

History of the Crusades. Episode 197. The Baltic Crusades. The Livonian Crusade Part III. Bishop Albert.

Hello again. Last week we saw Brother Theodoric embark on a Crusade in an attempt to assist Brother Meinhard to forcibly convert the Livonian people to Christianity. However, the Crusade was a flop, with only a handful of fighters actually making their way to Bishop Meinhard, who died not long after they arrived. So Livonia is now without a Bishop and needs a new one.

The Archbishop of Bremen, a man called Hartwig, decided to appoint a Cistercian Abbot, a man called Berthold, to the role. Now, unfortunately, for Berthold, he won't have hardly any military support. There won't be bunches of soldiers or armed men backing him up as he ventures into pagan territory to take up his new role. Why? Well, because Emperor Henry VI has decided to launch a Crusade to the Middle East. As we all know, Emperor Henry's father, Frederick Barbarossa, died in the Middle East before his Crusading venture really got off the ground, and Emperor Henry wants to take up the Crusading banner where his father left off, so he is in the middle of organizing a German Crusade to the Middle East. As such, just about every Christian soldier in the Holy Roman Empire is headed towards the Holy Land, and no one wants to miss out on this chance for glory, by going to the Baltic region with the newly appointed Bishop Berthold. So, determined to make the best of the situation, Bishop Berthold decided to approach the Livonian people with gifts, and ply them with food and drink to gain their trust, instead of forcing them to accept both Christianity and their new Bishop at the point of a sword. It did not go well.

Bishop Berthold traveled to Livonia, threw a party in Uxkull, or Ikšķile as it is now called, which seemed to go okay, but then he traveled to the neighboring town of Holm, where things quickly started to unravel. It soon became clear that instead of welcoming their new Bishop with open arms and declaring their intention to convert to Christianity under the gift-bearing party-throwing Germans, some Livonians were actually intent on killing the new Bishop. When Bishop Berthold was made aware of the assassination plots against him, he secretly made his way to the docks and rushed back to Saxony, telling anyone who would listen that the situation in Livonia was untenable, and that there was no way he was going back there without an army.

Our chronicler, Henry of Livonia, describes Bishop Berthold's arrival in Livonia in the following way, and I quote "He went to Livonia, came to Uxkull, took over the patrimony of the Church, and gathered into his presence all of the more important Livonians, both Christian and pagan. He strove to please them with food, drink and gifts, and said that he came at their invitation and that he had succeeded his predecessor as sole heir. They received him cordially at first, but at the consecration of the cemetery at Holm, some conspired to burn him in the church, others to kill him, and others to drown him. They charged that he came because he was poor. After considering this beginning, he went secretly to the ships, and back to Gotland and onto Saxony. He bewailed both to the Lord Pope and to the Bishop, as well as to all the faithful of Christ, the ruin of the Church of Livonia. The Lord Pope therefore granted remission of sins to all those who should take the Cross and armed themselves against the perfidious Livonians." End quote.

Woohoo, it sounds like the Pope has just launched a new Crusade against the Livonians. But wait, isn't everyone in the Holy Land on the Crusade led by Emperor Henry? Well, no. Actually, quite a lot has happened, while Bishop Berthold has been away having a bad time in Livonia. Let's get up to speed with what's been going on.

Far from outdoing his father's crusading exploits, Emperor Henry's Crusade actually failed to launch. While Frederick Barbarossa had died in Anatolia on his way to the Holy Land, Emperor Henry died in Sicily on his way to the Holy Land. He was in the middle of making his final preparations to sail from Sicily to the Middle East, when he was unexpectedly taken seriously ill. Wracked by chills and fevers, he died on the 28th of September 1197, possibly from malaria. So the German Crusade was cancelled and everyone threw their hands into the air and headed back home. Archbishop Hartwig of Bremen had traveled all the way to the Holy Land before receiving the news that the expedition was a no-go, so he turned around and headed back home. Why did everyone head back home? Well, because there was about to be a showdown over the succession to the Imperial throne.

Emperor Henry's death was sudden and totally unexpected, so there was much scrambling in the halls of power to fill the position with the right Emperor. There were two main contenders for the throne: Henry's brother, Philip, who will continue the Hohenstaufen line, and Otto, one of Henry the Lion's sons. France and most of the Holy Roman Empire supported the Hohenstaufen claim and wanted Philip as Emperor, but the Saxon claim to make one of Henry the Lion's sons Emperor was supported, unsurprisingly by Richard the Lionheart, who was actually Otto's uncle, as Richard's sister Matilda had married Henry the Lion, and perhaps more surprisingly, by the new Pope, Pope Innocent III.

