

History of the Crusades. Episode 209. The Baltic Crusades. The Livonian Crusade Part XV. The Fourth Lateran Council.

Hello again. Last week we saw a new Holy Roman Emperor arise from the Hohenstaufen ashes, Emperor Frederick II. We also saw the Sword Brothers take a step backwards in their bid for more power in Livonia after they attempted to blindside Pope Innocent III by going directly to the Emperor with their concerns, a move which ultimately backfired.

Well, now it's the year 1215, and it's time to down tools across Europe and head to Rome, because Pope Innocent has sent word out that he is convening an Ecumenical Council, the largest one yet seen in the history of the Church, known as the Fourth Lateran Council. It will be held in November 1215, and Bishops, Archbishops, senior clergymen and power brokers from across Europe were invited to travel to Rome to attend. We discussed this council way back in Episode 156, during our series on the Crusade against the Cathars. You might recall that Count Raymond VI will attend to this council, along with the eighteen year old future Count Raymond VII, who oddly traveled to Rome disguised as a merchant's servant. Arnaud Amalric will also be there, along with Simon De Montfort's brother, Guy.

Well, not only will the main players in the Crusade against the Cathars be in attendance, the main players in the Baltic Crusades are also intending to make the journey, those players being Bishop Albert Bishop Theodoric and the man who has been acting as Bishop Albert's caretaker in Livonia for the past few years, Bishop Philip of Ratzeburg. Now Bishop Albert didn't have that far to travel to get to Rome, but Bishop Theodoric and Bishop Philip did, so sensibly they decided to leave Livonia in the summer of 1215, allowing plenty of time to sail to Gottland, then Lubeck, then make the journey overland to Rome. And it was a very good thing that they allowed plenty of time. Why? Well, because Bishop Theodoric and Bishop Philip's journey to Rome was like a mini Odyssey, an action-packed journey full of delays, mishaps and drama. Things started off OK. The two bishops boarded a ship which, along with eight others was taking returning Crusaders and pilgrims back to Saxony via Gottland. But during their second night at sea they were hit by a ferocious storm, which continued throughout the following day, until all nine ships were forced to pull into a sheltered harbour on the island of Oesel.

Now as we all know, Oesel is currently home to the pirates of Estonia, and if you think that the Estonian pirates would be none-too-happy to see a bunch of German ships in their harbor, you would be right. Noticing the ships quietly catching their breath in the harbour, the Estonians sent word across the island that a bunch of Germans were sitting inside a bunch of ships nearby, and within an impressively short period of time, they had managed to raise both an army and a sort of a navy. Well, perhaps "navy" is too generous a term, but all the pirate ships scattered around the island descended on the harbour.

The Germans, at the moment were blissfully unaware of all of this. They sent a party of men out in small boats, or skiffs, to plunder some crops they saw growing on shore. The men were intending to harvest the crops using their swords, and bring them back on board the ships to share as food. However, their movements were observed by the hidden Estonians. The next day, when the party repeated their actions, they were ambushed by the Estonians, who managed to catch eight of the Germans along with their little skiff. According to Henry of Livonia, the Estonians killed some of the Germans and kept others captive, sending word to mainland Estonia that they had captured one of the Bishops of Riga. They actually hadn't. Both Bishops were still safely on board the ships, but I guess one German looks pretty much it's like another if you are an Estonian pirate.

What happened next sent dread through the remaining Germans. The entrance to the harbor was quite narrow. The Estonians sailed into the harbor, towing with them, a number of old ships. The Germans watched in horror as the Estonians sunk the older vessels at the entrance to the harbor, blocking the Germans' escape route. So the nine German ships are now trapped in the harbour, along with a bunch of Estonian pirate ships, while an army of angry Estonians mustered on shore, preventing any escape. Henry of Livonia reports that there were two hundred pirate ships and many thousands of Estonian cavalry and infantry on shore, although this is most likely an exaggeration.

