

AGAINST LITHUANIA

The Teutonic Knights began to direct their campaigns against pagan Lithuania (see Lithuanian mythology), especially after the fall of the Kingdom of Jerusalem at Acre in 1291. The knights moved their headquarters to Venice, from which they planned the recovery of Outremer^[21] Because "Lithuania Propria" remained non-Christian until the end of the 14th century, much later than the rest of eastern Europe, many knights from western European countries, such as England and France, journeyed to Prussia to participate in the seasonal campaigns (reyse) against the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Some of them campaigned against pagans to obtain remission for their sins, while others fought to gain military experience.

Warfare between the Order and the Lithuanians was especially brutal. Non-Christians were seen as lacking rights possessed by Christians. Because enslavement of non-Christians was seen as acceptable at the time and the subdued native Prussians demanded land or payment, the Knights often used captured pagan Lithuanians for forced labor. The contemporary Austrian poet Peter Suchenwirt described treatment he witnessed of pagans by the Knights:

Women and children were taken captive; What a jolly medley could be seen: Many a woman could be seen, Two children tied to her body, One behind and one in front; On a horse without spurs Barefoot had they ridden here; The heathens were made to suffer: Many were captured and in every case, Were their hands tied together They were led off, all tied up — Just like hunting dogs.^[22]

It was a total war in every sense of the word, lasting over 200 years, with its front line along both banks of the Neman River, with as many as twenty forts and castles between Seredžius and Jurbarkas alone, creating an absolutely desolated wasteland. This struggle was so deeply etched into Lithuanian culture and mentality that even now it is a prominent source of national pride and self-identity.

21.Christiansen, p. 150

22.Jump up ^ Sainty, Guy Stair. "The Teutonic Order of Holy Mary in Jerusalem". Chivalric Orders. Retrieved 6 June 2006.