

## History of the Crusades. Episode 193. The Baltic Crusades. The Teutonic Knights.

Hello again. Last week we saw the end of military incursions into the land of the Wends, which took place in the shadow of the Crusade of 1147. This week we are going to leave the Crusades for the moment and take a look at the rise of the Teutonic Knights, a military order which will be playing a significant role in the Baltic Crusades.

Now, back in Episode 190, when we were discussing the Duke of Saxony Henry the Lion, and the Holy Roman Empire, we mentioned that Conrad III went to the Holy Land on the Second Crusade, an expedition that was, quite frankly, disastrous for Conrad. But this bad experience won't deter future Emperors from going on Crusade to the Middle East. In the year 1189, four years after the end of the Wendish Crusade, the forces of the Third Crusade will muster, and will head off to the Holy Land. Back in the year 1152 Conrad died and apparently, on his deathbed, in an unexpected move, he declared that his successor be, not his own six year old son, but his nephew, Frederick Duke of Swabia, of the Hohenstaufen dynasty. Frederick was duly crowned King of Germany and a couple of years later was crowned King of Italy, and then, in 1155, he was crowned Holy Roman Emperor. As we've heard previously, Frederick earned the name Frederick Barbarossa due to his red beard. So in the year 1189, when the clergy of Western Christendom began preaching the Third Crusade, Frederick Barbarossa was ready to answer the call. More than ready, in fact. He had accompanied his uncle Conrad III on the Second Crusade, so he knew what he was in for.

The plan was for Frederick to lead the German forces overland to Constantinople, and then smashed their way through Anatolia, forcing their way past the Turks, who had been blocking the traditional route to the Holy Land. He would then head over the mountain pass into Syria, where he would meet up with the English and French forces. Once that had taken place, he would then lead the French and English forces on a campaign to retake the vital port cities on the Mediterranean, and then to reclaim Jerusalem for Latin Christendom. Easy.

Trouble was, as we all know, things didn't go quite to plan. Frederick did lead the German army to Constantinople, and he did smash his way through Anatolia. But he never made it over the mountain passes into Syria, because he drowned crossing a river. Most of the German forces then dispersed, with their leaders from the German nobility racing back to Europe to vote in the election for the new Holy Roman Emperor. However, a few Germans did decide to keep their crusading vows, and they joined the English forces at Acre.

Unfortunately for those Germans, the leader of the English forces, Richard the Lionheart, hadn't exactly been a fan of Frederick Barbarossa. Richard's sister had married Henry the Lion, the Duke of Saxony, and the rivalry between Henry and the Hohenstaufens was pretty intense. It had culminated in Frederick forcing Henry into exile. So according to William Urban in his book "The Teutonic Knights", Richard decided to take out his pent up Hohenstaufen frustrations on any German he came across. Life in Acre was pretty miserable as it was: it was hot; people were getting sick; and the dreams of easy victories against the forces of Saladin seemed to be fading by the minute. But Richard seemed to be determined to make an enemy of every German in the vicinity of the Crusader camp.

This was going to have ramifications for Richard, as he would find himself unexpectedly in the Holy Roman Empire on his way home from the Crusade, shipwrecked, desperate to

get back to England, and surrounded by Germans. He will try to make his way to Henry the Lion in Saxony, but he won't make it. Patreon supporters will know all about this saga due to the recent three-part supporter episodes. Oh, what's that? You want to become a patron too, and get an episode every fortnight after you pay a contribution of one dollar per month? Well, you can do that. Just head over to "[crusadespod.com](https://www.patreon.com/crusadespod)" and follow the link. We'd love to see you there.

Anyway, so it sounds like the Third Crusade was a complete disaster for the German forces, and it was a disaster. But there was, a silver lining in the crusading cloud, because out of the trials and tribulations of life in Acre, the Order of the Teutonic Knights was born. How was it born? Well, the conditions at the Siege of Acre were dreadful. While the European crusaders were struggling to acclimatize to the heat and to the strange foods that were on offer, the lack of sanitary conditions in the camp, and the fact that corpses of humans and animals often lay unburied, contaminating the drinking water, all resulted in people becoming sick. When you have large groups of people coming down with serious illnesses, you need people to look after them. The Knights of the Order of St John, or the Hospitallers, were the people that crusaders tended to turn to to care for their sick. However, at the Siege of Acre, the hospitallers were overrun with new patients. The Germans, with most of their leaders having returned to Europe, were a minority group. In times of crisis, when resources are stretched to the limit, people tend to favor their own national groups. With anti-German sentiment high, particularly amongst those aligned with the anti-German King of England, Richard the Lionheart, the Hospitallers tended to prioritize their care towards the English and French crusaders. That left the German crusaders with no one to care for them.

