

BALTIC CRUSADES - Curated Transcript of BBC In Our Time podcast
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In Our Time is hosted by Melvyn Bragg. Melvyn's guests on this podcast are:

Aleks Pluskowski, Associate Professor of Archaeology at the University of Reading

Nora Berend, Fellow of St Catharine's College and Reader in European History at the Faculty of History at the University of Cambridge and

Martin Palmer, Director of the International Consultancy on Religion, Education, and Culture

Producer: Simon Tillotson.

Transcript:

[Melvyn Bragg] Hello. From the 12th century, the Popes approved a series of crusades on the Baltic lands, principally Prussia and regions now covered by Lithuania, Latvia, Poland and Estonia. The... [Livonian Brothers of the Sword], later the Teutonic Order, led the fight to convert so-called pagans to Christianity, and if they refused, it was no sin to kill them. Over the next hundred years, the Teutonic Knights ran their own state, based in Prussia. Many German speakers settled the lands claimed for Christendom. They built ports on the newly secured Baltic Sea, which, through the Hanseatic League, transformed trade in northern Europe. There was rarely peace after the Crusades, and the changes in who lived in the region and how they lived have had great significance for the history of Europe. With me to discuss the Baltic Crusades are Aleks Pluskowski, Associate Professor of Archaeology at the University of Reading, Nora Berend, Fellow of St Catharine's College and Reader in European History at the

Faculty of History at the University of Cambridge, and Martin Palmer, Director of the International Consultancy on Religion, Education, and Culture.

[Melvyn Bragg] Martin Palmer, what were the priorities of the Christian Church in Rome at the start of this period, let's say the first half of the 12th century?

[1:16]

[Martin Palmer] Well, it was to embody Christendom and to, in a sense, say...that Europe is now the land of Christ, it is His domain and the Pope is His appointed representative, and that therefore both secular and religious authority should reside within the Papacy. And this was coming out of a period where it was quite dubious whether Christianity would actually make it to the 12th century. You had the Vikings and the northern invasions of pagan communities that devastated Christianity in England, Scotland, Ireland, across the northern parts of France and Spain. And you also had the Muslim rise coming up from North Africa, the conquest of Spain, Sardinia, Corsica, Sicily, and also the fact that piracy and slave trading meant that the Mediterranean - the northern part of it - was extremely dangerous. In fact, many cities ceased to function on the coastline. So you had a sense that Christianity had come through a period of immense trial for about 300 years, had now established itself. The Papacy had also brought in the "Peace of God", which was this, in a sense, an attempt to control the feudal feuding that was going on by saying, "come on, as the Church, we are going to determine what is a just war". But then you also had at the same time a sense of a real threat that was coming into this Christendom. Because having established this notion that Christ had given this land, as it were, to the Pope to control, you then had the heresies, you had the Bogomils coming in from eastern Europe spreading their notion of a sort of Manichean dualistic religion, that this world was essentially evil, that only the spiritual world was true and was godly, which led to the Albigensians - a most famous heretical sect in the 12th century down in south of France. But you also had a sense that suddenly paganism was dangerous, that there was actual evil forces in the world. And then you also had the fear of the Orthodox Church because there had been the schism between the Western and Eastern Churches in 1054 and this sense that if we didn't get to the Baltic first, those heretical Orthodox would.

[Melvyn Bragg] So the Crusade was called in 1147. Was there a particular circumstance that led to that, the calling of that Crusade by the pope?

[Martin Palmer] It springs out of the call for the Second Crusade to go to the Holy Land. And it comes also with the extraordinary preaching of Bernard of Clairvaux, who was probably the most astonishing preacher of the entire Middle Ages, who in a sense embodies this sense of a triumphalist Christianity, particularly within the monastic traditions, the Cistercians, but also this sense that that Christianity was under threat internally. He's the great beginner of the hunt for heresies, but also, of course, in Palestine itself and the lands there. But also this sense that somehow there was this external force that was

[Melvyn Bragg] How did he persuade the Pope, if he did, to call the Crusade?

[Martin Palmer] Money.

[Melvyn Bragg] Well, tell us what it means.

[Martin Palmer] Money. Essentially, he argued that here was lands that could be taxed and where the money could go towards the Papacy. He argued that therefore this was a land that was ripe for exploitation and development and he breaks the cardinal rule of the Catholic Church at that time, which was to say "pagans cannot be left to live in peace", which had been the attitude of the Church up until that point.

[Melvyn Bragg] He was also convinced that if you killed them, that was okay.

[Martin Palmer] Yes. And he, of course, is the origin of pretty much all the military orders like the Templars and the ... Knights Hospitaller, as well as eventually the Teutonic Knights.

[Melvyn Bragg] So the Crusade was called by the Pope in 1147. Aleks Pluskowski, who was living in the Baltic [at that time]? Who were these pagans? It was called against the pagans partly because there'd been Christians there beforehand. There were Christians there and the pagans, it was said, were harassing the Christians, therefore they're going there, the Crusaders, to protect the Christians. That's one of the reasons, apart from (Martin went to the sort of core of the matter) ... money, land grabs and so on. Who was living there? Can you give us some description of what's going on there?