Just when the Germans thought that things couldn't get any worse, they did. The Estonians constructed three barges onshore, made out of felled trees, and then set giant fires on them. They launched the first of the three fire barges into the water and, burning particularly fiercely, it floated out into the middle of the harbor. The pirates then maneuvered it, sending it directly at the German ships. I'll let Henry of Livonia tell you what happened next, and I quote "The Estonians circled around the fire in their pirate ships and kept it going. They steered it straight towards the midst of our ships. Our ships were all gathered together so that we could defend ourselves more easily from the enemy, so we feared all the more that we could not escape the fire. When the flames of this fire, which was taller than all of the ships, reached out towards us, we called the Bishop from his cabin, where he was praying day and night. He came and saw that there was no counsel or help for us save in God. He raised his eyes and both hands to heaven and prayed to be saved from the present fire. We all watched, and suddenly the wind changed from south to east. The east wind turned the weather-vane on the sails around and took the fire away from us. It gently forced the fire around the ships and behind us out to sea. And we all blessed the Lord, for he had visibly freed us from this present fire. The Estonians launched the second and third fires, and we worked for a long time, fighting them and pouring water on them, and at last the wind also removed them from us." End quote. Having survived the Estonian fire barges of doom, the Germans were then set upon by Estonians in small boats who circled around the German ships, shooting arrows and launching spears at any Germans they could see.

One of the captains of the German ships then came up with a cunning plan. The German ships weren't heavily loaded, so they were relatively light and maneuverable. The captain thought that the ships could be hauled one by one around the obstacles at the entrance to the harbor and then out to sea. This would involve the Germans lowering a ship's anchor onto a small boat. The small boat would then take the anchor as far as its rope would allow, and drop it into the water. Sailors on board the ship would then haul on the anchor rope until the ship was alongside the anchor. Then the anchor would be lifted onto the small boat and the process repeated until the ship had made its way around the obstacles and out of the harbor. This back-breaking and laborious task was performed while the ships and little boats were under constant fire from the Estonians, who hurled spears, arrows and rocks at the Germans. Two weeks later, all nine German vessels were out of the harbor, and the exhausted sailors had to wait another three weeks for favorable winds to blow so they could leave the Estonian shores. By this time, pretty much all of their food had run out. The ships did manage to make it to Gottland, but it was too much for Bishop Philip, who took ill on the journey and died on his way to Rome.

So of the three Bishops from the Livonian Crusade who traveled to Rome for the Fourth Lateran Council, only two actually completed the journey: Bishop Albert and Bishop Theodoric. So was attending the council worth the perilous journey? Yes, it absolutely

was. At the time of the council Pope Innocent was at the peak of his power, and the deliberations and determinations made at the council would drive Church policy, and therefore the politics of Europe, well into the future. Now we all know, of course, that Pope Innocent won't live to see the fruits of his labours. He will, in fact, die unexpectedly in about six months time. But the legacy of the Fourth Lateran Council will live on. In his book "The Papal Monarchy and the Western Church from 1050 to 1250", Colin Morris states that the purpose of the council was to set out Pope Innocent's plans for the next phase of his pontificate, those ambitious plans including, and I quote, "The recovery of the Holy Land, the reform of the church and the further prosecution of heresy" end quote.

So Crusading was to play a central role in discussions taking place at the council. Therefore, in addition to the major players from the Crusade against the Cathars and proponents of a new Crusade to the Holy Land, attendees were also interested in hearing what was taking place in the Baltic region. Accordingly, Bishop Albert was invited to address the Council and Pope Innocent. He spoke of the trials and tribulations of converting the pagans living on the cold, distant shores of the Baltic Sea, and he sought to increase Livonia's importance in the eyes of the Church by equating it to the Land of the Virgin Mary. Here are the words spoken by Bishop Albert to Pope Innocent at the Fourth Lateran Council as described by Henry of Livonia, and I quote, "Holy Father. As you have not ceased to cherish the Holy Land of Jerusalem, the country of the Son, with Your Holiness's care, so also you ought not to abandon Livonia, the Land of the Mother, which has hitherto been among the pagans and far from the cares of your consolation, and is now again desolate. For the Son loves his Mother, and as he would not care to lose his own land, so too, he would not care to endanger his Mother's land." End quote.

