

History of the Crusades. Episode 215. The Baltic Crusades. The Livonian Crusade Part XXI. The Estonian Uprisings.

Hello again. Now, before we start, I'd like to point you in the direction of a new history podcast. It's called the "Real Middle Ages Podcast", and he's by one of our listeners, Aaron Miller. Now the first subject that Aaron is tackling in his podcast is the history of Russia in the early medieval period. So if you've been wondering how the Russian Principalities that we have come across in the Baltic Crusades came to be, search for the "Real Middle Ages Podcast" and have that knowledge gap filled.

Now, while I'm on the topic of podcasts related to the Baltic Crusades, may I remind you that this podcast is powered by Patreon. At the moment, over on Patreon, we are eleven episodes in to a series on Joan of Arc. I initially thought that I would cover the whole topic in around ten episodes, but as usual, my estimates were way under. This is going to end up being a major series, and I'm really only just getting started. So if you can spare one dollar per month, want a bunch of extra episodes on topics such as the awesome and feisty Joan of Arc, and would like to help out the person whose voice is currently entering your ear, head over to [crusadespod.com](http://crusadespod.com), and follow the links. Or go to [patreon.com](http://patreon.com) and search for "History of the Crusades". And an enormous thank you goes out from me to all of you who have already signed up.

Okay, so where were we? Ah Yes. Last week we saw a minor victory for Bishop Albert as the Danish King placed Livonia back under the Bishop's control, while also relinquishing the regions of Saccalia and Ungannia in Estonia to the Sword Brothers. Livonia, Saccalia and Ungannia were required to swear fealty to Denmark and provide military assistance to the Danish King if requested, but other than that they were once again masters of their own destinies.

Now, while this was, of course, good news for Bishop Albert, the development may have been a double edged sword. Why? Well, because by giving the Sword Brothers significant portions of Estonia, King Valdemar had increased the wealth and independence of the Order. In fact, the land awarded to the Sword Brothers was massive. The combined regions of Saccalia and Ungannia amounted to an area of land twice the size of Livonia, with the northern boundary of the Sword Brothers' Estonian holdings bordering land controlled by Denmark, and the southern, eastern and western borders touching land controlled by Bishop Albert and Bishop Bernard. So potentially, this was a game changer. With their massive new land holdings, and having a number of ferocious, war loving Estonian tribes under their command, the Sword Brothers had every chance of securing themselves the means to expand their influence across a significant portion of the Baltic region. But it wasn't to be. In fact, things didn't go very well for the Sword Brothers at all. Let's sit back with Bishop Albert, and watch it all unravel.

Now, alarm bells probably should have started ringing for the Sword Brothers almost immediately. As William Urban points out in his book "The Baltic Crusades", the Estonians weren't too keen on being ruled by anyone. Forcing them to submit to foreign rule required a lot of manpower on the ground, yet King Valdemar hadn't left a significant garrison of men in Estonia. Added to this potential problem was the Russians. Always on the lookout for ways to muscle in and increase their influence in Estonia, the neighboring Russian Principalities watched on in interest as the Sword Brothers spread themselves thinly over their vast new Estonian territories.

In the end, however, the danger ended up coming from the island of Oesel. Now remember in last week's episode that King Valdemar himself had traveled to Oesel, and with the assistance of Count Albert of Orlamunde, had ended up subduing the pirates who lived on the island, and had built a Danish castle there. Now, after the Danish King and his army had departed from Oesel, he had left a small garrison behind to look after the castle. Interestingly, amongst the people left to watch over the newly subdued pirates of Oesel was Bishop Albert's brother, who was also a Bishop. Unhelpfully and somewhat confusingly, this particular brother of Bishop Albert was called Bishop Theodoric. So the people inside the sparsely garrisoned Danish castle on Oesel watched as the Danish ships sailed off into the sunset.

I imagine you can guess what happened next. That's right, the pirates of Oesel decided to attack and overrun the Danish castle which had been hurriedly constructed on their island. Now, to date the pagans of the Baltic region haven't had much success in attacking the Latin Christian strongholds in their midst. But as William Urban points out in his book "The Baltic Crusade", twenty years have now passed since the invasion of the pagan lands by the Latin Christians, and during those two decades the local people have learned quite a bit about the methods of warfare used by the invaders. A group of pirates from Oesel crossed over to mainland Estonia and had a word with some Christianized Estonians, who happened to be in possession of a catapult machine which some Danes had helpfully given them to defend themselves. The pirates studied the machine carefully and decided to return to Oesel and have a crack at building one for themselves. And that's what they did.