[5:30]

[Aleks Pluskowski] So you have a whole series of tribal societies dominating the eastern Baltic, subdivided broadly into two linguistic groups Balt and Finno-Ugaric - so Estonians and Livs. They are relatively small scale in terms of their territories, except for Lithuania that has formed the Grand Duchy by this point. So you have state formation in Lithuania, but the others are small scale - extended kinship groups based on an aristocratic hierarchy that is male dominated and militarized and focused on powerful families based in strongholds that litter the landscapes of eastern Baltic.

[Melvyn Bragg] Had they been warring against each other?

[Aleks Pluskowski] They had, yes. So you have lots of examples of intertribal feuding, and this is one of the things that the Crusaders take advantage of, of course, especially in Livonia, when they arrive at the end of the 12th century.

[Melvyn Bragg] Did they fight among themselves or had they turned south and tried to go into further into Europe?

[Aleks Pluskowski] Yes, that's right. So in Prussia you have Prussian tribal expansion to the south and also to the west at the borders of Pomerania and the Kingdom of Poland. So there you have raids across the border, raids of monasteries, of towns like Gdansk, and this causes a lot of tension on the Polish frontier.

[Melvyn Bragg] Now, the word that was used, and Martin's brought it into play already, was that there were "pagans" there and this was either the reason or the excuse, whichever way you're putting it (we might explore that later) for going there in the first

place. How are these pagans expressing themselves, if we can say it, in religious terms?

[Aleks Pluskowski] Yes, because most of what we know is initially from the commentator's perspective, a Christian commentator's perspective, which paints the region as a very homogeneous religious system based on animism and investing spirituality in the natural environment, in trees, rocks, prominent boulders, lakes, rivers, so on and so forth. So a classic sort of North European pre Christian belief system.

[Melvyn Bragg] Can you just can I stop there for a second? What does that mean? Do you worship there? Do you ask for favours from a lake or a waterfall or what's it doing?

[Aleks Pluskowski] It's problematic and obscure, but as far as we know, these places are associated with particular deities and so they are the focus of cult activity - you can leave offerings. Cemeteries are important sites of cult activity because we have a sense that there is ancestral worship happening and these are the most prominent features of religious activity in the pre-Christian period.

[Melvyn Bragg] That's a long track back, isn't it, through ... almost a prehistory - the cemeteries?

[Aleks Pluskowski] [It is]...We're effectively dealing with the continuation of the culture over the last thousand, or so, years. Obviously not timeless, there have been lots of changes, but for example, the ritual killing and deposition of horses is something that marks out the Balts in particular from the 1st century AD all the way through into the 13th century.

[Melvyn Bragg] In your notes, you emphasize that. What's going on there?

[Aleks Pluskowski] That's a good question. The horse seems to be the most important ritual animal in the Baltic, or for the Balts, rather. And here we have a ritual that developed in the first century in northeastern Poland, in the region of Masuria, associated with the Prussian Galindian group later on as we know it. And here we have the living burial of horses developing as a specific ritual within a funerary context. It is most likely associated with a cult of the sun or some solar symbolism, particularly in terms of how the horses are aligned across the entire region. By the Viking Age, we are seeing huge numbers of horses being deposited, or rather being sacrificed and buried, hundreds and hundreds in some cases.

[Melvyn Bragg] ...What did they have to achieve by this?

[Aleks Pluskowski] That's a good question. The horse is a vehicle to the other world, as far as we can tell. We have some later written sources that associate the horse with traveling - of passage to the other world.

[Melvyn Bragg] Is this area - I rattled off a lot of countries which now occupy this area at the beginning of the program - ... heavily populated? Thinly populated? Can you give us an idea?

[Aleks Pluskowski] No, it's thinly populated. We're dealing with a dispersed, rural, small scale population, extended family units.

[Melvyn Bragg] Nora Berend, can we go into again, which Martin alluded to in his opening remarks, what justification were given to the Crusades? Can we dig into that a bit? It didn't come out of the blue, Martin went to the core of it, but let's dig around it first...

[9:46]

[Nora Berend] I think it's important to emphasize that even before the Crusades were called as "Crusades", there was warfare going on, and already in 1108, for example, a Flemish cleric wrote a letter asking Germans to come to the aid of this land and very specifically said, "follow the example of your brothers from Gaul...", the French who went to Jerusalem to liberate Jerusalem, "...and come here to liberate this land". So already, pre-Crusade, there is justification that is very, very similar, that the pagans are killing Christians in particularly cruel ways. They talk about disemboweling Christians and sort of very gruesome images in this letter.

[Melvyn Bragg] You can be gruesome, it's all right....[laughter]

[Nora Berend] And so there's this sense of the pagans attacking Christians and needing to help Christian brothers. Another

[Melvyn Bragg] Can I just say something? Excuse me. This is the same date as the Second Crusade goes to Jerusalem?