Pope Innocent had commenced what will be a long and action-packed reign as Pope in January 1198, four months after Henry's death. Although he was new to the job, he was concerned that the power of the Hohenstaufen Emperors was threatening the Papal States, and ideally, he would like to see Sicily out of Imperial hands. Even better would be a weak Holy Roman Empire, which the Papacy could force to do its bidding. So, if Pope Innocent was going to pick a candidate for Emperor, that candidate would be Otto from Saxony. With the assistance of bucket loads of English silver, Otto was able to swing many undecided voters his way, and as a consequence, when the Imperial election was held in the spring of 1198, there was no clear winner.

In this scenario, the Papacy was required to choose a candidate. You would expect that Pope Innocent would immediately select his favored candidate Otto, but he didn't. No, even this early in his Papacy we can see Pope Innocent III stepping back, looking at the big picture, and manipulating events to the advantage of Rome. It was in Rome's interest to have a weak Empire, so Pope Innocent um'd and ah'd, twiddled his thumbs, muttered about irregularities in the election process, and delayed making a decision. The outcome of Pope Innocent's failure to adjudicate the matter was probably exactly what he expected it would be. By the summer of 1198, the Hohenstaufens had had enough. With financial backing from France, Philip attempted to resolve the situation by mediation with Otto, and when that didn't work a civil war was the result, a civil war which would last for the next twenty years.

So the result of all this was, when Bishop Berthold fled back to Saxony he found things in an uproar. You would think that all the power brokers in Saxony would automatically fall in behind Otto in the dispute, but it wasn't as simple as that. Particularly early on in the war, many people thought that a Hohenstaufen victory was inevitable, and they didn't want to be seen to be backing the wrong horse. So Bishop Berthold's overseer for example, Archbishop Hartwig, is supporting the Hohenstaufen claim.

Anyway, Saxony itself is full of men who were all prepared to go to the Middle East on Crusade but are now cooling their heels at home, with their dreams of Crusading glory fading by the minute. But they needn't lose heart, because, What's this? The Bishop of Uxkull, you need some help in Livonia? Oh, does that mean we can go on Crusade closer to home? Yes, it does. Pope Innocent raised the green flag and with an official Papal sanction, a Crusade to Livonia was now on offer.

So with a bunch of eager Saxon Crusaders in tow, Bishop Berthold sailed back to Livonia to bring those pesky pagans back into line. But just as converting the pagans of Livonia to Christianity had not gone well for Bishop Meinhard or Brother Theodoric, it also didn't go well for Bishop Berthold. The good news was, in the fight to forcibly convert the local Livonian people, only one Christian of note was killed. The bad news was that Christian was Bishop Berthold himself.

Here's how things panned out. When the Crusaders arrived in Livonia, their presence was objected to by the Livonians. In a meeting between the opposing sides, the Livonians stated that the Christians could remain in Livonia, but could only convert the local people by persuasion and not by force. Of course, this wasn't at all what the Crusaders wanted to hear. They were itching for a fight, and when the Livonians failed to act on Bishop Berthold's demand that they offer up hostages to the Christians, and when the Livonians killed several German fighters who were out searching for food, Bishop Berthold ordered the Crusaders to attack the Livonians. The two sides lined up against each other. The Crusaders were mostly on horseback, and it looked like the mounted Christians would be no match for the Livonians, who were mostly on foot. However, Bishop Berthold's horse became spooked and bolted, galloping into the pagan lines, carrying the startled Bishop Berthold on its back. The Bishop then found himself surrounded by the enemy, who pulled him off his horse and killed him. So if anyone's keeping a tally of horses versus Germans in the Baltic Crusades, we now have Brother Theodoric saved by a horse, and Bishop Berthold killed by a horse, so we're even.

Following the Bishop's death, the Crusaders went on an avenging rampage through Livonian settlements. They managed to forcibly convert some Livonians, and then most of them sailed back to Saxony. As soon as the Crusaders had departed, most of the newly-baptized Livonians plunged into the River Daugava, doing their best to de-baptize themselves and return to their pagan faith. So you would have to say that the Christianization of Livonia is really not going very well at all, with pagans and horses managing to kill or drive away most of the Christians who have come to forcibly convert them.

