

"Too Rich For A Duke,
Too Poor For a King"

Duke Jacob and the Colonial Empire of
Seventeenth Century Courland

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The title of this essay, "Too rich for a duke, too poor for a king," was thought to have first been said by King Charles X of Sweden, in grudging admiration of Jacob, the duke of the tiny state of Courland, which today is in the western part of Latvia. The Duchy, originally conceived of as an administrative section of Livonia, a decaying German colony on the eastern Baltic Sea coast, was never meant to be more than a dependency of Poland, the duchy's titular overlord. But as is often the case in Eastern Europe, little happened that was supposed to happen.

Eastern Europe is a land of constantly changing political reality, usually corresponding to the changings of power in the region. As a result, many people and places in Courland have several different names: a German one, a Latvian one, and in some cases, a Swedish, Polish, Russian, Lithuanian, Estonian, or other name. For example, the two main coastal cities of Courland have both German names (Windau and Libau) and Latvian names (Ventspils and Liepaja). Duke Jacob also went by the names James, Jekabs, and Jakob; Courland was known alternatively as Curonia, Kurland, Couronia, and Kurzeme.

To avoid confusion, one version is used throughout the report, usually the German one because this was a German colony and German was the language used by those in power in Courland.

The story of Duke Jacob's Courland illustrates what one extremely ambitious person can attempt and accomplish against the odds, boxed in as he was on all sides by the competing forces of Europe. From out of almost nothing, Duke Jacob created a small yet viable state at Eastern Europe's gateway to the West, one that even the great powers of Europe had to acknowledge and respect.

Section I. The History of Courland before Duke Jacob

For hundreds of years before its entry into the standard European historical time frame, the Baltic tribes -- the ancestors of today's Latvian and Lithuanian nations -- inhabited the area known as Courland. The native Balts cultivated amber (for jewelry and decorative purposes), timber,¹ and other goods considered valuable to the Western Europeans. This steady and reliable source of goods attracted outsiders; at first, the Vikings tried to find a suitable trading route to Byzantium using the various rivers there. Gradually, they were replaced with northern German merchants,² seeking more than convenient trade routes.

The city of Riga was founded by the German Archbishop Albert in the year 1201, and is considered by most historians of the subject to be the date that brought Latvia into the context of Europe.³ This settlement enabled German merchants to stay for longer durations -- they usually had been staying in Latvia for a few weeks at a time, often in summer -- and acted as a base for missionary work as well as military expansion throughout the western Baltic coast. Alarmed at the growing German influence, the Latvian peasants revolted; Archbishop Albert responded by inviting the German crusaders to pacify and Christianize the peasantry. By this time, the crusades in Palestine were becoming a losing proposition, and many Germans still had the zeal to die for the cross. These crusaders became known as, alternatively, the Teutonic or Livonian Order -- "Livonia" being the name given to the newly-conquered land, derived from the Livs, the first Baltic tribe to fall to the Germans -- and the "Knights of the Sword," because their costumes consisted of a white cloak with a red cross on the shoulders, and a sword⁴. After several decades of hard fighting, their work paid off; all of modern Latvia and Estonia, including Courland, fell to the Livonian Order, and were eventually incorporated into Livonia.

Livonia was a patch-work state of church lands and secular lands, much

like the contemporary Holy Roman Empire, with about as little central control. Added to this state of confusion was the Hanseatic League -- the trading network of cities in northern German and Scandinavia --in which Riga joined in the thirteenth century.⁵ Although no city in Courland itself ever became an important member of the League, the cities along Courland's coast grew and developed largely because of all the trading in the area.

The Germans' territorial expansion alarmed their neighbors, and these tensions brought about the Battle of Tannenberg in 1410. In this battle, the Kingdom of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania combined their forces and devastated the German knighthood's power, which never recovered. In 1462, after the Battle of Puck, the Poles effectively gained control of Livonia,⁶ although the Knights still had some control over their dominion.

Still more events doomed the Livonian Order. The Reformation, which began in 1524, almost immediately set the Knights against the archbishop of Riga; the two sides had rarely gotten along well, and the Reformation gave the Knights their excuse to rebel. The archbishop was the ruler of Livonia, personally owning large amounts of land there in the name of the church. The Knights secularized their order, became Luthern, and took direct control of Livonia for themselves, away from the church. Also, in the 1550's, Tsar Ivan

the Terrible of Russia invaded Livonia, hoping to gain access to the Baltic Sea. In the course of this action, he ravaged the Livonian countryside, sparking off a larger war with Sweden and Poland,⁷ and the three powers carved up Livonia among themselves, with Courland going to the Polish empire.