[Nora Berend] No, this is before. This is 1108 - crusading to Jerusalem already existed...

[Melvyn Bragg] But officially the Baltic Crusade ...wasn't it the same date as the Second Crusade?

[Nora Berend] That is 1147.

[Melvyn Bragg] So that's what I wanted to get a number. Why did they go in 1147?

[Nora Berend] Well, I just wanted to show the continuity a little bit. But then in the Second Crusade, this trend continues of helping Christians who are there. Also, there is this idea of conversion, which is fairly novel in the sense of actually tying the cause of the Crusade very specifically to converting the local populations. This is where this "convert or exterminate" comes in that Martin mentioned from Bernard of Clairvaux. But then there's another kind of borrowing, if you like, from the Holy Land Crusades in that by the very early 13th century, Livonia is seen as the land of the Virgin Mary. And Bishop Albert of Riga writes to Pope Innocent III asking him to "not ...abandon the land of the Mother when he cares for the land of the Son". So what we have here is saying that Jerusalem, the Holy Land, is the patrimony of Christ and Livonia is the patrimony of the Virgin Mary, his mother. So there is a kind of complete invention, if you like - there's absolutely, of course, no historical background to placing the Virgin Mary in Livonia. And of course, initially there were no holy sites, there were no places of

pilgrimage in the Baltic, unlike in the Holy Land. So they're trying to make up, in a sense, for that deficit.

[Melvyn Bragg] We have this Bernard of Clairvaux who keeps coming up. He was a fearsome figure, persecutor of heretics in Paris and all over France as well. But how did he (sorry to use a demotic term) ... "get away with" convincing people that killing pagans didn't matter?

[Nora Berend] Well he was not the first one...

[Melvyn Bragg] Yes, but let's stick with him...?

[Nora Berend] Yes, but in order to explain him, I think one really must put him in context...

[Melvyn Bragg] All right.

[Nora Berend] The Catholic Church, by the time of Bernard of Clairvaux in the 12th century was very much espousing violence in certain cases. So the right kind of violence was actually meritorious. And we have many sources from all over Europe, even extolling taking booty as a sign of divine favor - killing people and taking their possessions as a sign that God was on your side. So Bernard of Cleveraux did not come out of the blue. He very much was building on this existing tradition. Also, I think what is important is the interaction between local players and central players like Bernard and the Pope. In other words, people on the ground, people who were actually waging war for quite a while already in the Baltic, various Germans, there were also German merchants who had interests, long standing interests, were the intermediaries, who were basically appealing to Bernard and the Pope to espouse their cause. So it wasn't Bernard trying to convince people. There were people already on the ground who were very happy to do this, so to speak, and they just received the justification in this way.

[Melvyn Bragg] Yeah. Thank you. Very sorry, I rushed you. You're quite right to go back. I was quite wrong to rush. Right, Martin, the Teutonic Knights were established in Jerusalem, ... because of their work in Jerusalem, and they went out to help the German speaking pilgrims on their way to Jerusalem. That's how they began. How did they become part of the Baltic crusades? And can we revert, having heard what you said, can we revert to the idea of what is really going on there? How did they get part of it? In the beginning of the 13th century or so, they became part of the Baltic...

[Martin Palmer] They do they emerge out of the hospital for Germans in Jerusalem. Jerusalem is lost then 1187 to Saladin. They move to Acre and there they set up another hospital, and in 1199, they are given permission to become an order. And almost immediately, they are being recruited as essentially a religiously motivated mercenary group to go and fight, for example, for King Andrew in Hungary, and they help defend his kingdom. And then they're drawn up into the north and they're given... the Pope issues a bull in 1221...

[Note: The dates in this part of the podcast have been corrected to be 13th century not 14th century as related in the podcast]

...that says "go north". [In about 1226]... he says, "Actually take Prussia - I give you Prussia". Frederick II, the Holy Roman Emperor, issues his own bull, which is completely unconventional in 1225, and says, "Go north, go north". And the main reason, frankly, was that it was now extremely difficult to go crusading in the Holy Land. You'd taken your vow, you'd got all the tax relief that you got if you went on pilgrimage and if you were a German or a Dane, or indeed English, it was a jolly sight easier to go to the Baltic on crusade than it was to go all the way to the Holy Land. And you were far more likely to get land and a fiefdom, though for the Teutonic Knights, of course, they were monastic and therefore there was no claiming land for your family. You took it for the Order and initially they were offered all the land that they conquered. Later, as bishops begin to move in and parishes are established, the bishops actually say, "we need a bit of funding too", and they get one third of the land taken. But also, they are not the first. There were already, Nora's already referred to Albert and Riga, and the bishops there appealing for help. There were a horrendous crowd called the "Sword Brothers", who were founded round about 1200, and they just were thugs of the most appalling kind.

[Melvyn Bragg] Are they a German speaking...?

