those nasty men from the Teutonic Order the legal hiding that they deserved.

So the civil war continued in an on again off again manner in Livonia, without Archbishop Friedrich, who remained ever hopeful in Avignon.

In the year 1322 Master Gerhard decided to encourage the Livonian chapter of the Teutonic Order to elect a Vice-Master. Master Gerhard was by this stage pretty elderly and likely wanted to have a reliable Vice-Master whom he could coach and mentor, and who would then have the requisite skills to step into the role of Master when Master Gerhard either retired or passed away. A strange new rule had been created by the Teutonic Order which stipulated that two names needed to be sent to the Grand Master: the man the chapter had elected, and a runner up, and then it would be up to the Grand Master to select one of the men. The Livonian chapter duly sent two names to Grand Master Karl von Trier: Johann von Ungnader, the man who had been selected, and the runner-up, Johann von Hoenhorst.

Now Grand Master Karl was having a rather difficult time at this time in our narrative. You might remember that back in the year 1317 Grand Master Karl had been asked to resign, and had tendered his resignation and then stomped off to the Holy Roman Empire, only to have the Prussian chapter of the Order rescind his resignation following an outcry from members of the Teutonic Order in the Holy Roman Empire. At this stage he is still in the Holy Roman Empire. He hasn't returned to the headquarters in Prussia and he still seems to be a bit cranky about the whole saga. So what did cranky Grand Master Karl do when presented with two names for the position of Vice-Master in Livonia? Well he chose the runner-up.

This decision caused an outcry amongst the Order's members in Livonia, and at a meeting held in Dunamunde they took the bold step of rejecting the Grand Master's decision, and instead installed their pick, Johann Ungnader, as Vice-Master. When word of this got back to cranky Grand Master Karl, he demanded that Grand Master Gerhard resign, and then he selected a total outsider, a man from the Prussian chapter of the Order called Konrad Kesselhut to be Vice-Master. The Livonian chapter of the Order was unhappy with this turn of events and declared that Master Gerhard would not be resigning and that if the Grand Master sent a Prussian man to be Vice-Master, that individual would not be welcome in Livonia.

To attempt to resolve the issue Grand Master Karl then sent two delegations to Livonia. One was instructed to travel to Riga to meet with the merchants and citizens and to try to convince them to end their alliance with the pagan Lithuanians. And the other was sent to Dunamunde to try and resolve the dispute about the appointment of the Vice-Master. The delegation sent to Dunamunde was led by Paul, the Bishop of Kurland, and he sent a detailed letter back to Grand Master Karl outlining the events which transpired. It's quite long, but I'm going to read the letter out to you, and I quote.

"Brother Paul, by grace of God Bishop of Kurland, to the Grand Master. We went to Dunamunde and stayed there until we could meet with the castellans and important knights of the individual convents. On the Sunday before the feast of St Mary Magdalene,

before breakfast, which is the time that chapter meetings are customarily held, we were called to the place where the castellans and brothers would discuss our business. Coming to the matter, two castellans and two priests of the convent of brothers, honest and religious men, persons well known in the Order, rose and said that Brother Johann von Hoenhorst could not accept the post to which he had been named because he had been convicted of theft during the time he was advocate of Jerwen, when he had stolen or alienated from the Order 169 Marks, and this conviction was made by 65 brothers, who had sentenced brother Johann to the punishment and correction that the customs of the Order require for such a transgression. And having heard this, the Master and brothers unanimously said that they wanted to obey the Grand Master and Grand Chapter at all times and in all things, but that it was not possible for Brother Johann von Hoenhorst to become Master because of his dishonor of being convicted of a crime. After a few days, on a Monday, brothers assembled in the morning at the designated place, and Brother Gerhard, the Master of Livonia, saying that he was ready to obey the Grand Master and his Chapter, rose up and laid the seal of his office in the hands of the castellans and resigned his office. And we, and everyone there, were moved to tears by this act". End quote.

So, we have a total and complete capitulation by Master Gerhard, who quits in a tearful and dramatic way, because it turns out that the man that the Grand Master had initially chosen to be Vice-Master and who had been runner-up in the election for the position, was actually a thief. Who knew? Oh, only the 65 brothers who had convicted and sentenced him. This is quite a strange development, and I imagine that there were a raft of events and power plays taking place behind the scenes about which we will never know. Anyway the end result was a win for Grand Master Karl. Master Gerhard has resigned, and the man Grand Master Karl chose as Vice-Master, Konrad Kesselhut, is traveling from Prussia to Livonia to take up his new position.

Konrad Kesselhut will serve as Vice-Master until new elections can take place to select a Master. Don't anyone hold their breaths though, because this election will be delayed for a number of years. Why will it be delayed? Well, because the Teutonic chapter of the Teutonic knights are about to be distracted by a number of events. The first of which concerns a bunch of letters sent out from Lithuania by Grand Duke Gediminas.

Join me next week, as we discover the content of those mysterious letters, and the huge consequences which followed their delivery. Until next week, bye for now.

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