

History of the Crusades. Episode 285. The Baltic Crusades. The Samogitian Crusade Part XVII. Jogaila versus Vytautas.

Hello again. Last week we saw Jogaila do a series of acrobatic maneuvers, out-leaping, out-classing, and outwitting his rivals to become the sole ruler of Lithuania. His uncle Kestutis and his wife are now both permanently out of the picture, and Kestutis' son and heir Vytautas is safely imprisoned. Jogaila appears to have won the support of most of the Lithuanian people, and has negotiated a four year long military alliance with the Teutonic Order, one of the conditions of which had Jogaila agreeing to be baptized, and another condition was the handing over of western Samogitia to the Teutonic Order.

Now a bunch of events are about to happen at this point in time, which are really quite astonishing and unexpected, and we'll see some seriously wacky political alliances form. Hold onto your hats people, because this next bit is complicated, and so bizarre as to be nearly unbelievable.

The first event which sets the stage for the happenings which are about to take place was the death of King Louis the Great in September of 1382. King Louis, as we all know, was a very powerful man, being both the King of Hungary and the King of Poland. King Louis, however, didn't have any sons, although he had stipulated that he wanted his two surviving teenage children, both of whom were daughters, to step neatly into his shoes, and there was some disquiet about this. Then the question arose whether King Louis' successor would rule both kingdoms, or whether one daughter would take a kingdom each, so powerful players in Poland, Hungary and further afield were all rubbing their hands together and getting ready to make their moves.

The person doing most of the hand rubbing was young Duke Sigismund of Brandenburg, who had married King Louis's oldest surviving daughter Mary, and Duke Sigismund fancied himself using his wife's succession to place himself on the throne of Poland. Keen to get some influential support for his play for the Polish crown, he arrived in Prussia shortly after Konrad Zollner von Rothenstein had been elected as the new Grand Master of the Teutonic Order.

Now Grand Master Konrad Zollner von Rothenstein was suddenly a very busy man. He had intended that his first act as Grand Master would be to travel to Lithuania, to meet with Jogaila to personally oversee the details surrounding the surrender of Samogitia, and Jogaila's baptism. But suddenly meeting the next possible King of Poland seemed more important, so the Grand Master remained in Prussia and sent the Grand Commander of the Order, a man called Rudiger von Elnor, and the new Marshall of the Order, Konrad von Wallenrode, to Lithuania. The two men set off, and met with Jogaila for six days of negotiations, after which they came to an arrangement which seemed to suit everyone.

Basically, Jogaila agreed to split Samogitia effectively down the middle, with the dividing line being the Dubysa River. The Teutonic Order would take all of Samogitia to the west of the river which was the sparsely populated part of Samogitia near the coast. The most populated region, nearest to Lithuania, would remain under Jogaila's control. This suited the Teutonic Order because "Yay", they now had half of Samogitia, and it suited Jogaila because most of the Samogitians living in western Samogitia were staunch supporters of Kestutis and staunch pagans. Jogaila was worried that his elimination of Kestutis, and his alliance with the Teutonic Order, had lost him the support of the Samogitians in this region. And besides, even though on paper the Teutonic Order now owned this part of Samogitia,

the fiercely pagan Samogitians wouldn't be that keen to hear about their new Christian overlords, so good luck with that. So everyone shook hands and the Grand Commander and the Marshall of the Order headed back to Prussia.

They had only just arrived back in Prussia when an event occurred, which would change absolutely everything. Jogaila had given permission to Vytautas' wife Anna to visit him in prison. This wouldn't have been a problem, except for the fact that Vytautas was apparently a short, slimly-built man who was currently clean shaven. In fact, he was so short and slimly-built that he was able to fit into his wife's clothes. So, as you might have guessed, Vytautas quickly swapped clothes with his wife during the visit. Then he managed to sneak out of the castle disguised as his own wife, and can I just say that I really wish there was smart phones and YouTube videos back in those days, because I would absolutely love to see a recording of that. Anyway, back in Vytautas' cell, Anna, wearing Vytautas' clothes, remained quiet and discreet, perhaps curling up on Vytautas' bed pretending to be asleep, to enable her husband to travel as far away from Lithuania as possible before the deception was uncovered. In the end, Vytautas managed to safely make his way out of Lithuania completely, and eventually ended up at the residence of Duke Siemowit IV of Mazovia.