[16:38]

[Martin Palmer] They were a German speaking group as well. They were brought in to defend the bishopric that had been established. There was another group that was down in what's called Old Prussia, which were even worse. And they were so bad that eventually the Pope said, we're going to dissolve this order. It was like a Wild West frontier, in a sense, and give responsibility for a military, monastic, religious crusade to the Teutonic Knights. And they move eventually, in 1309, they move their headquarters from Venice, which they'd gone to after the fall of Acre in 1291, to Marienberg, picking up, exactly, as Nora said, on this notion that this was the Virgin Mary's Land.

[Melvyn Bragg] Aleks, before we go any further with the Teutonic Knights, which for many people seems to be a strange, not contradiction, but conflation - they follow the strict life of monks, we're told, they're chaste, they pray, and at the same time, they're fearsome warriors. And they come from being mainly or centrally, an aristocratic background. Can you give us some idea of the well, I sketch it a little, but you tell us more about that,

[Aleks Pluskowski] About the Teutonic Order's composition?

[Melvyn Bragg] Yeah.

[17:45]

[Aleks Pluskowski] Well, yes, they're recruited from aristocratic families, mostly in the eastern parts of the Holy Roman Empire, German speaking regions, and you join a military order as a crusader. So they are institutions dedicated to the promotion of Christian holy war at the time, very much based on the model of the Templars and something that the Hospitalers also followed, and various other smaller military orders. They are directly obedient to the papacy, so, if anything, they are the fighting arm of the papacy and the lands that were conquered in the eastern Baltic were held as papal thieves.

[Melvyn Bragg] It just seems an odd yoking, doesn't it? You're praying massively, you're following the rules of the monastic order in which you find yourself, and then you go out, put on full armor, jump on a horse and charge into battle...

[Aleks Pluskowski] No, of course. But as we've heard, the violence has a role within Christian ideology at this time, and especially within crusading ideology. And fighting is something that is built into the lifestyle of the military orders. So you pray, you fast, but you fight as well, and you practice fighting. And the idea behind these institutions was to create a permanent garrison in areas where Christendom had expanded, because most crusaders will go home after completing their period of penitential warfare. And this leaves a security issue for territories that have been conquered, or "recovered" from the Christian point of view. So you have military orders providing permanent garrisons, which is why they became so popularly used around the frontiers of Europe, including, for example, Iberia, Transylvania, as we've heard.

[Melvyn Bragg] So they operated across all these regions. They seem to have been very effective?

[Aleks Pluskowski] Yes, incredibly. They had amazing reputations as fighters. They were probably the most impressive professional mercenaries is the term that's been used.

[Melvyn Bragg] Nora, when does the crusade idea, ...degenerate or transform itself into a feeling of "total war", and at the same time, normal life seems to be not only going on, but getting better in some ways with the Hanseatic League being formed? Can you sort of unpick that?

[19:56]

[Nora Berend] First of all, I would not talk about the degeneration of the Crusade. The Crusade, from the very beginning, had this idea of warfare and killing, and so I wouldn't call that degeneration of the ideal. And it wasn't "total war" in the sense that on the ground you had all sorts of interaction. Certainly you find a lot of chronicle accounts saying things like, "the snow turned red with the blood in a battle", so many people were killed. You have accounts of people being massacred so you could get this sense of a total war. But then at the same time, there was trade going on. For example, the Teutonic Order we have just heard about was partly financing its own wars in the Baltic region through trade with Lithuania. And they had trade treaties where Lithuanian merchants and merchants from the Teutonic [Order's state] could cross, even though these two states were in war. There were also cross-cutting alliances, so it was not necessarily Christians fighting against pagans. Aleks already mentioned that there were internal wars between these tribes there. So ... the Letts, for example, then try to side with the Teutonic Order against the Estonians. Also, the town of Riga at one point was in alliance with the pagan Lithuanians against the Teutonic Order. So when you start looking at all this complexity, there is a kind of level of ideology declaring Christian war, which may even sound like total war on the ground you have the complexity of interaction of trade and alliances, which do not really necessarily follow Christian versus pagan.

[Melvyn Bragg] Is there any sense out of this complexity that you can get an idea that, steadily or unsteadily, ... more and more people are being (in heavy inverted commas) "converted" or forced to be Christians?

[Nora Berend] Yes, and certainly if you look at the very long term outcome, you can say...

[Melvyn Bragg] What's very long term?

[Nora Berend] Several centuries... That the outcome is conversion. Christianization. At the time, there were various accounts we have complaints against the Teutonic Order saying that they're not doing their job well enough in terms of converting people. There are other accounts which actually claim kind-of forced conversion. There are accounts from missionaries thinking that they managed to convert, but the minute they turn their back, the population just kind-of shrugs off Christianity. We have accounts in the early period of people washing themselves in the river, in their local river, to wash away baptism. So they do a kind of "unbaptism" to return to their previous customs. So, yes, there is Christianization and conversion to Christianity, but it stops and starts again, and it's only successful in the very long term.

