

## History of the Crusades. Episode 205. The Baltic Crusades. The Livonian Crusade Part XI. Attacking The Neighbors.

Hello again. Last week we saw a couple of headaches emerge for Bishop Albert. Despite successfully Christianizing most of the Livonians and Letts, Pope Innocent had granted the Sword Brothers the right to administer one third of the new Christian lands and their rough-handed rule was affecting Bishop Albert's plans for the region. To make matters worse, back in Europe, two influential men who had supported and overseen Bishop Albert's adventure in Livonia had died: Bishop Albert's uncle, Archbishop Hartwig, and the near victor in the fight for the Imperial throne, Philip of Hohenstaufen. As we saw last week, while Otto of Saxony swooped in to take advantage of Philip's death, there was no immediate replacement for Archbishop Hartwig. Two men went to war over the powerful position of Archbishop, and at the moment the position remains unfilled.

So at the present time in Saxony, everyone is holding their breath. Everyone fully expects the new victor in the Imperial civil war, Otto of Saxony, to use his new power to boot King Valdemar out of the Holy Roman Empire, so the noblemen in Danish-occupied Saxon lands are sharpening their swords and preparing their men, ready to start fighting the Danes.

But Otto doesn't turn his attentions to his homeland. No, In a move which shocked many of his supporters, Otto instead marches his army way down south to Italy. Why? Well, because Otto had his eyes firmly focused on the big picture. He knew that he required Papal support to be elected Holy Roman Emperor. Pope Innocent couldn't have cared less about the Danish occupation of Saxony, but he cared very much about the restoration of territory to the Papal States in Italy. So Otto marched south to deal with Italy and gain some brownie points from Pope Innocent, while the Saxon noblemen scratched their heads in confusion, and King Valdemar settled back on his throne with a big sigh of relief.

Now, just as an aside here for completeness, you should know that in a couple of years time Otto will do a complete backflip, and will actually work to eliminate Papal influence from the disputed territory in Italy, and will instead work to incorporate them into the Holy Roman Empire, a move which will see Pope Innocent excommunicate Otto in 1210. Just so you know.

Unsurprisingly, Bishop Albert found all of this a bit unsettling. Possible Danish overlordship was still looming large over Livonia, and with Otto of Saxony seemingly unfazed by the Danish occupation of his homeland, the threat of continual Danish expansion remained very real. Still, Bishop Albert decided that the recent upheavals in Saxony wouldn't affect his ability to preach his Crusade, so he stuck to his old routine, traveling around Saxony and the

neighboring region, gathering recruits to take with him on his return trip to Livonia. However, due to the unsettled state of political affairs in Saxony, he only managed to gather a handful of men. But that was OK.

Things were actually going really well back in Livonia. With most of the Livonians and Letts now Christianized there was a large area to administer, and the Sword Brothers were, of course, creating their own set of problems, but the mass conversion of the vocal Livonian people that Bishop Albert had fought so long to achieve had now come to pass. As a result, Riga was thriving. The church coffers in Livonia were full, Crusaders were now happy to spend winter in Livonia, and some were choosing to stay permanently in the country. With the German presence in Livonia now looking secure, people were spending money building comfortable, permanent housing for themselves. The threat of freezing to death over winter was abating, and really, things were looking up.

In his book "The Baltic Crusade", William Urban reports that even some of the Livonian and Lett people in the region were optimistic about the future. They saw their new circumstances as providing opportunities to score military victories against their traditional enemies, the Lithuanians and the Estonians. Consequently, one way for the Crusaders and other German fighters to gain the loyalty of the people they had conquered was to expand into neighboring regions, and team up with Livonian and Lett fighters to attack the neighbors. Sometimes this worked really well, and sometimes it didn't. Let's look at two examples.

The first example occurred in the year 1208. The leader of the Semigallians approached the Christians in Riga and requested their assistance in a campaign he was about to undertake. His plan was to send a fighting force into Lithuanian territory and attack the Lithuanians. He pointed out to the Christians that the Semigallians had come to their aid in previous battles, and that he was now calling in that debt. He also pointed out that the pagan gods had deemed it favorable to attack Lithuania at this time. Henry of Livonia reports that the Christians replied that they didn't care about the views of the pagan gods, and stated that they couldn't spare any Christian Knights at the moment. Then, apparently they declared that the war against the Lithuanians was forbidden at this time. But the Semigallian leader was very persistent. He and his men said that they would conduct the war regardless, and eventually the Christians caved in to his requests, authorizing fifty Knights, a handful of Sword Brothers, and some catapult machines to go with the Semigallians to attack Lithuania. They also took a priest, just in case any of the Lithuanians were of a mind to be baptized.