Now Duke Siemowit IV of Mazovia was currently the most senior person remaining in the Piast dynasty, and upon hearing news of the death of King Louis, you guessed it, Duke Siemowit decided that he also wanted to make a play for the Polish crown. Duke Siemowit decided that it couldn't hurt his chances at all if he took Vytautas, who himself had a claim to the rulership of Lithuania, under his protection. Then, pondered Duke Siemowit further, what if he convinced Vytautas to convert to Christianity before Jogaila converted to Christianity? Then the Duke of Mazovia could claim that he had brought Christianity to the pagan Lithuanians, meaning that surely the Papacy and other power-players would fall in behind him and support his claim to the Polish crown. That seemed to Duke Siemowit of Mazovia to be a mighty fine plan, so he had Vytautas write a letter to the Grand Master, saying that he was now in Mazovia, having escaped from Jogailas' custody, and requesting permission to travel to Prussia, to speak to the Grand Master personally about his conversion to Christianity.

This put Grand Master Konrad Zollner von Rothenstein in a bit of a bind. He knew that if he allowed Vytautas to come and meet with him in Prussia, this would make Jogaila really cross, and he didn't want Jogaila to get really cross. But on the other hand, a converted Vytautas, under the thumb of the Teutonic Order, could be a seriously useful acquisition, as Vytautas could likely convince the western Samogitians, which the Teutonic Order had just gained lordship over, to accept the Order's rule and convert peacefully to Christianity. In fact, the Grand Master pondered he could probably even install Vytautas in western Samogitia as the new ruler of the region, which would solve a bunch of problems. So the Grand Master gave the green light to Vytautas, and Vytautas traveled to Prussia to be baptized, while Duke Siemowit of Mazovia, rubbed his hands together in delight at his cleverness.

Duke Siemowit's cleverness, however, didn't end up getting him very far. Young Sigismund of Luxembourg, the Duke of Brandenburg and husband to King Louis' eldest daughter, went into a rage when he heard about Duke Siemowit's claim to the Polish crown. He gathered a large army full of Hungarian, Czech, Polish, and even German troops, to indicate the extent of his support, and invaded Mazovia until the Duke, who's

support of Vytautas had gotten him precisely nowhere, was forced to abandon his claim to the crown of Poland.

What the Duke of Mazovia had achieved though, was the placement of the newly converted Vytautas under the sphere of influence of the Teutonic Order. The Grand Master decided that he would send Vytautas to govern western Samogitia, but he didn't want to put Jogaila offside unnecessarily, so he decided that the Teutonic Order would comply meticulously with all the terms of the recently agreed military alliance with Jogaila. The Grand Master figured that if Jogaila rocked the boat too much, and turned against the Order, well the Order could then assist Vytautas to overthrow Jogaila, then they would have their man in Lithuania on the throne. So off Vytautas went to Samogitia, and the Grand Master sat back and waited to see how Jogaila would react.

How did Jogaila react to all of this? Well, with predictable rationality, skill and forethought. He allowed Vytautas' wife Anna and all of the Vytautas' immediate family, friends and hard-core supporters, to leave Lithuania to go join him, no doubt thinking that it would be easier if all of Vytautas' allies were out of Lithuania, and all in one place where Jogaila didn't need to worry too much about their scheming. Then Jogaila gathered his army and invaded Mazovia. Invading Mazovia was actually a pretty savvy move. It didn't violate any of the terms of the alliance he had recently signed with the Teutonic Order, but it indicated to everyone Jogaila's displeasure about the way the Duke of Mazovia had assisted Vytautas. Jogaila's army ravaged Mazovia mercilessly, then withdrew back to Lithuania.

In the year 1383, the date on which Jogaila had agreed to be baptized in accordance with the treaty he had signed with the Teutonic Order, was fast approaching. Grand Master Konrad Zollner von Rothenstein decided to personally travel to Lithuania to oversee the baptism, so taking the Bishops of Ermland and Pomesania with him, he sailed up the Nemunas, intending to meet with Jogaila. However, when they arrived at Christmemel they were forced to abandon their plan to use the Nemunas River to travel to the meeting place. The river had become too shallow and they were forced to abandon their ships. Jogaila's brother Skirgaila met the party at Christmemel, and advised them that Jogaila was waiting for them fifteen miles inland, and if the Grand Master and the two Bishops accompanied him, Skirgaila would lead them to Jogaila. A nervous Grand Master and Bishops sensed that this may be a trap, so the Marshall of the Teutonic Order borrowed a horse and accompanied Skirgaila where Jogaila was waiting. The upshot then was that Jogaila refused to travel to Christmemel, as he was worried he would be arrested by the Order, and likewise, the Grand Master refused to leave Christmemel to meet with Jogaila, using the excuse that he had no horse, but really he was worried that he was walking into a trap.