[Melvyn Bragg] Martin Palmer, what written records do we have [from] the Baltic people? Maybe part of [the crusades or] slightly before [them]. You said very emphatically at the beginning when I [asked] what was really going on, you said "money". And what happened? ... Trade began with stuff the Baltic had which [others] wanted in Europe: timber, fur, grain, salted cod, herring - bulk stuff. [Settlers] came over and built up the Hanseatic League to that area to begin to rival the Mediterranean, in a way. So let's go back to money. ... We've talked about crusades, we've talked about ideology, we know that Christianity is in a tight spot, as you said from the beginning, but is there a sense that we're talking about land grabs? Can you just go in that rather coarse, secular, capitalist direction, and see how far it takes us?

[23:30]

[Martin Palmer] Happily! One of the earliest accounts we have is from the 11th century by Adam of Bremen, and I think he sums up in one sentence both the plurality, the complexity of the situation. He says "Men cared as much for fur as they did for the salvation of their souls". And I think that dialectic, as it were, between the material and the spiritual world, which he's writing about towards the end of the 11th century, just flows right the way through. And, as Nora said and as Alex has indicated, there was this extraordinary amount of trade going on, there were compromises. There was also a great deal of confusion ... [for example in, the already referenced,] First Crusade in 1147, the first city they go to, Stettin, was already a Christian city! And in fact, the bishop kind-of got up on the walls with lots of crosses and said, "Sorry, chaps, wrong place, wrong time, go away". So there was this sort of sense...

[Melvyn Bragg] Those are his very words? It's in the written record?

[Martin Palmer] It is in the written record. We have two really fundamental records. One written around about 1230 by Henry the priest in Livonia, who was very much, as Nora saying, was saying, "look, we've got to preach to these people. We've got to be pastors to them, not slaughter them. If they rise up, fair enough, kill them. But if they

don't, be kind to them". Then we have this extraordinary book called the "Livonian Rhyming Chronicle", written almost certainly by a Teutonic knight, we don't know who. And in this rather nice rhyming way, he talks about how wonderful it is to slaughter pagans. He also praises them for being noble warriors, but he has no qualms about wiping them out. He basically portrays the Mother of God, the Virgin Mary, as a war goddess and these are almost sacrifices to her. But then at the same time, you've got the trade opening up. And one of the wonderful little bits is that the island of Gotland, off Sweden, it begins to develop round about 1220, a major trade in carved fonts, which they export to the new Christian communities on the south coast of the Baltic, because it's a good trade. But they're also trading with Novgorod with the Russians. And there is this very interesting difference, too. The Russians missionize their area, not with crusades (they have a completely different theology about war) but ...[with] sort-of eccentric mystics who go off into the forest and have mystical experiences and form a little hut and people gather around them. So you've got these two very different spiritual traditions. But actually, in terms of trade, Novgorod and Gotland and Luebeck are these enormous trading emporiums. Of course, London joins in with the Hanseatic League - where Cannon Street Station is now...was their fortified area. So you've got this....both...a love for fur and a love for the salvation of their souls.

[Melvyn Bragg] Aleks?

[Aleks Pluskowski] Could I just jump in and reinforce what's been said, that I think in the 13th century we can characterize the Baltic region as having a war economy where crusading and commerce are entangled completely. And you have merchants accompanying crusaders participating in crusade, funding crusade, while opening up new markets and taking advantage of ...

[Melvyn Bragg] What we're interested in is - I mean, what you're saying is fascinating - but can you unpick? Are the merchants driving the crusaders or the crusaders driving the merchants?

[26:46]

[Aleks Pluskowski] Difficult to unpick. No, because in some cases we're talking about the same kinship groups. Your brother may be in the military order and you may be a merchant, and you're both following the same path, but in different trajectories.

[Melvyn Bragg] Can we bring in ... Poland and then Russia? What part did they play? We've had an intricate contribution from Nora. What are Poland and Russia doing there?

[Aleks Pluskowski] Well, the kingdom of Poland is really where everything starts with a Prussian Crusade, because Duke Konrad of Masovia invites the Teutonic Order in the first place to secure his frontier. And then, following a short internal civil war within Poland, the Poles actually join the Crusade and participate in taking Prussian territory. Of course, the Teutonic order ends up actually laying claim to all of this territory...

[Melvyn Bragg] And all of Prussia?

[Aleks Pluskowski] And all of Prussia subsequently in the conquest so they frustrate the territorial ambitions of the Masovian dukes of what emerges as the Kingdom of

Poland and this creates a level of antagonism that persists into the later medieval period. In the case of Russia, we are dealing with a frontier between what becomes western Catholic states that are created as a result of the Crusades and Eastern Orthodox states based on the principalities of Novgorod and Pskov at this time. And this becomes more or less a fixed frontier because the Teutonic Order try to launch crusades in the 1240s into this region and are defeated by Alexander Nevsky at Novgorod. And then subsequently we don't have any efforts to really attack Russian territories until the end of the 15th, early 16th century when crusading bulls are sought again by the Livonian master to do so.

[Melvyn Bragg] The defeat in Nevsky, that's the great charge across the ice by the Teutonic knights?

[Aleks Pluskowski] Yes.

[Melvyn Bragg] Nora?