At this time, the last Master of the Livonian Order (the leader of the German knights), Gotthard Kettler, facing another invasion by Ivan the Terrible, as well as the growing discontent of the local aristocracy and peasantry, decided he his best chance for his nation's survival was to subjugate Livonia totally to Poland. At this time, Poland was very tolerant in religious matters, and was not as staunchly Catholic as it is today. Sweden probably would have limited the rights of the nobility and not allow as much autonomy as Poland, while Russia was seen as an primitive barbaric state. In 1561, Kettler dissolved the Order and accepted the rule and protection of the Polish throne.⁸ In return, he became the first Duke of Courland, which Poland allowed to have a large deal of independence, including self-government at the local level and a large deal of independent foreign policy. Before this time, Courland was just an administrative district in western Livonia. Courland's nobility, which were essentially kings to their private territorial holdings, did not like the new system. On top of selling out to Poland, a state that had a large number of Catholics in

the ruling class, the German nobility believed any strong central leader would at least attempt to limit their power. In order to gain the aristocracy's recognition as their duke, Kettler guaranteed their existing privileges;⁹ these rights lasted throughout the duchy's existence as a Polish vassal state.

II. The Early Life of Duke Jacob.

Into this strange state of affairs was born the future Duke Jacob Kettler, on October 28, 1610. His mother died shortly after his birth, and he was adopted by his uncle, Duke Frederick Kettler, who had succeeded his own father, Gotthard Kettler, after the eldest's death in 1587. Little is known about Jacob before his rise to the ducal throne -- he graduated from the University of Leipzig and traveled throughout Europe in order to learn about the West.¹⁰ During his travels, he met several powerful and famous Europeans who would later have much influence in shaping his economic policies, such as Charles I of England (who also happened to be his godfather), Frederick William (the future Great Elector of Brandenburg), and Cardinal Mazarin of France.¹¹

In 1638, Jacob became the Duke of Courland, but ruled in Duke Frederick's name since Frederick was getting old; Jacob was crowned "full

duke" once Frederick died in 1642.¹² The Courlander nobility were always suspicious of Duke Jacob -- Frederick and Gotthard Kettler were compromisers who preserved the nobles' rights, while Jacob corresponded with and even visited some of the great absolutists of his day. Jacob was very ambitious, as his plans for his duchy would reveal, and the nobility knew this. Since the nobility so jealously guarded their rights, Jacob never became as centralized and powerful a leader as other contemporary heads of state.

The duke had three main goals for Courland: "to increase the welfare of all classes, to westernize Courland, and to extend the power and prestige of the small Duchy of Courland beyond her narrow boundaries."¹³ Here, "Westernizing" means being more like the richer, and in the Baltic Germans' eyes, "civilized" nations of Western Europe, like England, France, and Holland. Russia (the "East") was considered to be a nation of Asiatic barbarians, and Duke Jacob wanted to place as much distance between Courland and Russia as possible. In order to achieve these objectives, he knew he had to develop Courland's few natural resources, starting with the most promising, forestry and agriculture. During his travels to Holland and Brandenburg, he noted local farming methods, including dairy farming and gardening, as well as better methods of cultivation. He brought these techniques back to Courland and

implemented them there. These reforms worked so well that Courland actually started to export a large surplus of dairy and animal products, including "grain, textiles, timber, tar, pitch, ropes, guns, muskets, glassware, hardware, ships and boats, brandy, beer, and amber jewelry."¹⁴

Before James came to power, Courland had virtually no industry; his major contribution in this field was to develop shipbuilding, a trade associated with Courland area for centuries. The Kuronians (or Kurs), an early tribe of Balts from whom Courland received its name (Courland = Kurland in German), actively roamed and raided the Baltic Sea area during the same time the Vikings and other Scandinavian tribes earned their reputations in Northern Europe.¹⁵ Jacob's main ship-building center was at the city of Windau (Ventspils to the Latvians) on the Baltic coast. The enterprise started off slowly -- only one ship was built each year from 1639-1642, but beginning in 1643, vessels were produced and sold abroad, especially to England and France.¹⁶ In the fifty years between 1638-1688, Courland constructed a total of 135 ships;¹⁷ most were built before 1658. According to seventeenth century economic principles, as much as possible had to be built in the state, not imported, so Jacob set up workshops to manufacture parts for his ships, like linen, tar, and even steel. Under the duke's guidance, these workshops sprang up all across Courland.