The group set off, and while they were resting in their camp during the first night on the road, the Semigallians decided to ask their gods how things were looking. They were astounded to find out that the gods had bad news. Word of the attack had reached the Lithuanians, and

they were fully prepared for the arrival of the Semigallians. The horrified Semigallians then informed the Germans of the gods' bad tidings, and told them that they should all pack up and head back home. I guess you can probably see where this is going. The Germans decided that the pagan gods didn't know what they were on about and decided instead to attack immediately. As the multitude of Semigallian fighters shook their heads at the Germans' foolishness, the German Knights led the charge into Lithuanian territory, and the Semigallians, biting their fingernails and looking nervously at each other, followed them.

The first Lithuanian village they came across was empty. So was the next one. The pagan gods had been right, after all. Expecting an attack, the Lithuanians had removed vulnerable women and children out of the region and had instead filled it with fighters on speedy horses, fighters who were currently in hiding, watching the Germans and Semigallians, and waiting for the right moment to attack. Spooked by the whole empty village thing, the Germans decided to withdraw, and that's when the Lithuanians made their move. Darting up to the wedge formation that the German Knights had placed themselves in, the Lithuanians would race up individually, strike with a spear or lance, and then wheel away before the Germans could retaliate. It was all too much for the Semigallians, who decided to retreat back out of Lithuanian territory. The Germans, however, decided not to retreat. William Urban puts this decision down to the Germans using a European model of personal courage, and their grim determination to stick to battle tactics which really didn't suit the local fighting conditions. It was a disaster for the Germans. Most were either killed, wounded or taken captive by the Lithuanians. A handful of Germans escaped and made it back to Riga to report on the event.

The lesson the Germans learned from this disaster was, according to Henry of Livonia, that they shouldn't ally themselves with local pagans. Their priority instead should be to fight alongside their fellow Christians with the goal of defeating the pagans of the region.

Bishop Albert was able to put this lesson into practice the following year. The following year, which, incidentally, was the year 1209, saw Bishop Albert return to Livonia with a healthy number of Crusaders. The plan seemed to be to use these Crusaders to push out the Christian boundaries in Livonia, take strongholds, and fortify them using German muscle and techniques, and then man them with Germans. Henry of Livonia also reports that some Crusaders were roped into extending the walls around some churches, as some of the local clergy were so fearful of pagan attacks that they chose to live inside their church, and wanted to ensure that the walls were high enough and strong enough to protect both themselves and their parishioners.

Now, it was at this time as well that the Sword Brothers were experiencing some issues with some of their more wayward members. Remember how I mentioned in the episode about the

Sword Brothers, which was Episode 198, that the Master of the Order was murdered by an axe-wielding Sword Brother? Well, that occurred in the year 1209. Henry of Livonia describes the wayward Sword Brother as being, and I quote, "rather more inclined to love of the world than to religious discipline", end quote, and that he, and I quote "sowed many discords amongst the Brothers" end quote. Anyway, this wayward Brother repented and begged to be given a second chance. The Order decided to give him a second chance, and in what was to prove a bad move, allowed him to keep with him the double edged axe which was his chosen weapon. Anyway, the wayward Brother requested a meeting with the Master of the Order, in which he promised to reveal all of his secrets. The Master, together with a priest, entered the room in which the wayward Brother was staying, and instead of revealing his secrets, the wayward Brother revealed his skill at wielding his axe, killing both the Master and the priest. The wayward Brother was captured as he tried to flee into the chapel, and according to Henry of Livonia was, and I quote, "killed with a cruel death that he deserved". End quote.

Anyway, in the year 1209, the Germans decided to push their territory further up the Daugava River. They, of course, already had Riga, Holm, and Uxkull (or Ikskile) under their control, but they pushed on further, taking the abandoned fort which they called Kokenhusen and which today is called Koknese. They constructed a stone fort on the site, replacing the dilapidated wooden construction which had been used by the pagans. Then they cast their eyes further up river at the fort of Jerzika.