[28:44]

[Nora Berend] Could I come in on this? I mean, just to add to that a little bit. There were also commercial rivalries between Novgorod and these western merchants, so they were interested in partly the same territories. And that's why also why potentially this crusade was launched against the Rus. But I think in terms of whether Alexander Nevsky really had this big victory, scholarship is a bit more divided because Alexander rose to power and stayed in power with Mongol backing. He was an ally of the Mongols, and after his death, the life that was written about him, which is our source, tried to turn him into this hero. And it seems that this text really presented this western danger as much more serious than it in fact was. So it kind of attributes to Alexander this fantastic victory on the ice. The same Livonian Rhymed Chronicle that was already mentioned suggests that there were only about 20 knights, so it may not have been a huge battle.

[Melvyn Bragg] On the other hand, the chronicle might be wrong? It might be only one of the chronicles... It's intriguing to me that when you have that degree of warfare and the knights sailing in and people sailing, there's a feeling that there should be blight on the land and things should be expunged and so on. Instead of which, there's growth going on, heavy growth at the same time. Is there a key reason for that?

[Nora Berend] It's the mercantile commercial growth. ... And the merchants were already there before the crusades, as Alex said, they sort-of participated in the Crusade. The town of Riga is very interesting in this respect. So ... there is already some kind of trading port there before the Crusades. Then Albert turns this into the seat of the bishopric. So this new bishopric that is possible because of the conquest, the Christian conquest of this land, and the same town 80 years later, in the 13th century, becomes part of the Hanseatic League. So you can really see how this movement, settlement, conquest, and trading interest is very much intertwined.

[Melvyn Bragg] Martin Palmer?

[Martin Palmer] I think what's also important, [is that] the teutonic element, is also in the merchants. So what we're dealing with is not just German aristocracy in terms of

the military, but then you have the merchant classes coming in from the German speaking areas, and they predominate, which is why Prussia becomes a German speaking zone right up until the present day. So you have a kind of kinship, exactly as Aleks said, ... between the aristocrats and the merchants. Then you have this movement of, really the workers, coming out of the lowlands, the Netherlands, Belgium, North France, due to the huge population explosion that takes place in the 12th and 13th centuries.

[Melvyn Bragg] Artisans?

[Martin Palmer] Artisans. And so the ethnic mix of those areas is radically transformed. It's not just an occupying force, as it were, but you've actually shifted the balance of populations in favor of those who come from Christian lands and come with German, particularly as

[Melvyn Bragg] And immigration has transformed the economy?

[Martin Palmer] Very much so. Contemporary, isn't it?

[Melvyn Bragg] No, we're not allowed to be contemporary! [laughter] ... Aleks, which cultures were ... more resistant to the Crusaders than others, these so called pagan cultures?

[32:04]

[Aleks Pluskowski] Well, generally speaking, we have sort of widespread resistance across the whole region, but it's relatively small scale, and it fails. The ones who seem to be the most effective unite on a broad regional basis of the Estonians, who rise up again in the mid 14th century in the famous St. George's Night uprising and is defeated by the ...

[Melvyn Bragg] Why is it famous?

[Aleks Pluskowski] It's famous because it is after almost a century of the conquest being completed, and the province of Estonia is part of Denmark, the Danish crown. And you think that everything would have been settled at this point in terms of political unrest and religious unrest, but then you have this massive organized Estonian uprising that attacks Christianity specifically, but also, of course, the Danish and German colonists, or rather, by this point, we're talking about later generations. And it's unprecedented in terms of its scale, but it is suppressed, and at that point, the Teutonic Order buy Estonia from the Danish crown. But in terms of resilience, cultural resilience, we see it mostly among rural communities, indigenous rural communities. They're at the edges of control in terms of a new Christian regime. So that is where we see pre-Christian practices surviving old habits, old customs...

[Melvyn Bragg] Surviving until when?

[Aleks Pluskowski] We can talk about the 16th century, 17th century. In Estonia, we can talk about the 18th, even early 19th century, certain practices such as funerary rites continuing into that time. So a really long duray of pre Christian practices.

[Melvyn Bragg] Nora, was there any prospect of the crusaders moving into Russia, into Rus?

[33:41]

[Nora Berend] Well, we already talked about this a little bit. There was in the 1230s, 1237, there was a call for a Crusade. But whether we see the two victories, against the Swedes and against the Teutonic Order, by Alexander Nevsky as great victories or not, certainly there was no real attempt then for centuries to really go there crusading. And because Rus was then under Mongol vassalage, there was a strong military power there. This kind of society was very different from the tribal Baltic peoples, where internal fights and so on could be exploited by the crusaders. So after this very short, brief period, for centuries.. there was no real crusaders [going to Rus].

[Melvyn Bragg] ...Because they were too strong to take on?

[Nora Berend] Well, there was also kind-of quite a lot to do in the conquered lands already. I don't think we mentioned it, [but] the Teutonic Order actually built a state, created a state, in Prussia, which was one of the most efficient and modern states at the time. The Hanseatic League that you mentioned started exploiting the local economy, taking grain from Mecklenburg, Pomerania to Western Europe, so it became one of the kind of main grain producing areas. So this, in a sense, was a fairly successful venture as it was. There was no real point [in needing to have a crusade to Rus].

