

History of the Crusades. Episode 206. The Baltic Crusades. The Livonian Crusade Part XII. Livonia Under Attack.

Hello again. Last week we saw Bishop Albert succeed in pushing Latin Christian territory further up the Daugava River. However, we also saw a raid by the Semigallians and Christians into Lithuania end in disaster. If you think that this combined success and failure will have an impact on Bishop Albert's plans to expand Christian Livonia, you would be right. At this stage in the events, so around the year 1209, Bishop Albert seems happy to concentrate on consolidating Christian gains on the River Daugava, and perhaps on extending Christian rule further up the river. The Sword Brothers, however, have different plans.

The Sword Brothers are not really happy with their one third of holdings in Livonia, and with healthy volumes of crusaders now visiting Livonia every year, the Sword Brothers are keen to take some of these Christian swords and conquer some land and some pagans, not for their Bishop but for themselves. Not wanting to step on Bishop Albert's toes too much, the Sword Brothers are currently proposing attacking parts of Estonia.

So is Bishop Albert rubbing his hands together at the thought of the Sword Brothers conquering pagan Estonia? No, he's not. In fact, Bishop Albert thinks that this is a terrible idea. King Valdemar of Denmark still has his expansionist eye on the Baltic region, and his recent personal journey to the region indicated that the place he was most interested in conquering was, of course, Estonia. So for the Sword Brothers to charge into Estonia would be to invite Danish intervention, and once the Danish crown had conquered Estonia, would they be likely to stop there? No. Bishop Albert knew that King Valdemar wanted the entire southern coast under Danish control, so it was quite conceivable that once the Danes had secured Estonia, they would then make a move on Riga. So to Bishop Albert, it was absolutely imperative that the Sword Brothers stayed out of Estonia, just in case it stirred renewed Danish interests in the region.

Really, King Valdemar at this moment probably had enough to occupy himself back in central Europe. By this stage, the politics between the Holy Roman Empire and the Pope had turned toxic once again. We saw last week that following the death of Philip of Hohenstaufen, Otto began his rise to power, not by pushing the Danes out of Saxony but by doing the Pope's bidding in Italy. Why did Otto decide to use the Imperial army to help the Pope out initially? Well, it wasn't really out of the kindness in his heart. No, Otto needed Papal support to be crowned Emperor, and the best way to secure said Papal support was to help annex some land for the Papal States. So Otto did just that, and Bang! found himself crowned Holy Roman Emperor in October 1209, becoming Emperor Otto IV.

But pretty much as soon as he was crowned Emperor, Otto decided that he didn't really want to be Pope Innocent's lapdog anymore. So you know those lands in Italy that he has just conquered for the papal states? Well, now he decides to re-conquer them for the Holy Roman Empire. To the distant cheers of all the folks back home, including the Hohenstaufens, Emperor Otto boots the Papal troops out of territory in northern Italy and claims it for the Empire. Then he marches to Rome, to wave his sword at Pope Innocent himself, demanding an increase in Imperial rights. This all made Pope Innocent very unhappy, so unhappy in fact that he excommunicated Emperor Otto in November 1210. In order to poke Pope Innocent with another stick, Emperor Otto then decided to back a rebellion against the rule of a Hohenstaufen in Sicily, one Frederick Hohenstaufen, who was currently ruling Sicily under the guardianship of Pope Innocent. This was actually a

terrible move which will backfire bigly on Otto in the future, because this Frederick Hohenstaufen was the very savvy, the very dangerous, future Holy Roman Emperor, and King of Jerusalem, Stupor Mundi, himself. Anyway, Otto's major Frederick Hohenstaufen problems are in the future. At the moment he just has a Pope Innocent problem.

So how are these imperial dramas affecting the Livonian Crusade? Well, when Bishop Albert sailed back to Saxony in 1210, he arrived to a bit of a mess. The conflict between the two contenders for the Archbishop of Hamburg-Bremen was still in full swing, with Bishop Valdemar still retaining control of territory to the west of the River Elbe, despite the fierce opposition of King Valdemar of Denmark. His contender for Archbishop was now a man called Gerhard of Oldenburg. But many people, even some on the east bank of the River Elbe, opposed Gerhard of Oldenburg's play for Archbishop, as the Oldenburg family was already very powerful and wealthy, and had made many enemies in the city of Bremen.

Now, the Holy Roman Emperor, Emperor Otto, was meant to adjudicate disputes such as these and put an end to the disruption and conflict they caused. But Emperor Otto had not gone to Saxony to appoint a new archbishop of Hamburg-Bremen, because he was away in Italy. As William Urban points out in his book "The Baltic Crusade", things were made even worse by the fact that no-one knew what Otto stood for anymore, and therefore no-one knew whom he would favour as Archbishop. Otto had, until recently, been anti-King Valdemar of Denmark and pro-Pope Innocent. As soon as he rose to power, everyone expected Otto to boot King Valdemar out of Saxony, but he hadn't done that. Instead, he had gone down to Italy to wrestle some territory back for the Pope, but now it looked like he had changed sides and was pursuing a more Hohenstaufen agenda, an agenda which placed him in full opposition to Pope Innocent.