Then, pretty much, the gloves came off and the military alliance fell apart. The Grand Master gave Jogaila fourteen days to commence negotiations for his baptism, otherwise, the Grand Master stated, the Order would declare war on Lithuania. Then the Grand Master sent word to Vytautas in Samogitia that he was to gather himself an army and head to Lithuania. Vytautas arrived with his army at the place in Lithuania in which he enjoyed the most support, his family seat at Trakai. Trakai surrendered to Vytautas, then the Grand Master left Vytautas with a garrison of men from the Teutonic Order and marched to Vilnius, hoping that it too would surrender. But Vilnius didn't surrender. After the city put up a stiff resistance, the Grand Master was forced to retreat, leaving Lithuania and returning to Prussia. Jogaila then struck back, attacking Trakai. The garrison at Trakai surrendered after a six week long siege, and Jogaila allowed the men from the Teutonic Order who had been in Trakai to return to Prussia. But Vytautas was nowhere to be found.

Okay, so now the situation is that the Teutonic Order are out of Lithuania, but two men are in Lithuania who wish to rule the country: Jogaila and Vytautas. Vytautas has the advantage of the fact that he is the son of the much-loved Kestutis, so for that reason alone he has a lot of supporters. But his bid for power is dependent on the assistance of the Teutonic Order, and in order to secure this assistance he has been baptized, and has agreed to hand over the entire region of Samogitia, not just western Samogitia, to the Order if he succeeds in becoming ruler, and he has also agreed to rule Lithuania as a vassal of the Teutonic Order. And of course, he has agreed to the conversion of all of Lithuania and Samogitia to Christianity. Jogaila on the other hand, isn't hampered by the taint of being subservient to the Teutonic Order, so he is able to campaign on a "keep Lithuania for the Lithuanians" sort of a platform, and although he doesn't have a lot of support in Samogitia, Lithuania is predominantly on his side.

So how does this civil conflict play out? Well, recognizing that Vytautas' main support base was in Samogitia, the Teutonic Order moved Vytautas into Samogitia, and set him up in a castle on the Nemunas River. The Order then set about securing the rest of the Nemunas River, and started work building a stronghold at Kaunas. At the same time, Vytautas was meant to start work on Christianizing the pagan Samogitians. Jogaila then led small raiding parties into Samogitia, to harass and attack the Teutonic fighters.

It was around about this time that Vytautas started having second thoughts about the whole situation. The local Samogitians weren't at all keen to accept Christianity, and perhaps they started Vytautas questioning why he was doing what he was doing, because really, Vytautas' heart wasn't in Samogitia, it was back in Lithuania, around his family's ancestral base at Trakai. In his book "The Samogitian Crusade", William Urban describes a scene in the summer of 1384, when Vytautas and a bunch of Latin Christian crusaders attacked a group of pagans while they were engaged in a ceremony of worship at a site deep in the forests. A total of thirty six pagan leaders were captured, and the crusaders went on to desecrate as many holy sites as they could, by using them as camping grounds. William Urban suggests that the glee the Latin Christians felt about these conquests may have led them to overlook the fact that their enthusiasm didn't seem to be shared by Vytautas.

One person who did notice, though, was Jogaila. Soon after this event, he quietly sent word to Vytautas that he would be willing to form an alliance with Vytautas, and assist Vytautas to throw off his Teutonic shackles. Jogaila dangled the tantalizing prospect of handing over to Vytautas not only Trakai, but the whole of western Lithuania, if Vytautas would turn on his Latin Christian allies and assist Jogaila to drive them out of Samogitia. Vytautas readily agreed, and the two men sat down to work out the best way of surprising the Teutonic Order and attacking their Samogitian holdings.

Why, you might ask, is Jogaila doing this? Remember, his original plan was to ally himself with the Teutonic Order, ensuring that they wouldn't attack Lithuania while Jogaila concentrated on his Russian holdings, specifically his plan to take Moscow? Well, Jogaila has ditched that plan in favor of a much more ambitious one, because Jogaila has decided on a course of action which, if he can pull it off, will see him installed not only as the Supreme Prince of Lithuania, but also as the next King of Poland.

So does Jogaila succeed in using Vytautas to drive the Teutonic Order out of Samogitia, and does he manage to then place himself on the Polish throne? Of course he does. Find out how next week. Until next week, bye for now.

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