[Melvyn Bragg] Aleks?

[35:15]

[Aleks Pluskowski] It's just worth mentioning that the Teutonic Order's own propagandists pitch [was that] the Teutonic Order's presence there during this time [was for] providing security for Christendom, against Russian territories, against Eastern Orthodoxy and against pagan Lithuania. So this is a justification for having these territories in the same way that the Hospitalers are providing that defense in the Eastern Mediterranean at the end of the 13th century. So you have these two frontiers of Christendom and this is how the Teutonic Order basically justify the exploitation of the conquered territories - as providing security against these neighboring hostile powers.

[Melvyn Bragg] From what I've read, it's that battle across the ice where the Teutonic Order began to lose their power. They began to lose their power. Was it because of that or is it around that time? You're shaking your head...

[Nora Berend] No, it was much later. I mean, they started really losing their power because they confronted Poland-Lithuania, as you said, they kept using this justification of fighting against the pagan Lithuanians. But in the meantime, the Lithuanians converted to Christianity in 1386 and had a dynastic union with Poland. And there was even a court battle at the papal court between Poland and the Teutonic Order over whether or not the Teutonic Order still kind-of had a right to be fighting. But more importantly, they were defeated in 1410 at the Battle of Tannenberg or Gruenwald. And after that, I mean, it still took about a century and a half, two centuries

for the Prussian Teutonic State to disintegrate, but that was the major turning point. And it was the military might of Poland-Lithuania, that led to that.

[Melvyn Bragg] And so did we see a steep decline in the power of the Teutonic Knights?

[Nora Berend] Yes. I mean, they lost territories. They even had to move their headquarters and then basically in the early 16th century, the rest of it secularized and then eventually became part of Germany.

[Melvyn Bragg] Martin, did the Church have second thoughts about what its crusade was bringing about in these Baltic lands?

[37:13]

[Martin Palmer] Well, it had second thoughts, particularly, as Nora said, because the major enemy, Lithuania, converted, notionally, and joined Poland and created this Commonwealth, or joint kingdom of Lithuania and Poland in 1387. And that took away a lot of the justification. But then you have the Council of Constance, which takes place between 1414 and 1418, which was an attempt to deal with a schism within the Papacy - to start with, you had two popes and so forth. [It] was also an attempt to do a reformation kind-of 100 years before the Reformation takes off itself. And issues that had been long simmering were brought to the fore. And one of these was that Poland came to the Council in 1415, denounced the Teutonic Knights as attacking Christians, as having failed to actually preach or to convert properly, as having seized lands illegally, at having basically become only interested in gain. And they [the Teutonic Knights] put up a spirited defence based on the theology that had been espoused in the papal bulls and then the bull of Frederick II, which was, "these pagans have to be defeated. They're a threat to us". But from that date on, in a sense, the theological ground for their position has been undermined. And [the Council of Constance is] only four to five years after the Battle of Tannenberg, where [the Teutonic Order's] military might has been undermined. And in a sense, they kind of go into a sort of, "okay, let's hold on to what we've got", and [they] kind of go a little bit more quiescent. They join in various wars, but they are, at that point, theologically they just squeak through, but they know they're under threat.

[Melvyn Bragg] Aleks, how did the Crusades affect the map of Europe? Can you tell our listeners, after a couple hundred years or so, is the map of Europe radically different?

[38:56]

[Aleks Pluskowski] They created basically the modern border or the roughly modern border area between Estonia, Latvia and Russia, and also northern Lithuania and southern Latvia. In Prussia, it was a little different because you have major political shifts in the post medieval period with the expansion of the Kingdom of Prussia and then, of course, what happens afterwards with the Yalta agreement in 1945, where you have Prussia being dissolved and separated between Lithuania, Russia and Poland, so there the geographical boundaries have shifted dramatically. Having said that, you have a German heritage, a legacy that lasted for almost 800 years in that region, and as we've already heard, a German speaking culture dominated from the 13th century.

[Melvyn Bragg] Would you like to add to the consequences, Nora?

[39:47]

[Nora Berend] I think the shorter term consequences actually led to the development of a pagan state in Europe, which is quite interesting, that is Lithuania. [Lithuania] became a united realm and created, probably on the model of Christianity, a kind of pagan religion that was much more centralized. Although that was short lived, I think that's still an interesting consequence. Longer term, I agree, it's basically Germanization, new political structures, Christianization and sort of becoming part of Europe that was the most important.

[Melvyn Bragg] Martin, you started with very graphic and convincing statement that Christianity was under threat from the Vikings, from the Muslim threat in the South, .. and so on after this. Has it survived the threat? Is it stronger because of this?