Pope Innocent gave this speech his stamp of approval, and not only recognized Livonia as the Land of the Virgin Mary, but also renewed the authority for another Crusade to Livonia. Henry of Livonia summarizes the outcome of the Council as follows, and I quote, "When the Council was finished, the Pope sent them back joyfully, having renewed their authority to preach and to enlist, for the remission of their sins, pilgrims who would go to Livonia with them to secure the new Church against the assaults of the pagans." End quote.

So with his Crusade to Livonia having been given a big thumbs-up from Pope Innocent, Bishop Albert headed back to the Holy Roman Empire on his annual recruitment drive. On his way to Lubeck, with the recent Papal approval under his belt, he visited the court of Emperor Frederick II, who promised to give him assistance. Buoyed by the approval and encouragement of both the Pope and the Emperor, Bishop Albert and Bishop Theodoric sailed from Lubeck in the summer of 1216 and arrived safely in Riga with a healthy contingent of Crusaders.

And really, it was lucky that Bishop Albert arrived back when he did, because once again things were about to heat up in Livonia. The Latin Christians, most likely at the urging of the Sword Brothers, had invaded deep into Estonia during Bishop Albert's absence. So deep into Estonia in fact, that they had advanced into territory which was considered to be under Russian control. As a consequence, the Estonians had requested Russian assistance to push back against the Germans, and it looked like a full blown war was about to break out between the Russian territories of Pskov and Novgorod and the Germans of Livonia.

This, of course, was not good news, especially since tensions were still high between Bishop Albert and the Sword Brothers. So the first item on Bishop Albert's to-do list was to

try and smooth things out between himself and his military Order, so they could present a united front to the Estonians and Russians. He did this by renegotiating the territorial agreement over Christianized lands in Livonia. Bishop Albert volunteered to hand over the final portion of his lands in Livonia to Bishop Theodoric. So under the new agreement, Bishop Albert would retain his first choice of one third of the lands in Livonia, the portion to the north of Riga including the town of Treiden, the Sword Brothers would retain their chosen portion, and the Bishop of Estonia, Bishop Theodoric, with his strong ties to the Sword Brothers, would now assume control of the remaining lands. With the cracks in Christianized Livonia now smoothed over, the now-united Germans invaded Estonia, heading northwards to the region of Saccalia (or Sakala), which you may recall, was the territory around the Estonian town of Fellin which the Germans had previously conquered.

Once they were satisfied that they had secured Sakala, they headed even further northwards to the region they called Harrien and which today is called Harju County, a county on the shores of the Baltic Sea, which includes the current capital city of Estonia, Tallinn. Henry of Livonia describes what happened when the Germans entered the region, and I quote "When we arrived there, we divided our army among all the roads, villages and provinces of the land. We burned and devastated everything, killed all the males, captured the women and children, and drove off their horses and many flocks." End quote. Unsurprisingly, the Estonians were none too happy about this. They assembled an army and attempted to attack the German invaders, without success. Meanwhile, the Russians of Pskov marched to the Estonian region of Ungannia, which is south of Fellin and had at its base of power, the fortified stronghold of Odenpah, which today is called Otepaa.

According to Henry of Livonia, this action by the Russians seems to have been aimed not so much at helping the Estonians to drive out the Germans, but to threaten them with Russian retaliation if they accepted German overlordship. Accordingly, The Russians demanded taxes and tributes from the Ungannians, and expressed their displeasure at the fact that some of the local pagans had converted to Latin Christianity rather than Orthodox Christianity. The poor Ungannians were now between a rock and a hard place, the rock being the Germans and the hard place being the Russians. Some of the Christianized Ungannians approached the Germans for help, and the Germans responded by sending a bunch of Crusaders to Odenpah, where they gathered together groups of Christianized Estonians and prepared to fortify Odenpah against both the pagan Estonians and the invading Russians.

So as the year 1216 draws to a close, we will see the crusading forces increasingly swing their attention to Estonia instead of Livonia. Join me next week for a showdown between the Germans and the Russians in Ungannia, where we enter the final year of the first phase of the Livonian Crusade. Until next week, bye for now.

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