

History Of The Crusades. Episode 274. The Baltic Crusades. The Livonian Crusade Part L. The Great Estonian Insurrection Part 3.

Hello again. Last week we saw the Great Estonian Insurrection continue, with an army from Sweden arriving, too late as it happened, to assist the rebels. By the end of last week's episode, Master Burchard of the Livonian Chapter of the Teutonic Order, had managed to quell the uprising in every part of Estonia, save for the island of Oesel, where he was waiting for winter to come so that the Teutonic army could cross to the island over the frozen sea ice.

Now, while Master Burchard was waiting for the ice to thicken enough to enable a safe crossing to the island, he took the opportunity to send word far and wide, across Livonia and throughout the Bishopric of Dorpat and the Bishopric of Oesel-Wiek, for fighting men to come to the aid of the Teutonic Knights. While this did make the Bishops and ecclesiastical hierarchy sniff a little, as it implied that they were at the beck and call of the Teutonic Order, a sizable force of men did answer their call and made their northwards towards Oesel.

By February of 1344, the ice was thick enough to cross, and the Order's forces made their way to the island. They found that the rebels had stationed themselves inside a number of well-fortified castles on the island. Master Burchard decided to start his attack by focusing on the strongest and most formidable of these castles, which happened to be surrounded by a high wall, which in turn was surrounded by a moat. Master Burchard set up a number of siege engines and catapult machines, which were aimed at two of the castle's three gates. The machines were manned night and day, and eventually one of the gates gave way, and the Teutonic army poured into the castle.

The Estonians sheltering inside the structure, including thousands of unarmed women and children, were all killed, and Master Burchard ordered the rebel commander of the forces inside the castle to be tortured to death. Master Burchard was just about to move on to castle number two when word came in that a large Lithuanian army was about to cross the Daugava River and invade Livonia, so he hurriedly packed his bags, collected his forces, and scurried back southwards, leaving the remaining Estonian rebels untouched.

Now, this Lithuanian raid was actually really bad news for Master Burchard, because it was, in fact, just the first move in what would be a lengthy and successful campaign against Latin Christian holdings in Livonia and Semigallia, launched by the Lithuanian Prince Algirdas. Now, we first met Prince Algirdas back in Episode 272, when he led a Lithuanian army out of Polotsk to assist the men of Pskov in a raid inside the Bishopric of Dorpat. Now, since this time Algirdas has been a busy man. He was one of Gediminas' sons, and he was one of Gediminas' seven heirs, receiving the official governance of a Russian principality following Gediminas' death. Algirdas, however, was a competent ruler and a talented military commander, so it occurred to Algirdas that perhaps he should aim to extend his rule across the Russian principalities, and in fact, while he was in an expansionist frame of mind, why not make a play for the rulership of the entirety of Lithuania while he was at it.

Now, spoiler alert, Algirdas is not an all-talk-no-action sort of a bloke. In a couple of years time he will realize his ambition and will become the Grand Duke of Lithuania, a position he will hold for more than thirty years. He will end up creating a massive empire, which will stretch from Lithuania, across the Russian principalities, all the way to the Black Sea in the

south, and all the way northwards nearly to Moscow. Today that region would stretch from modern Lithuania, down through Belarus, into Ukraine, and across much of western Russia. At this point in our narrative however, Algirdas is not yet the ruler of Lithuania. He is flexing his military muscles, and with the assistance of his brother Kestutis he is working to undermine one of his other, younger brothers, who was currently ruling much of Lithuania from his base at Vilnius.

Unfortunately for Master Burchard, Algirdas is showing off his military skills, and making Gediminas' other heirs nervous, by raiding into Latin Christian territory in Semigallia and Livonia. Master Burchard wisely decided that the island of Oesel could take care of itself for a while, while he concentrated on pushing back against the chest-thumping moves being made by Algirdas. Algirdas eventually overthrew all but one of his brothers, and, along with his remaining brother Kestutis, became the ruler of Lithuania in 1345, and he seemed to decide to celebrate this boss move by leading an army into Semigallia, attacking Teutonic holdings at Tiverton and Mitau, and killing and capturing a number of Latin Christians.

According to a chronicler, Algirdas at this point in time was of a mind to expel the Latin Christians from the entire region, no doubt hoping to add Semigallia, Kurland and Livonia to his already extensive holdings. Having raided successfully through Semigallia, Algirdas crossed the Lithuanian army over the Daugava River and headed deep into central Livonia, burning churches, destroying and plundering property, and taking anyone who looked like they could be sold in the slave markets. The Teutonic forces and the local militia appeared to be all but powerless to stop them, and everyone breathed a sigh of relief when the Lithuanians, burdened with as much plunder as they could carry and as many slaves as they could handle, crossed back over the Daugava to take their booty back to Lithuania.

Now, as you can imagine, poor Master Burchard at this point in time is stretched pretty thinly, trying to ensure that the remaining pockets of Estonian rebels were adequately stamped out, while also trying in vain to protect the borders of Latin Christian territory from invading Lithuanians. Luckily for Master Burchard, one of his problems was about to resolve itself. A force of Teutonic Knights was sent to Oesel in early 1345, when the sea had frozen over sufficiently for them to cross to the island. Keen not to repeat the horrific losses which they endured the last time that the Teutonic army invaded, the elders of Oesel surrendered shortly after the Knights arrived. They were spared harsh punishment, but their taxes were raised and they were forbidden to own weapons or armor. As William Urban points out in his book "The Livonian Crusade", this ban continued for a number of years, and while it did ensure that no further rebellions broke out, it had the unfortunate side effect of rendering useless a bunch of talented warriors, which the Order may have been able to mobilize against the Lithuanians.