Duke Jacob appeared to be a powerful figure in Europe. His navy, which consisted of 44 armed men-of-war, 15 unarmed ships, 60 merchant ships, and a "large number" of smaller ships¹⁸ dwarfed that of many contemporary nations, such as France, Denmark, and Sweden. In 1658, the Duke's fleet was more than one-third the size of Oliver Cromwell's fleet, and over half the total of the Spanish Invincible Armada of 1588.¹⁹ Most of the Duke's sailors were Latvian peasants, while the Germans were usually the officers on the vessels.

However, in an age of nearly constant warfare, Jacob was a man of peace. Although the king of Poland formally was the highest authority, the Duke could choose sides in a war or be neutral. Even during the long Baltic struggle between Poland and Sweden, the Duke could (and usually did) declare neutrality. The Poles allowed the Duke to build up his navy only because they were too weak and divided to control him. Throughout the Duke's reign, the Polish kings tried to limit Courland's autonomy, but never succeeded because of the Duke's wealth, colonies and, most importantly, his international prestige that his wealth and colonies brought him. Other countries considered Courland's fleet a strong enough force that they needed to make treaties with the Duke; among them were England, France, Spain, Holland, Portugal, Denmark, Russia, Sweden, and Venice.²⁰ For example, the French, under King Louis XIV, in

Article 4 of their treaty of commerce with the Duke, granted Courland freedom of French seas in exchange for peaceful neutrality:

"The said Seigneur Duke of Kurland also promises not to assist the enemies of France with his vessels, nor to ship goods to them under pretext of the freedom of our seas hereby granted, but only to be used like the cities of Hamburg, Danzig, and other neutral places."²¹

France was not the only major European power desiring good relations with the Duke. England, too, wanted to maintain cordial ties, as is shown in letters from the Court of Westminster, dated August 10, 1654:

"It is our wish and command that all and everyone employed in the service of this kingdom ..., should permit [Duke Jacob and his subjects], to live and operate without obstacles or troubles, to use and exercise their professions and trade both by land and by sea, and to treat them everywhere as friends and to permit them without restrictions to use and enjoy the benefit of our said protection, under pain of incurring our displeasure."²²

Not all countries were interested in friendly relations with Courland, though. The Dutch, despite the treaty they signed with Duke Jacob, rarely respected his right to the seas. Holland and the free city of Riga, which was a rival with Courland for trade in the eastern Baltic Sea area, had a good partnership. The English were one of Courland's closest friends, and at that

time, one of Holland's greatest adversaries. (England and Holland had competing interests in Europe, Africa, and the Americas, and throughout this time, the two nations often fought each other for supremacy in a colony or trading route.) This combination led the Dutch to antagonize Duke Jacob all his reign. Sweden presented more of an immediate threat to the duchy, because Sweden and Courland's master, Poland, were at war for a large amount of the seventeenth century. At this time, Sweden, the major power in the northern Baltic area, was expanding its frontiers southward towards Courland, acquiring all of old Livonia up to and including the city of Riga by 1660.²³ The constant fear of a Swedish invasion, however, did give the Duke some clout in his dealings with his unruly nobility. Duke Jacob needed control at home in order to implement his plans for Courland, chief among them being his colonial schemes.

III. The Colony of Gambia

The Duke's colony in Africa was at the mouth of the Gambia River on the continent's western coast. The Duke was able to establish his colony at a

place so near other European colonies in Africa simply because none of the major colonial powers wanted it at that time. On October 26, 1651, the Duke made an agreement with the king of Barra to lease the island Jacob he later named St. Andrew. Since the island had no water supply, he bought a plot of land at Jaffre on the northern end of the Gambia River.²⁴ Later on, the Duke made another leasing agreement with the king of a different region, Kombo, for the island of Banjul,²⁵ as well as some more land upstream at Gassan. In all, his territory at Gambia was roughly 2,000 square kilometers.