The group of crusaders from the German towns of Bremen and Lubeck decided to address the situation by establishing a German version of the Hospitallers, a new monastic Order whose focus would be to care for sick and dying German crusaders. This idea was heartily endorsed by the most senior of the German noble crusaders present of Acre, Duke Frederick VI of Swabia, Frederick Barbarossa's son, who had stayed in the Holy Land with the remnants of the German forces. Frederick wrote to his brother, who was in the process of being crowned the new King of Germany and the new Holy Roman Emperor, Emperor Henry VI. He informed him about what had occurred and sought his support. Frederick also made contact with both the patriarch in Jerusalem and the senior echelons of the two main existing Orders, the Templars and the Hospitallers, with the result that when the new German Order applied to Pope Celestine III for the order to be formally approved by Rome, the approval process went without a hitch. The new Order was called "The Order of the Hospital of St Mary of the Germans in Jerusalem", and was kind of a German version of an amalgamation of both the Hospitallers and the Templars. The function of this new order was to care for sick German crusaders, like that of the Hospitallers, but they lived under the rules established by the Templars.

In his book "The Teutonic Knights", William Urban points out that this new Order became known as "the German Order". In a time where ancient of lineages and illustrious foundations were celebrated, the name "the German Order" implied that the new Order wasn't new at all, but was a continuation of a much older Order which had also been called the German Order. However, the Knights Hospitaller technically held supervisory rights over this older Order, so eventually links between the new and the old Order were abandoned as the new German hospital Order sought to differentiate itself from, and come out from under the umbrella of, the new powerful order of the Hospitallers.

The newly formed German Order performed its tasks efficiently and effectively, and when a bunch of German Crusaders arrived in the Holy Land in the year 1197, they were able to report that, not only were the Knights of the Order caring for sick German Crusaders, every German who arrived in the Holy Land on Crusade had their needs met by the Order. You don't have anywhere to stay? Don't worry, the Order will arrange some accommodation for you. You spent all your money on your journey to the Holy Land and now you don't have enough resources to buy food or other essentials? Don't worry, the Order will supply you with food and even give you some money to see you through. And the favour was returned. Wealthy German noblemen arriving on Crusade would often donate gifts and money to the Order, and if any German Knights decided to swap their secular life for a more religious calling while they were in the Holy Land, well, they invariably ended up joining the ranks of the German Order.

Now, at this stage of its existence, the German Order's main function, as we've pointed out, was to care for sick crusaders and those who had fallen on hard times. Knights from the other older Orders, the Templars and the Hospitallers, however, were performing a very different role. With crusaders from various countries across Europe coming and going from the Middle East, a permanent standing army was really needed to garrison castles in key strategic positions, and to hold the territory won for Latin Christendom. Trouble was, there was no standing army. Instead, key castles were handed over to the Order of the Temple and the Order of the Hospital, who were then expected to supply Knights from their ranks to garrison the castles and to hold the territory guarded by the castles. As William Urban reports in his book "The Teutonic Knights", the Germans decided that their hospital Order could meet the growing demand for castle duty on the frontier, and as a result they asked Pope Celestine to reincorporate the Order of the Hospital of St Mary of the Germans in Jerusalem as a military Order. Pope Celestine did exactly that, and a new charter was issued in 1198. It was this new military Order which would become known as the Teutonic Knights.

Why was it called the Teutonic Order? Why didn't it just stick with its original name, the German Order? Well, William Urban reports that the reasons for this are unclear. As we have seen, in English the full name of the Order was "The Order of the Hospital of St Mary of the Germans in Jerusalem". The word German in this title is "Deutschen" in the German language, and in fact the Teutonic Order is called the "Deutscher Ordern" or the German Order in the German language. However, the word "German" in Latin is "Teutonicorum", so "the Teutonic Order" is the Latinized version of the name "the German Order". The name "Teutonic Order" stuck, and voila, the Teutonic Order was born, and joined the other two military Orders already operating in the Holy Land.

Once the Teutonic Order had transformed itself from a group of charitable friars serving the sick and poor into a group able to take an active military role, it meant that German members of the Order, many of whom had perhaps come to the Holy Land for the specific purpose of taking up arms on behalf of the church, were able to do so, instead of spending their days caring for others. In his book "The Military Orders", Alan Forey quotes the thirteenth century historian James of Vitry, who was of the opinion that the Order transformed from a hospital-based organization to a military-based one, precisely because men who were already members of the Order wanted to take up arms and have a crack at fighting the Muslims. Alan Forey says that James of Vitry stated, and I quote, "Since men not only of lesser rank but also of knightly status, and some German nobles, bound themselves by vows to the hospital, they thought that it would be pleasing and agreeable to God, and more meritorious, not only to serve the poor and sick, but also to lay down

their lives for Christ, and by defending the Holy Land from the enemies of the Faith of Christ, to engage in both spiritual and bodily welfare for Christ", end quote.

