DECLINE

In 1410, at the Battle of Grunwald (German: Schlacht bei Tannenberg) — known in Lithuanian as the Battle of Žalgiris — a combined Polish-Lithuanian army, led by Vytautas and Jogaila, decisively defeated the Order in the Polish-Lithuanian-Teutonic War. Grand Master Ulrich von Jungingen and most of the Order's higher dignitaries fell on the battlefield (50 out of 60). The Polish-Lithuanian army then besieged the capital of the Order, Marienburg, but was unable to take it owing to the resistance of Heinrich von Plauen. When the First Peace of Thorn was signed in 1411, the Order managed to retain essentially all of its territories, although the Knights' reputation as invincible warriors was irreparably damaged.

While Poland and Lithuania were growing in power, that of the Teutonic Knights dwindled through infighting. They were forced to impose high taxes to pay a substantial indemnity but did not give the cities sufficient requested representation in the administration of their state. The authoritarian and reforming Grand Master Heinrich von Plauen was forced from power and replaced by Michael Küchmeister von Sternberg, but the new Grand Master was unable to revive the Order's fortunes. After the Gollub War the Knights lost some small border regions and renounced all claims to Samogitia in the 1422 Treaty of Melno. Austrian and Bavarian knights feuded with those from the Rhineland, who likewise bickered with Low German-speaking Saxons, from whose ranks the Grand Master was usually chosen. The western Prussian lands of the Vistula River Valley and the Brandenburg Neumark were ravaged by the Hussites during the Hussite Wars.[25] Some Teutonic Knights were sent to battle the invaders, but were defeated by the Bohemian infantry. The Knights also sustained a defeat in the Polish-Teutonic War (1431-1435).

In 1454, the Prussian Confederation, consisting of the gentry and burghers of western Prussia, rose up against the Order, beginning the Thirteen Years' War. Much of Prussia was devastated in the war, during the course of which the Order returned Neumark to Brandenburg in 1455. In the Second Peace of Thorn (1466), the defeated Order recognized the Polish crown's rights over western Prussia (subsequently Royal Prussia) while retaining eastern Prussia under nominal Polish over lordship. Because Marienburg Castle was handed over to mercenaries in lieu of their pay, the Order moved its base to Königsberg in Sambia.

The Order was completely ousted from Prussia when Grand Master Albert of Brandenburg, after the Polish–Teutonic War (1519–1521), converted to Lutheranism in 1525, secularized the Order's remaining Prussian territories, and assumed from King Sigismund I the Old of Poland, his uncle, the hereditary rights to the Duchy of Prussia as a vassal of the Polish Crown in the Prussian Homage. The Protestant Duchy of Prussia was thus a fief of Catholic Poland.

Although it had lost control of all of its Prussian lands, the Teutonic Order retained its territories within the Holy Roman Empire and Livonia, although the Livonian branch retained considerable autonomy. Many of the Imperial possessions were ruined in the German Peasants' War from 1524 to 1525 and subsequently confiscated by Protestant territorial princes.[26] The Livonian territory was then partitioned by neighbouring powers during the

Livonian War; in 1561 the Livonian Master Gotthard Kettler secularized the southern Livonian possessions of the Order to create the Duchy of Courland, also a vassal of Poland.

After the loss of Prussia in 1525, the Teutonic Knights concentrated on their possessions in the Holy Roman Empire. Since they held no contiguous territory, they developed a three-tiered administrative system: holdings were combined into commanderies which were administered by a commander (Komtur). Several commanderies were combined to form a bailiwick headed by a Landkomtur. All of the Teutonic Knights' possessions were subordinate to the Grand Master whose seat was in Bad Mergentheim.

Castle of the Teutonic Order in Bad Mergentheim.

Altogether there were twelve German bailiwicks:

- Thuringia;
- Alden Biesen (in present-day Belgium);
- Hesse;
- Saxony;
- Westphalia;
- Franconia;
- Koblenz;
- Alsace-Burgundy;
- An der Etsch und im Gebirge (in Tyrol);
- Utrecht;
- Lorraine; and
- Austria.
- Outside of German areas were the bailiwicks of
- Sicily;
- Apulia;
- Lombardy;
- Bohemia;
- "Romania" (in Romania); and
- Armenia-Cyprus.