St. Andrew's Island was the capital of the Duke's holdings at Gambia, and he forged it into the center of his slave-trading and gold-mining expeditions into inner Africa, in which some of his missions extended 100 miles up the Gambia River.²⁶ Soon after securing the island, Major Fock, the leader of the first group of settlers, started building Fort Jacob, much of which still stands today.²⁷ The fortifications were built out of sandstone from the area. The inside of the fort was basically a large empty square; each of the four walls had one gun to defend it, and in every corner stood a steep bastion. Scattered across the island were wooden huts, used for barracks, lodgings, storerooms, and even a church -- the Duke sent along a Protestant minister, the first (but not last) in Africa. A dock for canoes and small rowboats also was set up for expeditions

for fresh water and provisions.²⁸ Within the walls stood lodgings for future settlers, too.²⁹

Luckily for Duke Jacob, the fort was at least partially completed by the time the English arrived, later in 1651. They had not heard of any claims made by Europeans on that part of the Gambia River, and were stunned to find the Courlanders building a fort there. However, they recognized the Duke's claim and left without harassing the Duke's subjects. Since the English had a superior military force, they could have attempted to seize the Duke's holdings without much difficulty.

The Duke followed the British plan for administrating the colony. He appointed a governor, who commanded Fort Jacob, and chaired a council, which consisted of the heads of the other forts -- the Duke built two more forts and established several trading posts on other parts of his Gambia colony.³⁰ Meetings of the council convened whenever an important decision needed to be made.³¹ The Duke's first few colonial administrators were terrible for the colony -- they abused their positions, stole money from the Duke, or just could not handle the responsibility. In 1655, Duke Jacob found the right person for the job, Colonel Otto Stiel. He was a loyal and honest man, and also knew the Gambia River very well.

Because the colony was now in good hands, Duke Jacob decided to send colonists to Gambia. A high number of non-Courlander Europeans were allowed to go (about 80% of the total colonists³²), on the condition that they swore an oath of loyalty to the Duke of Courland. Unfortunately, as soon as they arrived, a disease broke out, killing many of them. But despite the high death rate, the colony survived, largely because of the Duke's relations with the native Africans living nearby. Unlike other Europeans of the time, the Duke did not arbitrarily claim the lands he settled by forcing the natives off their homes. He rented his lands from the local chiefs and paid what he owed. He respected the local chieftains, and even trained and educated some of the Africans to be administrators for his colony.³³

His good relations with the Africans led to a flourishing trade. The Courlanders brought salt, iron, brandy, glass, and amber from Europe to trade for "ivory, gold, hides, pepper, wax, indigo, coffee, ebony, spice, and dyeing material,"³⁴ and also engaged in pearl fishing. All the goods were exported for sale in Sweden, Poland, and Russia. All together, 18-20 expeditions, involving a total of 28-31 ships, left Courland for Africa, although three expeditions did not make it to Gambia.³⁵

The Courlanders participated in the slave trade as well. In order to

preserve the good relations with the local Africans, as well as the trading arrangements, slaves were never captured near the colony. All the slaves went to the Duke's other colony at Tobago; unfortunately, records were very poorly kept on the slave trade. So, using what data I have available, I believe roughly 4,500 Africans were brought to the Tobago colony between 1654-1658, the only years any major importing was possible. I based this estimate on a comparison made with British figures for the same time period and similar areas of the world. The two nations had similar trade routes (Gambia to Tobago for the Courlanders, Senegambia [which borders the Duke's Gambian colony] to the West Indies for the British), and also had similar methods of colonial management. From 1651-1675, England annually imported about 2,700 slaves to its Carribean colonies. Courland's fleet was about one-third the size of England's, so 900 (1/3 of the English annual slaves imported), multiplied by the five years Courland actively participated in the slave trade, gives us a total of 4,500 slaves. This number roughly corresponds to the numbers of the English slave trade in the area once they take over Courland's colonies, as will be explained later.³⁶

As at the Tobago colony, the Courlanders at Gambia soon ran into trouble with the competing European colonial powers. The Dutch arrived at Gambia in

1659, and offered to send a garrison to "hold" the fort for the Duke until he could defend it himself. The Dutch knew Jacob was having a hard time supplying the colony with enough people to present a real defense from outside threats. In exchange for their protection, the Dutch wanted full use of the fort; but as soon as they moved in, they expelled the Duke's colonists from Fort Jacob all together. While the Dutch occupied the fort, the Swedes licensed the French pirate Du Quesne to destroy the colony, and he did his best; all the fortifications were leveled and the settlements robbed.³⁷ After this happened, the Gambian tribesmen drove the Dutch out of the fort entirely by cutting off the island's water supply. The defeated Dutch left, but not before thoroughly wrecking anything left standing.³⁸

The Duke regained the destroyed colony only for a short while, as it turned out. On March 6, 1661, a British expedition under Robert Homes landed and demanded the fort,³⁹ which the Courlanders just two days earlier had completed repairing the damage done during the Dutch occupation. The colonists had no choice but to surrender to the five British ships that had arrived, because only six people -- four men and two women -- were still alive. When they left, the British never let them back.⁴⁰ The Duke was forced into signing a treaty on November 17, 1664, with King Charles II of England, which

set forth the following conditions:

1. The English received possession of Gambia, Fort Jacob, St Andrew's Island, and everything on them.
2. Tobago was permanently made a fief of Courland.
3. Only Courlanders and English people could settle on Tobago.
4. The products from Tobago could only go to ports in Courland or England, or to the city of Danzig.
5. Courland was to have received some trading rights at its former possessions in Gambia.⁴¹

IV. The Colony of Tobago

Under the tenets of the prevailing seventeenth century economic theories, a country should be as self-sufficient as possible. Courland's main natural resources were timber, amber, and some agricultural products -- except for limestone, little mineral wealth was known,⁴² so everything else Courland needed had to come from elsewhere. This lack of resources forced the Duke to find other sources to fulfill the duchy's needs, and eventually led him to briefly create a colonial empire, consisting of the island of Tobago in the Caribbean Sea, and parts of the mouth of the Gambia River in Africa, as well as plans for expansion to the island of Trinidad and even to parts of Australia and India.

The early years of the Duke's other colony at the Carribean island of

Tobago are not well established in the records. One version claims that as early as 1634 -- seven years before the Duke formally owned the island -- Jacob sent 200 colonizers to settle Tobago, but all had disappeared by 1639, when a British expedition arrived.⁴³ Other historians claim the first settlement (or second if counting the 1634 attempt) occurred sometime in the 1640's, possibly only to establish the Duke's property rights. To further complicate matters, all official documentation from Duke Jacob claim the beginning of colonization was in 1654.⁴⁴ In any case, the large scale colonization did not start until 1654.

During that year, at the arrival of the first "official" group of colonizers, Tobago had no permanent inhabitants -- European settlers lived on near-by Trinidad or off the American coast, and the native Carribean tribes never stayed for very long on Tobago. They lived on other Carribean islands.⁴⁵ The settlers sent by Duke Jacob consisted of a large number of Europeans from other parts of the continent, not actually from Courland itself. This was done because Courland's population was too small to give up more than a few people for foreign settlements. Settlers were invited from Germany, Scandinavia, England, France, Holland, and elsewhere in western Europe to colonize the Duke's holdings, so long as they recognized the Duke's authority. The largest

group of foreigners to go to Tobago were the Dutch -- they grew to such numbers that they essentially divided the island into two parts: the "Courlanders" and the Dutch. The Dutch never really accepted the Duke as their sovereign, and were always plotting to take the island for themselves.⁴⁶ They actually managed to take over the island, as will be described later on.

Courland's hold on Tobago did not last very long. In 1655, English pirates raided the island,⁴⁷ despite the close relationship between England and Courland. Fortunately for Duke Jacob, he managed to take control of the island again, at least temporarily. In 1658, the Dutch, who had been waiting for the right time to make their move, convinced the governor of Tobago to send the Duke's fleet home because he needed their help back home in his dealings with Sweden. Once the fleet left, the Dutch began to besiege the main fortress, Fort James; the fort could not last long, and when it fell, the Dutch massacred a large number of settlers that were loyal to the Duke.⁴⁸ The Dutch did not keep their prize for very long. In 1666, the British captured the Dutch settlement; for several years after that, the British, Dutch, and even the French fought over Tobago. The whole time Duke Jacob continued to claim the island.⁴⁹

Although he actually controlled Tobago for only a few years at that time, the colony was a success. He kept good relations with the Spanish and

Portuguese, who also had colonies in the area. These two powerful and potentially threatening nations left the Courlanders alone. The 120 plantations on the colony produced enough excess goods to be exported to Poland, Sweden, and Russia. They had several sugar refineries, two rum distilleries, and an indigo factory, all of which made the 700 Courland colonists (not including the Dutch) very wealthy.⁵⁰ The African slaves did the bulk of the work, especially on the sugar plantations.

V. The Decline of Duke Jacob's Power

As was mentioned earlier, nearly the entire time Duke Jacob ruled Courland, Sweden and Poland fought for control of the Baltic Sea area, with Sweden usually having the upper hand during the seventeenth century. Sweden had already seized most of Livonia south to Riga, and always wanted Courland because it once was a part of Livonia, which it claimed as its own, and it had some excellent port cities on the Baltic Sea. Sweden tried diplomatic means to convince Duke Jacob to abandon his allegiance to Poland and become a vassal

state of Sweden, but the Duke always refused. The Swedes would not have allowed the Duchy as much autonomy as the Poles did, and Sweden would have ended serfdom, limiting the peasantry's obligations to the nobility. Even though maintaining serfdom was contrary to his theoretical goal of prosperity for all classes, the Duke needed the nobility's support, grudging though it was, and remained loyal to Poland.

