

HEIGHT OF POWER

In 1337, Emperor Louis IV allegedly granted the Order the imperial privilege to conquer all Lithuania and Russia. During the reign of Grand Master Winrich von Kniprode (1351–1382), the Order reached the peak of its international prestige and hosted numerous European crusaders and nobility.

King Albert of Sweden ceded Gotland to the Order as a pledge (similar to a fiefdom), with the understanding that they would eliminate the pirating Victual Brothers from this strategic island base in the Baltic Sea. An invasion force under Grand Master Konrad von Jungingen conquered the island in 1398 and drove the Victual Brothers out of Gotland and the Baltic Sea.

In 1386, Grand Duke Jogaila of Lithuania was baptised into Christianity and married Queen Jadwiga of Poland, taking the name Władysław II Jagiełło and becoming King of Poland. This created a personal union between the two countries and a potentially formidable opponent for the Teutonic Knights. The Order initially managed to play Jagiello and his cousin Vytautas against each other, but this strategy failed when Vytautas began to suspect that the Order was planning to annex parts of his territory.

The baptism of Jagiello began the official conversion of Lithuania to Christianity. Although the crusading rationale for the Order's state ended when Prussia and Lithuania had become officially Christian, the Order's feuds and wars with Lithuania and Poland continued. The Lizard Union was created in 1397 by Prussian nobles in Culmerland to oppose the Order's policy.

In 1407, the Teutonic Order reached its greatest territorial extent and included the lands of Prussia, Pomerelia, Samogitia, Courland, Livonia, Estonia, Gotland, Dagö, Ösel, and the Neumark, pawned by Brandenburg in 1402.