Unfortunately though, for the Teutonic Order, they were a little late to the party. The heyday of the acquisition of castles and construction of castles by the military Orders had peaked prior to the battle of Hattin. After Saladin's victory at Hattin in 1187, the two Orders lost control of many of their strongholds. The Hospitallers did manage to hold on to their two most important castles, including the magnificent Krak de Chevaliers, while the Templars hung onto Tortosa and managed to win back Beaufort and Sidon, but really, by the time the Teutonic Order emerged onto the scene, things were on the decline as far as the Latin Christians were concerned. They were, however, given defensive responsibilities around the city of Acre, and they purchased a couple of strongholds in the hinterland behind the city of Acre. They branched out to a number of scattered castles at Jaffa, Ascalon, and Gaza, and were even granted some land in Armenia by the Armenian King. The pinnacle of their achievements in the Holy Land came when they began work on their own signature castle, Montfort to the northeast of Acre, in the 1290s.

Now I know to most of you, the name Montfort for will immediately bring to mind Simon de Montfort from the Crusade against the Cathars. Well, the Teutonic castle Montfort, unsurprisingly, had absolutely nothing to do with Simon de Montfort. The word "montfort" for was actually the Anglicized version of the French version of the German name for their castle, which was "Starkenberg", meaning "Strong Mountain". The Order purchased the castle in a rundown state and then proceeded to excavate the site, which even unimproved, boasted many natural strategic and defensive advantages. By the time it was complete, it contained a keep, a chapel, and a hall. However, compared to the castles built by the other orders, absolutely magnificent structures with mind-boggling defenses such as Krak des Chevaliers, Montfort was a bit "meh". In his book "The Military Orders", Alan Fourie describes Montfort as, and I quote, "hardly impressive" end quote. He goes on to say, and I quote "It was not in a strategically important position and served mainly as an administrative center and place of refuge and defense, for which it relied to a considerable extent on the natural advantages of its site." End quote. In his book "Crusader Castles", Hugh Kennedy politely describes Montfort as modest. He compares Montfort to the only other castle constructed by the Teutonic Order, a stronghold seven kilometers to the south of Montfort, at Judin.

Hugh Kennedy makes the interesting observation that, by the time Montfort and Judin were being built, the other two Orders, the Templars and the Hospitallers, were old hands at castle construction in the Middle East and had developed a number of modifications, some based on Muslim designs, which made their castles more suited to the climate and terrain of the Holy Land and to the Muslim enemies they faced. Hugh Kennedy notes, however, that neither Montfort nor Judin contained any of these innovations. No, they were German castles, based on German designs, and on the long history of German traditions accumulated over many centuries in central Europe. They might have well have been lifted straight from a cliff overlooking the Rhine River and been plonked down on a defensive sight in the Middle East. The Teutonic Order was clearly a German Order building German castles for German Knights, regardless of where those castles were located.

Just as the castles built by the Teutonic Order had a distinctly German flavor, so did the rules and laws governing the Teutonic Order. William Urban, in his book "The Teutonic Knights", notes that the documents containing the charter, rules and laws of the Teutonic Order were all written in German, so that every member of the Order could easily

understand them. Like the members of the other military Orders, the Teutonic Knights took vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. As the original purpose of the Teutonic Order was to care for the sick, members had to agree to undertake this duty as their primary role. However, if this duty clashed with their obligation to take up arms and fight on behalf of the Church, then they could delegate their caring role to one of the lesser, non-noble members of the Order, while they ordered their squire to prepare their horse, armor, and weapons so they could go and fulfill their military obligations. The Teutonic Knights attended religious services on a regular basis. Those services were held at specified times during the day and at night.

In order to distinguish themselves from Knights of the other Orders, the Teutonic Knights wore a white cloak adorned with a black cross. This cloak was worn over dark clothes, giving the German Knights a distinctive and austere black-and-white sort of look. The administrative wing of the Order will develop over time, and will eventually consist of an elected Grand Master. Actually, it sounds much better in German, "Hochmeister", who appointed five officers, each having distinct duties: a treasurer; an officer responsible for all hospital matters; an officer responsible for logistics and armament; a chief of military affairs; and a person to act as deputy to the Hochmeister.

Now, the castles of the Teutonic Order in the Holy Land were eventually lost to the Muslims, with both castles having fallen to the Muslims by the year 1271. But this doesn't spell the end of the Teutonic Order, far from it. The Order will have its heyday during, you guessed it, the Baltic Crusades.

Now, in two week's time, we will be getting back to the Baltic Crusades, but next week we will be taking some time out to explore the Christianization of Poland. The question needs to be asked: Why, at the time of the Baltic Crusades, was Christian Poland standing alone, surrounded by pagans? How did this come about? Join me next week to find out. Until next week, bye for now.

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