In 1655, war broke out between Poland and Sweden. The Swedish King, Charles X, overran Poland, taking its two most important cities, Warsaw and Cracow, and then turned to Courland. Disregarding the treaty of neutrality he had signed with the Duke, Charles X invaded Courland and captured the ducal capital of Mitau, or Jelgava as it is known today. The Duke was taken to a prison in Swedish-controlled Riga.⁵¹ He remained a prisoner there for almost two years. He was released on July 7, 1660,⁵² after a number of European nations started to claim that Sweden, a country that prized human rights, had violated Courland's neutrality and "kidnapped" the Duke.

After his release from the Swedish prison, Duke Jacob's international image and prestige were tarnished, and his entire duchy and prized fleet were both nearly destroyed. On top of this, an epidemic broke out and killed about one-third of the surviving population.⁵³ During his imprisonment, the Dutch

attempted to seize both colonies of Tobago and Gambia, and the English later seized Gambia and forced the Duke to sign a treaty limiting his rights in both places, as was already described. The persistent duke would not abandon his life-long dream of a strong Courland, so he continued to fight the English for implementation of the 1664 treaty, which they had no intention of honoring.

The British did not allow Duke Jacob very much access to Gambia. One of the few times they let one of the duke's ships into the colony resulted in a disaster. Led by Otto Stiel, the former governor of the Duke's colony at Gambia, the ship was wrecked off the Irish coast, losing all the cargo on board, and permanently crippling Stiel.⁵⁴

The Duke had a little more luck with Tobago. During 1667-1668, he tried to take back Tobago according to the terms of the treaty he had with England, but could not expel the Dutch, who were still living there and claimed the island for their own. In 1680, the Duke's soldiers temporarily occupied his fort there and were about to start colonizing the island again, but were attacked by the natives living on Trinidad.⁵⁵ After that misfortune, the Duke at long last gave up on personally colonizing Tobago in favor of establishing a private company to do so, ran by Captain John Poyntz of England. Under the agreement, signed in mid-1681, only British and Courlanders could settle there,

for a small annual fee and an oath of allegiance to the Duke. The company had to supply Tobago with 1,200 English colonists within three years, each of whom was to receive fifty acres of land. The colony was to be neutral, even if Courland was involved in a war.⁵⁶ This arrangement did not last very long; the last known mention of Courlander settlers at Tobago was in 1693.⁵⁷ They were gradually absorbed by the English, who were firmly in control of the island by 1699.⁵⁸

The restoration of Tobago to the Duchy was one of Duke Jacob's last acts. In 1676, his wife, Louise Charlotte, died, and this, combined with a case of palsy he suffered, seriously affected his health. Just as the year 1682 was ushered in by the church bells, Duke Jacob Kettler breathed his last, and was buried at his castle in Mitau. The Duke died at age 71, and had ruled Courland by himself for 43 years.

Duke Jacob's death nearly erased Courland's small niche in world affairs. Jacob's son, Frederic Casimir, took over after his father's death;⁵⁹ however, Frederic Casimir cared more for extravagance and luxurious living than for furthering his father's colonial schemes. The new duke gained the attention of Peter the Great of Russia; the Tsar was extremely impressed with what he saw during a visit, by the wealth and Western way of life in

particular. This began Russia's long relationship with Courland. Gradually, Russia gained power over the duchy, and in 1795, during the Third Partition of Poland, the duchy was incorporated into Russia. Except for a few months of Napoleonic rule⁶⁰, the Russian tsar was the "Duke of Courland." In the aftermath of World War I, the native Latvians in Courland threw out both their Russian and German overlords, and for the first time in almost 700 years, the Latvians were masters of their own destiny; one of the four districts of modern Latvia still bears the name of Duke Jacob's state.

For a brief time, Duke Jacob created a colonial empire -- the only one of its kind in Eastern Europe. Even though he was not a native Latvian, the Duke's reign is remembered as a time in the Latvians' history when they were treated well and were respected, compared to earlier and later times. For someone to accomplish as much as he did while starting with so little, we can only imagine what he could have done had Courland not been only a pawn in the "great game" of European affairs.

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