What this meant on the ground in the Holy Roman Empire was that no one really knew whether the Emperor would be on their side or not. Everyone was surprised when word came through that Otto was intending to throw his support behind Bishop Valdemar's pitch for the Archbishop, which really just made everyone more confused. Church politics could be both complex and dangerous at the best of times, but really, most of the time everyone at least knew where they stood as far as the Emperor was concerned, but not now. Confusion ruled, and in Otto's absence, no one really knew what Otto's policies would be when he returned home. As a consequence, many senior Churchmen just wanted to get out of the Empire for a while. A total of three bishops indicated to Bishop Albert that they would accompany him back to Livonia when he returned there with his Crusaders.

But Bishop Albert wasn't ready to go back to Livonia just yet. No, Bishop Albert was off to Rome to meet Pope Innocent. The conflict between himself and the Sword Brothers really needed to be resolved, so both Bishop Albert and the Master of the Sword Brothers made their separate ways to Rome. On the 20th of October 1210, Bishop Albert and the Master of the Sword Brothers both presented their arguments to Pope Innocent. It was in Pope Innocent's interests for the Bishop and his military Order to resolve their differences and to get on with administering Livonia in harmony, because the absolute last thing that Pope Innocent wanted was for the conflict to get out of hand and provide a pretext for Emperor Otto to intervene. So Pope Innocent had to come up with a plan to have everyone playing nicely in Livonia. Unfortunately, no such plan came to mind, so he delayed making any pronouncement on the matter.

But before the Bishop and the Master departed, Pope Innocent made a bombshell of a decision. He urged Bishop Albert to reject Bishop Valdemar's bid to become Archbishop, and to instead support Gerhard of Oldenburg. William Urban speculates that Bishop Albert may have pointed out to Pope Innocent that really life would be so much easier if he didn't have to answer to the Archbishop of Hamburg-Bremen. Astonishingly, Pope Innocent agreed, taking the momentous step of declaring that the Archbishop of Hamburg-Bremen was to have no further authority over the Bishopric of Riga, but that instead the Bishop of Riga should now have the power to found Bishoprics and monasteries himself. This was a massive step towards independence for Christian Livonia and was a huge confidence booster for Bishop Albert personally. He was so thrilled and excited that he decided that the news couldn't wait until he returned to Livonia. Instead, at great expense and inconvenience, he sent messengers to travel overland to Livonia via Prussia, through the harsh winter weather, to deliver the news to Riga.

Talking of Riga, what has been happening back in Livonia during Bishop Albert's absence? Well, quite a bit, actually, and none of it good if you happened to be a Christian. The different pagan groups surrounding Livonia, most of whom had previously spent their time fighting each other, decided around this time to combine forces and attack Livonia. So the Estonians raided from the north, the Lithuanians attacked from the south and, not to be left out of the party, the Kuronians boarded ships and attacked via the Gulf of Riga. Now I guess I don't need to tell you how much of a shock this was to the Christians of Livonia, who immediately had to stop their squabbling and unite to defend themselves against the pagan attacks. Of the pagan attacks, the one by the Kuronians was the most successful.

Our Chronicler Henry of Livonia describes how ambassadors were sent from one pagan group to another. Some Livonians traveled to speak to the Kuronians, then some Kuronians traveled to Estonia to meet with the pagans there, and likewise, representatives also visited the Lithuanians and the Semigallians. Between them, they devised a plan, that plan being to attack Livonia, destroy Riga, and kill all the Germans. Having consulted with their gods and been given the green light to proceed, the combined attack commenced.

As I've mentioned, by far, the most successful attack was that undertaken by the Kuronians. They sailed their ships into the Gulf of Riga and up the Daugava. They disembarked and marched on Riga, with Henry of Livonia describing their army as being great and strong. Interestingly, Henry of Livonia reports that the Kuronian army was opposed not by the Germans, who I guess may have been occupied fighting the Estonians and Lithuanians, but by the local Christianized Livonians.

Remember those nasty three-pronged iron barbs which the Germans of Riga used during the Russian and Livonian uprising? Well, it seems that the Livonians have now adopted them as a defensive tactic. They scattered a bunch of the barbs on the road to Riga, and it seems that they did injure some of the Kuronians, while others were killed by the Livonians. The Kuronians then retreated back to their ships for a rest and a bite to eat, and then, nicely refreshed, they got ready for battle once again. This time they actually managed to make it to Riga, and ended up surrounding the city. They weren't able to maintain the siege for long, though. Taking considerable losses from the catapult machines and arrows, they once again retreated to their ships. However, this gave the defenders time to rally and regroup before the next assault.