To the absolute horror of the people inside the Danish castle on Oesel, they suddenly not only found themselves under attack, but one of the weapons used by their pagan attackers was a fully functioning, newly constructed catapult machine. Henry of Livonia reports that the castle was pummeled ceaselessly by rocks hurled from the catapult machine for five whole days. The pirates manned the machine around the clock, and the bombardment was constant and deadly. The castle itself was still under construction. The main structure had been finished, but the array of buildings, houses and other structures which you usually find inside castle walls hadn't yet been built, so there weren't many places to hide from the constant deadly rain of rocks.

On the fifth day of the attack, the pirates proposed quite generous peace terms to the occupiers of the castle. They proposed that the Danes and Germans hand over the castle to the pirates and leave Oesel, relinquishing the island back to the pirates. In return, the Latin Christians would be free to leave unharmed, save for eight men who would remain on the island as hostages. As Henry of Livonia states, and I quote, "The men who were fighting under the open sky, lacking houses, in need of everything, accepted these terms of peace. They went out of the fort, brought their belongings with them to the ships and gave up the fort and the land to the Oeselians. The Oeselians also kept seven of the Danes and Theodoric, the brother of the Bishop of Riga, as hostages there, for the confirmation of the peace. All the rest returned to the Danes in Reval." End quote.

Now the pirates didn't decide to keep the castle for themselves. No, they decided to totally obliterate the Latin Christian structure. They knocked it down and pulled it apart until, as Henry of Livonia reports, nothing at all was left, and I quote, "Not a stone upon a stone", end quote. Pretty happy with the result they had achieved, the pirates sent word of their successes to tribes over in mainland Estonia, letting them know that the pirates of Oesel had expelled the Latin Christians from their land, and urging the mainland Estonians to do

the same. As a result, in January 1223 uprisings occurred across Estonia, with the most successful of these occurring in the sparsely garrisoned lands newly acquired by the Sword Brothers. Across Estonia, from small settlements to major strongholds such as Fellin and Odenpah, the Estonians went on an occupier-killing rampage, a rampage which seemed to take the Latin Christians completely by surprise and which was devastatingly successful.

Of the many, many uprisings which took place across Estonia that winter, I'll relate the details of just one, the uprising at Fellin. In the words of Henry of Livonia, here is what took place, and warning: this is quite a long passage, and I quote. "The Saccalians indeed, who lived together with the brothers of the militia in the fort of Fellin, were unable to disguise any longer the evil thoughts in their hearts against the Brothers. They all ran with their swords, lances and shields, seized some of the Brothers, their servants and the German merchants, and killed them. On Sunday, January 29, 1223, when the Gospel is read, when Jesus entered onto the ship, behold, a great tempest arose in the sea, as Theodoric the priest celebrated the solemnity of the mass, and other Brothers stood around in the Church, a great disturbance and commotion indeed took place, for after killing the Brothers, the servants and all the Germans outside, the Saccalians gathered at the Church. They sought to make blood, not prayers flow. They did not desire the sacrament of the Masses, but rather wanted to disturb the rest of Jesus Christ. They occupied and surrounded the door of the Church, and encircled the unarmed Brothers with their weapons. In order to get them out more easily, they treacherously gave the Brothers their hands and offered them peace. Maurice their magistrate, who was too ready to believe the infidels went out to them first. At once they rushed upon him and killed him. The rest therefore, were terrified by their certain knowledge, and prepared to defend themselves. After a long delay peace was at last sworn to, and the Brothers went out, one by one, to the Saccalians. The traitors at once seized them, cast them into shackles and chains, and pillaged their money, horses and all their goods, which they divided amongst themselves. They threw the bodies of the slain into the fields to be gnawed at by the dogs." End quote.

Scenes similar to this were repeated across Estonia, but as I've previously mentioned, hardest hit were the regions of Ungannia and Saccalia, the territories recently acquired by the Sword Brothers. In his book "The Baltic Crusade", William Urban reports that as many as one third of all the Sword Brothers who were in Estonia at the time of the uprisings were either killed or taken captive, and huge quantities of weapons, horses, money and supplies were lost to the Estonians. Before the Estonian uprisings, around 1200 men were members of the military Order. After the uprising, there were only 700 Sword Brothers remaining.