While the rebels of Oesel were now effectively neutralized, Master Burchard was still fighting pockets of resistance in other regions of Estonia, was fighting off invasions into Estonia from Pskov, and of course was really, really struggling to oppose the now frequent raids by Algirdas and the Lithuanians into Livonia. The final straw for Master Burchard came in late 1345. The Prussian Chapter of the Teutonic Order decided to combine with King John of Bohemia to step up crusading activities in Samogitia, with the hope that this would distract Algirdas sufficiently to force him to leave Livonia alone for a while. It didn't work. In late 1345 Algirdas led a very successful raid deep into Livonia, devastating the

region to the north of Riga, resulting in the deaths of fifteen Teutonic Knights. It was all too much for Master Burchard, who tendered his resignation.

What followed was a double election, as in addition to the now vacant position of Master of Livonia, the position of Grand Master needed to be filled as well. The two men elected to fill those vacancies were Heinrich Dusemer, a military man with sound knowledge of the problems in Livonia, who became Grand Master Heinrich, and Goswin von Herike, who became Master of Livonia. Remember Goswin von Herike? He was the castellan who was selected to occupy the castle at Reval in our last episode, and who did a fine job of negotiating the diplomatic minefield which presented itself with the arrival of the Swedish army in Reval. Both men appeared to be popular choices, and ex-master Burchard briefly went to fill the position left vacant by the new Master Goswin, becoming castellan at Reval Castle, then he moved to Prussia and settled in to his retirement.

Now, both the new Grand Master and the new Master of Livonia then came up with a novel plan to end the Great Estonian Insurrection, once and for all; that plan being, they decided that the Teutonic Order should purchase Estonia from the Kingdom of Denmark. Now this plan seemed to suit just about everyone. The Teutonic Order had been occupying a number of castles in Estonia for a while now, with the permission of the King of Denmark, and it would just be easier for everyone if this became a permanent rather than a temporary measure. The King of Denmark was currently waging a number of expensive wars, and rumor had it that as soon as the Teutonic Order withdrew from Estonia, Sweden was intending to invade Estonia, a move which would have stretched the Danish Crown to the limit. So, in August of the year 1346 it was agreed that Denmark would sell Estonia to the Teutonic Order for the sum of 19,000 marks, with the Grand Master to pay 14,000 of those marks, and the Master of Livonia paying the rest. This meant that the King of Denmark's war chest was now full, and he no longer had to worry about defending Estonia from Sweden, and it also meant that the Teutonic Order were now officially the rulers of Estonia. This move, of course, had massive ramifications for the people of Estonia, and for the prestige and power of the Livonian Chapter of the Teutonic Order.

Master Goswin rearranged Estonia into a number of administrative districts which were to be ruled by castellans from the Teutonic Order. William Urban notes, and we should note too, that although Master Goswin is supervising the day to day running of the Order's new acquisition, Estonia, technically the region doesn't yet belong to the Livonian Chapter of the Order. It belongs instead to the Grand Master, who stumped up most of the purchase price. The Livonian Chapter of the Order will however, over a number of years, gradually repay the Grand Master the 14,000 marks he paid for the region, so Estonia will eventually belong to the Livonian Chapter of the Order.

Now, the installation of the Teutonic Order was bad news for the Estonian peasants. It signaled the official end of the Great Estonian Insurrection, and meant that they were now firmly under the German thumb. They were now destined to remain as humble peasants, with no opportunity to distinguish themselves as warriors, and gain wealth and prestige for themselves, and they now had no means whatsoever of raising themselves out of the grind of peasant-hood into the lower levels of the noble classes. William Urban points out that, under Danish rule, many regions were able to exercise a degree of self-governance, and for local Estonians this came with a degree of flexibility. Now that was all gone, and Estonian peasants found themselves completely locked out of any form of power or opportunity for advancement. Basically, under Teutonic rule, the Estonian population was

divided into two sectors: the ruling Germans from the Teutonic Order, and the Estonian peasants. William Urban states that the Estonians found themselves locked out of German culture, with few options to improve their lot in life. There were to be no more peasant uprisings.

The merchants of Estonia fared much better. Conflict between Denmark and other regional powers had been adversely affecting trade for some time, and when the Danish rulers were replaced by the Teutonic Order, Reval suddenly found itself added to the coastal trading towns which served as stopover points for seafaring merchants making their way to Novgorod, which increased its wealth and economy markedly.

Now, just before we sign off for this episode, you might be interested to know that there is a new Archbishop of Riga. Yes, old Archbishop Friedrich remained in Avignon, feebly raising his trembling hand every now and again, trying to get the Pope to wallop the Teutonic Order, until his death in 1344, a release which no doubt came as a relief to everyone, possibly including Archbishop Friedrich himself. Engelbert von Dolen, who had been the Bishop of Dorpat since 1323, was chosen to be the new Archbishop of Riga. Woohoo! Join me next week as we return to the Samogitian Crusade, to see what effect the rise of Algirdas is having on the Prussian Chapter of the Teutonic Order. Until next week, bye for now.

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