Now the fort of Jerzika had been making a nuisance of itself, so far as the Christians were concerned, for quite some time. It was close enough to the Russian principality of Polotsk to have a Russian vassal in control of it, a man called Vsevolod. Now Vsevolod was no fan of Christians in general and Latin Christians in particular. To make matters worse, he had married the daughter of a Lithuanian warlord, so he also had strong ties to the Lithuanians and was happy to let the Lithuanians use Jerzika as a crossing point on the Daugava, and as a supply post for their raids into Livonia, Russia and Estonia. Clearly, taking Jerzika would come as a blow not only to the Russians but more importantly to the Lithuanians, and would hinder their capacity to attack the Christianized Letts and Livonians. At this time, pretty much everyone was terrified of the Lithuanians, and if Bishop Albert could send some Germans to capture Jerzika and hinder the capacity of the Lithuanians to attack the people living along the Daugava, then that would make a lot of people very happy.

In fact, to let you know just how much of a menace the Lithuanians were, at this point I'll let Henry of Livonia tell you. His Chronicle reports, and I quote "The Lithuanians were then such lords over all the peoples, both Christian and pagan, dwelling in all those lands, that scarcely anyone, and the Letts especially, dared to live in the small villages. Not even by leaving their houses deserted to seek the dark hiding places of the forests could they escape them. For

the Lithuanians, laying ambushes for them at all times in the forests, seized them, killing some and capturing others, and took the latter back to their own country, seizing all their possessions. The Russians also fled through the forests and villages from the face of the Lithuanians, however few, as rabbits flee before hunters, and the Livonians and Letts were food and provender for the Lithuanians, and like sheep in the jaws of wolves, since they were without a shepherd. Sending a shepherd therefore, namely Bishop Albert, God freed the Livonian sheep and the now-baptized Letts from the jaws of the wolves." End quote. So have we got that? According to Henry of Livonia, the Lithuanians are the wolves, the Russians are the rabbits, and the Livonians and Letts are the sheep, so Bishop Albert the shepherd is now going to go and save the sheep from the wolves. How will he do this? Well, by taking Jerzika, of course.

Bishop Albert mustered an army consisting of Livonians and Letts, fighters from Riga, and the Crusade volunteers, and marched to Jerzika. According to Henry of Livonia, when the Russians of Jerzika saw them coming, they locked the town gates, but when the Germans began attacking the town it all became too much, and the defenders fled, allowing Bishop Albert to easily take the town. Vsevolod managed to escape, but his Lithuanian wife was taken captive, and was presented, along with her serving girls and all her possessions, to the Bishop. The Germans looted the town, gaining much booty.

Here's what Henry of Livonia had to say about the attackers looting the town and its Russian Orthodox churches, and I quote, "The whole army remained in the town that day, collecting much booty from all its corners, clothes and silver and purple cloth and many flocks. They carried away with them the bells, icons and other ornaments, money and large amounts of property, which they took from the churches, and they blessed God, inasmuch as he had both given them a sudden victory over their enemies, and without the loss of any of their men, opened the city." End quote.

The following day, before they departed back down the River Daugava for Riga, they set fire to the town, burning it to the ground. Vsevolod ended up making his own way down to Riga as well, to try and negotiate the return of his wife. In the end, Bishop Albert gave her back, along with the other captives taken from Jerzika, in return for Vsevolod swearing fealty to Riga, promising to be faithful to the Latin Christian faith, and promising to inform on the Russians and Lithuanians. Vsevolod, his wife and the captives made their way back to the burned rubble that was once their town and began the long, slow task of rebuilding. Henry of Livonia informs us that, despite his promises, Vsevolod kept in close contact with the Lithuanians, and often incited pagan attacks on the nearby German town of Kokenhusen, down-river from Jerzika.

So really, it looks like things are going well for Bishop Albert, whose plans for Livonia bounced back from the disastrous Semigallian raid into Lithuania. He now looks to be succeeding in his plan to turn Livonia into a sort of feudal state, with himself at the top of the pyramid and local elders and leaders acting as his vassals. But we all know that good times don't last. Join me next week as things once again get a bit ugly in Livonia. Until next week, bye for now.

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