Buoyed by their overwhelming successes, the Estonians sent word to the neighboring Russian principalities of the uprising, and requested Russian assistance to attack the remaining Latin Christian strongholds. Henry of Livonia reports that the Estonians worked tirelessly to secure their gains. They fortified the strongholds they had seized from the Sword Brothers, and divided the German catapult machines equally amongst themselves. Estonians who knew how to construct the machines were ordered to teach others how to do so, until the strongholds were all adequately armed.

Henry of Livonia reports that the Estonians took back their wives, who had been sent away during the Christian occupation. They dug up the bodies of their fellow Estonians who had been buried in Christian cemeteries, and cremated them in accordance with their pagan

traditions. They washed themselves, their houses, and their strongholds with brooms and water determined to erase Christian baptism from both themselves and their lands.

The local Estonian tribes in Saccalia sent a message to Riga indicating they would like to develop a peaceful relationship with Livonia. In order to pursue the same, they proposed a hostage swap. The Estonian boys who had been taken from Saccalia to Riga by the Christians would be swapped for the Sword Brothers and German merchants who had recently been captured by the Estonians. The terms were agreed to, and the hostage swap took place.

With much of Estonia back in Estonian hands, the local fighters now turned their attention to the Danish settlement of Reval to the north. Now, this set alarm bells ringing in Riga. While the people of Livonia were certainly not massive fans of the Danish King, it really wasn't in their interests to see Estonia fall entirely out of Danish hands. Should Reval fall to the Estonians there was a real likelihood that Denmark may decide to withdraw from Estonia entirely, leaving little prospect of the Germans being able to hold on to any of their Estonian territory. In that scenario, Estonia may be entirely retaken by its original inhabitants, in what would be a huge blow to both the crusading cause and the Latin Christian Church. Trouble was, with the Sword Brothers having suffered staggering losses, there was really no means by which the Germans could send military assistance to Reval. So everybody really just crossed their fingers and waited to see what would happen.

What happened was that the Estonians besieged Reval. Things weren't looking too good for the Danes and Germans trapped inside the fortress at Reval. However, having been besieged for, in the words of Henry of Livonia, and I quote "a long time" end quote, the Latin Christians decided to rally and take the fight to the Estonians. They left the fortress and attacked the besiegers, managing to kill many of them and causing the rest of them to flee. So, in a setback for the Estonians, Reval remained in Danish hands.

So to summarize, by the end of the uprising the Danes were still hanging on to Reval in the far north of Estonia, however, the regions of Ungannia and Saccalia had now fallen out of the control of the Sword Brothers and were back in Estonian hands. With their numbers having been reduced so drastically, there was no way that the Sword Brothers could win back their territories without outside help. The obvious people to call on for assistance were the Danes. King Valdemar II of Denmark had granted the two regions to the Sword Brothers, so surely King Valdemar could help the Sword Brothers take it back. Well, no actually, he couldn't.

We all know that good times don't last, and King Valdemar had recently experienced an impressive run of good times. Now however, the pendulum of fortune for the Danish King has swung far back the other way. In an absolutely startling move, one which will have grave implications for the future of the Danish occupation of Saxony, one of King Valdemar's vassals, Henry I, the Count of Schwerin, also known as Henry the Black, which actually sounds much better in German, "Heinrich der Schwarze", kidnapped the Danish King. Yes, poor King Valdemar was having some downtime, fishing and hunting on the picturesque little island of Lyo in Denmark, with his eldest son and some of his vassals. Following a prolonged session of drinking and feasting, Henry the Black led a group of conspirators to the royal tent and abducted the Danish monarch and his son, took them to Brandenburg, and imprisoned them inside a castle in the little town of Lenzen.

Now, as I said, the ramifications of this bold move by Henry the Black will be massive, and I won't be going into them now. All that we need to know for the moment is that the absolute last thing on King Valdemar's mind, while he languishes as a prisoner in a castle deep inside the Holy Roman Empire, is the fate of the Sword Brothers' territories inside Estonia. So with the Danish crown out of the picture, there is really only one other person the Sword Brothers can turn to for assistance. And that person is Bishop Albert, the man whom the Sword Brothers have been knocking their collective heads against since their inception as a military Order.

Will Bishop Albert listen to the desperate pleas of the Sword Brothers and come to their aid against the Estonians? Or will he be happy to watch them get hung out to dry on the Estonian washing line? You'll have to tune in next week to find out. Until next week, bye for now.

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