The Order gradually lost control of these holdings until, by 1810, only the bailiwicks in Tyrol and Austria remained.

Following the abdication of Albert of Brandenburg, Walter von Cronberg became Deutschmeister in 1527, and later Administrator of Prussia and Grand Master in 1530. Emperor Charles V combined the two positions in 1531, creating the title Hoch- und Deutschmeister, which also had the rank of Prince of the Empire.[27] A new Grand Magistery was established in Mergentheim in Württemberg, which was attacked during the German Peasants' War. The Order also helped Charles V against the Schmalkaldic League. After the Peace of Augsburg in 1555, membership in the Order was open to Protestants, although the majority of brothers remained Catholic.[28] The Teutonic Knights now were tri-denominational, and there were Catholic, Lutheran and Reformed bailiwicks.

The Grand Masters, often members of the great German families (and, after 1761, members of the House of Habsburg-Lorraine), continued to preside over the Order's considerable holdings in Germany. Teutonic Knights from Germany, Austria, and Bohemia were used as battlefield commanders leading mercenaries for the Habsburg Monarchy during the Ottoman wars in Europe. The military history of the Teutonic Knights ended in 1809, when Napoleon Bonaparte ordered their dissolution and the Order lost its remaining secular holdings to Napoleon's vassals and allies.
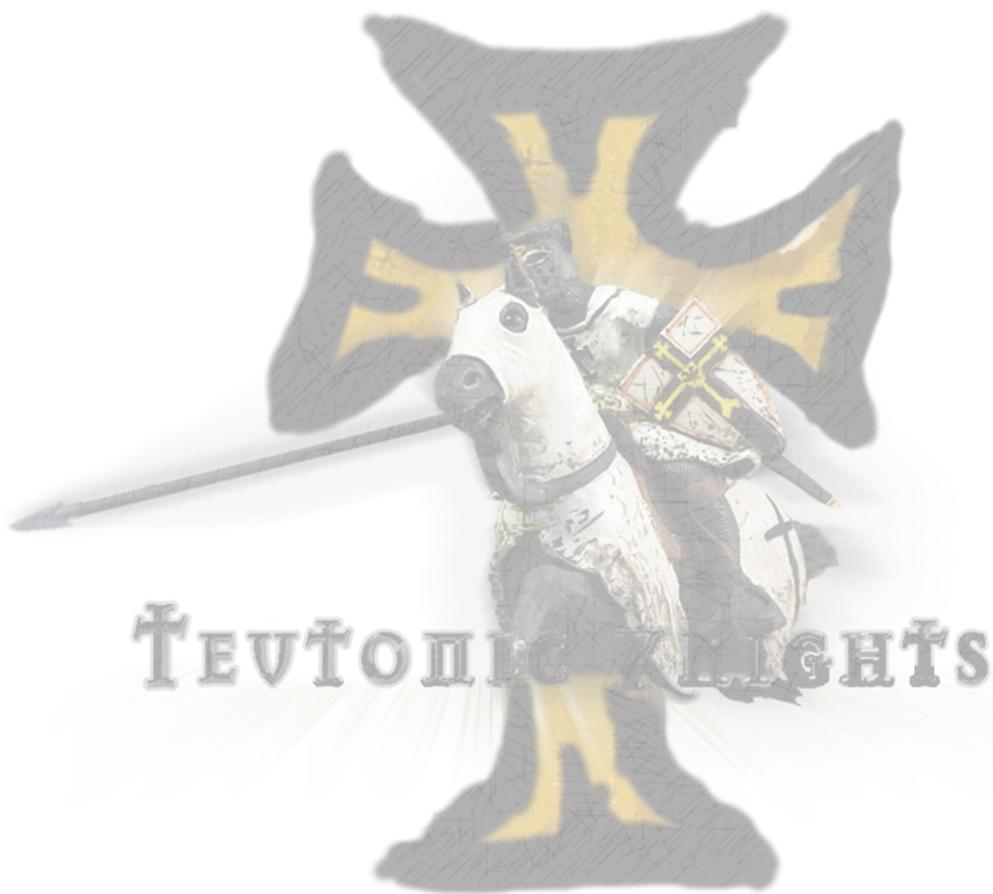
25.Westermann, p. 93

26.Jump up ^ Christiansen, p. 248

27.Seward, p. 137

28.Jump up ^ Urban, p. 276