With Uxkull now Bishop-less and having gained its first martyr in the form of the late Bishop Berthold, it left Archbishop Hartwig to decide what to do next. Of course, as we've just seen, the Holy Roman Empire in general and Saxony in particular was in a state of civil unrest at this time. In addition to the many men who had been mentally and physically prepared to go on the late Emperor Henry's Crusade to the Holy Land, there were also men in Saxony with blood on their hands, men who had become physically involved in the civil war, and we're now either looking for another outlet to vent their frustrations or an excuse to quickly get as far away from Saxony as possible.

Combined with the fact that the Lubeck-Gotland-Livonia sailing route was one familiar to many German merchants, and that compared to the Holy Land Livonia was a close and convenient place to go crusading, Archbishop Hartwig quickly realized that he would have

access to a steady supply of German Crusade volunteers. All he needed to do was to appoint a competent new Bishop to replace Bishop Berthold, to take charge of the situation, then he would just sit back and wait while the Crusaders did their work and forcibly converted the Livonians. Easy. The new Bishop had to be someone that the Archbishop knew and could trust, so in the end, the man he chose for the job was his nephew, Albert of Buxtehude.

Now, Albert seems to have been a very thorough man, deeply committed to the Crusader cause. He started his new mission by laying the diplomatic groundwork for a new Crusading expedition. He sailed from Lubeck to Gotland to get the support of the Scandinavian merchants for a new Crusade. The trip went well, and many merchants took the Cross. Albert then traveled to the Kingdom of Denmark, where he met with King Canute and the most senior cleric in Denmark, the Archbishop of Lundt. He gained the tacit approval of both of these men for his venture. In a savvy move, soon after he returned to Saxony, Albert traveled to Magdeburg to meet with Philip of Hohenstaufen. He managed to gain Philip's support for the Crusade as well. Importantly, present at Philip's court was the Papal Legate, who also confirmed that the Crusaders who made the journey to Livonia would receive remissions of their sins, and would have their possessions placed under Papal protection. With all his ducks now lined up in a row, Albert was ready to gather his army. He preached the Crusade around Saxony and Westphalia, and in the end around 500 Crusaders departed for Livonia under Albert's guidance, aboard twenty three ships.

Albert may have hoped that this large force would cower the Livonians into submission, and make them throw their hands into the air and accept Christianity, but it wasn't to be. Most Livonians fled into the forests out of the reach of the Crusaders, while their warriors stayed to fight where they could, wisely choosing not to face the German fighters on the battlefield, but instead attacking small groups of isolated Crusaders whenever possible. Albert eventually requested a meeting with the Livonian Elders. As a result of the meeting, thirty Livonian boys were offered up as hostages, which, while it did mean a temporary peace was put in place, couldn't have been welcome news for the Crusaders. Once again, Crusaders had come to Livonia, and once again they had failed to bring about the mass conversion of the pagans.

The Crusaders sailed off back home, and Bishop Albert decided to send Brother Theodoric on another journey all the way to Rome, to personally deliver a report of the situation to Pope Innocent. Bishop Albert hoped to gain from Pope Innocent permission to launch another Crusade, and to also prohibit international trade between the merchants and any non-Christians. All went to plan, and Papal permission was granted. So in the year 1200, Bishop Albert sailed back to Germany to launch a recruitment drive for his next Crusade. Bishop Albert arrived in Saxony to a scene of turmoil. Not only was the Civil war still in full swing, the Kingdom of Denmark had decided to take advantage of the unrest by invading Saxony. Albert departed for Livonia just before the Danish invaders arrived, but due most likely to the fact that Saxon fighters were clearly needed in Saxony, Albert's crusading army wasn't as large as he had hoped for.

Upon arriving back in Livonia, Bishop Albert decided to move his base from Uxkull to nearby Riga. Riga was near the mouth of the Daugava River and offered a larger site, which could be made into a city, as well as a natural harbor. He ordered work to begin on building a church, and he invited merchants and local people to set up homes in the town. Today, Riga is the capital city of Latvia and is the largest city in the Baltic states. Not

satisfied with this momentous decision, Bishop Albert then decided to establish a new military Order, one which would have far reaching consequences for the Livonian Crusade.

Join me next week as we see the establishment and rise off this new military Order, which became known as the Sword Brothers. Until next week, bye for now.

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