Word went out that Riga was under attack and assistance poured in from all quarters. Members of the Sword Brothers came to the city's defense, along with a significant

number of Livonians, including an army led by I've-Been-To-Rome Caupo. In fact, in his book "The Baltic Crusade", William Urban credits Caupo and his Livonians for turning the tide against the Kuronians, and saving the city of Riga. Had the Christianized Livonians not sprung to the city's aid, there's definitely a chance that Riga may have fallen to the pagans. William Urban points out that had this occurred, the Christianized Livonians still wouldn't have gained their independence. Instead, they would have been swapping German Christian overlords for pagan, possibly Kuronian ones. So they decided to stand their ground against the pagan invaders. William Urban points out that not only the attacks against Riga but the combined attacks across Livonia were really serious, and the Christians fought desperately to hold on to Livonia, with many laying down their lives in the process.

In fact, it wasn't the Germans or the Livonian Christians who saved Christian Livonia from annihilation. No, it was the weather. As winter started to descend, the various pagan armies packed up and withdrew back to their homes, leaving the exhausted and relieved Christians pondering how to prevent this sort of an attack from occurring again. There was every likelihood that the various pagan armies would resume their attacks in the spring, as soon as the weather warmed, so the Christians needed a plan, and they needed one quickly. So they decided to reach out to the Russians, not just to Prince Vladimir of Polotsk, but further afield.

Now I guess I don't have to tell you that the Christians of Livonia are in all sorts of bother here. They are leaderless, Bishop Albert is still doing his tour of Saxony and Rome, and they are surrounded by enemies who, while they have withdrawn for the winter, will in all likelihood renew their attacks in the spring. As Henry of Livonia puts it, and I quote, "The Livonian Church was thus now beset with many tribulations, as it was in the midst of many nations and the adjacent Russians, who all took counsel together over ways to destroy it." End quote.

Well, desperate times call for desperate measures, so it was time to ask the Russians for help. Now we all know that if you travel far enough up the River Daugava you will enter Russian territory, namely the Principality of Polotsk, and you will eventually find yourself at its seat of power, the town of Polotsk. Well, the Principality of Polotsk covers a vast area, and the town of Polotsk is located in the northernmost reaches of the Principality. So most of the region of Polotsk runs south from the town, stretching around the region which was home to the Lithuanians. Now, to the north of the Principality of Polotsk lies another vast Russian territory, the principality of Pskov. The seat of power for the Principality of Pskov is, you guessed it, the town of Pskov. Today the town of Pskov lies in Russia, around twenty kilometres from its border with Estonia. Back in the thirteenth century, the town of Pskov was located in the Russian Principality of Pskov, around twenty kilometers from the region controlled by the Estonians. So nothing much has changed.

In a nutshell, Pskov borders Estonia, and the Germans of Livonia decided that it would be very good to reach out to these Russians to see if they could assist the Germans, while at the same time making life difficult for the invading Estonians. In fact, while they were there they thought, they might as well discuss trade and commerce. Pskov was, handily, not too far away from Novgorod, which was in the neighboring principality of Novgorod. There was also some suggestion that goods could make their way from Pskov to Smolensk and from there on to Kiev. So all in all, sending a group of Germans to Pskov seemed like an excellent idea, so that's what happened. The group had some trials and tribulations

reaching Pskov, and were attacked numerous times by the Estonians, but in the end, a Sword Brother named Arnold made it to Pskov, along with a small group of Germans.

The Prince of Pskov seemed interested in what the Germans were proposing, and he sent a rich and influential merchant from Smolensk back with the Germans to Riga to negotiate terms. The terms they reached were this. Bishop Albert, or the Livonians themselves, would from now on pay tribute to Pskov, making an annual payment. In return, the Russians of Pskov agreed to provide military assistance to the Germans. The Germans thought that this was great. As Henry of Livonia explains, and I quote "and all rejoiced since they could now more securely wage war against the Estonians and the other pagans" end quote.

So that's the Russians of Pskov taken care of. What about the Russians of Polotsk? Well, William Urban in his book "The Baltic Crusade" is able to report that the Germans were also able to secure an alliance with Polotsk, meaning that additional Russian assistance would be forthcoming down the Daugava.

And that's very fortunate, because the Germans are going to need all the men they can muster. Spring is coming, and spring will bring with it Bishop Albert sailing back from Lubeck, and a massive invasion by the Estonians. Join me next week for the next round in the conflict which is the Livonian Crusade: Estonians versus Christians. Until next week, bye for now.

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