[40:35]

[Martin Palmer] Much stronger. It's also exactly as Aleks said, it's kind-of set the boundaries of how far Christendom can go when it butts up against Russian Orthodoxy, but it's also given Christendom a sense of its own integrity. And it has also confronted head-on this idea that you can use military force for religious purposes, including the execution of kings who were captured and so forth. And that really sows the seeds for a radical reassessment of Christianity that comes up in the Reformation. It's fascinating. The Teutonic Knights end effectively as a force, as a governing force, because the Grand Master of the Teutonic Knights converts to Lutheranism in 1525, and so you can't have monks in Lutheranism, so you have a huge shift away from the medieval Catholic model because, frankly, it's beginning to creak.

[Melvyn Bragg] Well, thank you all very much. Nora Berend, Martin Palmer and Aleks Pluskowski.

And the In Our Time podcast gets some extra time now with a few minutes of bonus material from Melvyn and his guests.

[41:55]

[Melvyn Bragg] So what did we miss out?

[Martin Palmer] I think the English dimension. We didn't touch on the English as major missionaries into that area from the 8th, 9th, 10th century. So the patron saint of Finland ...

[Melvyn Bragg] From the northeast?

[Martin Palmer] Yes, ... well, not just from the northeast. I know you have a particular bent towards that, Melvyn, but ...

[Melvyn Bragg] ...or from the northwest...

[Martin Palmer] Exactly. But Henry the Englishman is martyred in about 1147 in Finland and is the patron saint of Finland to this day. You also have still a very close link between Canterbury and the churches in Norway and Sweden, Denmark, not so much Finland. And then, of course, you have Henry Bollingbrook in 1139, who later goes on to become, of course, Henry IV, as actually goes, crusading. But, Alex, you know far more about that than I do...

[Aleks Pluskowski] You have lots of participation from English knights in the Baltic Crusades. One thing we didn't talk about was that after Prussia and the region known as Livonia become these fixed Christian polities under the control of the Teutonic Order and bishops. We then have a century of warfare, of ongoing crusading against Lithuania, which includes knights from all over Europe who participate, who go there to fight alongside the Teutonic Order. And there are many English knights who participate, and many of them die out there. Many of them are financially ruined. But Henry IV, before he is Henry IV, is probably the most famous and reaches Vilnius with a huge contingent of English archers before attempting to go down to Jerusalem. So it's this crusading ideal that lives on. But, yeah, the English component is very interesting. And we have lots of English merchants present as well. In fact, in Gdansk, German Danzig, we have a whole English merchant quarter that's established because of the trading connections.

[Nora Berend] I think the multiplicity of the people who participated, not just the English, but we didn't really talk about the Scandinavians, the Danes. Voldemort, the Danish king was quite an important crusader, the Swedes, and also the rivalries between these different groups, that's kind of one thing. And the other one, I think, is this Lithuanian aspect, which I find very interesting. The Lithuanians developed a fantastic diplomatic procedure to deal with the Christians, so they kept promising baptism at crucial moments when it seemed that they were going to be defeated in war. And one of these, in the early 14th century [Note: 1351], Kęstutis, who was then the Duke of Lithuania [Duke of Trakai - western Lithuania], took this oath, which is probably kind of a traditional Lithuanian oath, cutting a dog to pieces and smearing the blood on oneself, saying that if one does not actually fulfill the oath, this should be the fate of the oathbreaker. And this made such an impression on the Europeans that even Petrarch heard about this and wrote about it eventually. [Note: Kęstutis betrayed his oath.]

[Martin Palmer] You mentioned going and washing off baptism. There is a very famous story of a German bishop who converts a tribe somewhere up in old Prussia, and as was the tradition, blesses an entire river. And the chieftain leads the tribe through, and they come out Christians the other side, and they're having a grand banquet in the evening, and they're into their cups, and the chieftain leans towards the bishop and says, "it's fantastic, this. We're Christians are going to go to heaven. I shall see all my old friends, my battle warrior friends". And the bishop, huge diplomatic mess, goes, "no, they're not Christians, they're down in hell". So the chieftain goes, "Wait a minute. You mean they're there and I would be up there? Okay". He gets up and he drives the entire tribe back through the river and out the other side as pagans because he'd rather be with his ancestors than he would be with the bishop.

[Melvyn Bragg] Is that true?

[Martin Palmer] Well, it's a good story. I think it has elements of truth in it, let's put it that way.

[Melvyn Bragg] If it's true, it's terrific. If it isn't, it's still a good story.

[Aleks Pluskowski] I think it's also worth talking about the pragmatism of Teutonic Order. We've heard a lot about the sort of ideological confrontation between paganism and Christianity. But just to give you one example, in southern what is today southern Latvia, in the region of Couronia [?], we have commanders of the Convent of Goldingen, which is Kuldiga today, tolerating cremation practices among the local indigenous aristocracy and hunting in sacred woods, which in a pre Christian context is a continuation of local beliefs. And the commanders of the Teutonic Order actively tolerate this. This is something that would be otherwise unheard of within a core orthodox part of Europe, if we're talking about the Christian mainstream. So the Teutonic Order seemed to also be very pragmatic when dealing with local people.
