

History of the Crusades. Episode 216. The Baltic Crusades. The Livonian Crusade Part XXII. Changing Fortunes.

Hello again. Last week we saw Fortune smile down upon the native Estonians, and Fortune scowl menacingly at King Valdemar II of Denmark and the Sword Brothers. By the end of last week's episode, we saw the Estonians, sparked by an uprising on the island of Oesel, take back much of Estonia. While Reval still remains in Danish hands, the King of Denmark himself has been kidnapped and is currently languishing as a captive inside a castle in the Holy Roman Empire, and the Sword Brothers have pretty much been forced to relinquish their hold on the Estonian regions of Ungannia and Saccalia.

Now, unsurprisingly, the Sword Brothers would like to retake Ungannia and Saccalia from the Estonians, but with their numbers slashed from losses incurred during the recent uprisings they need outside assistance to do so. With King Valdemar out of the picture, really the only option available to the Sword Brothers is to seek assistance from neighboring Livonia. Now, as we all know, Bishop Albert isn't exactly a fan of the military Order he founded. Likewise, the citizens and fighting men of Livonia aren't exactly fans of the Sword Brothers, either. Bishop Albert is currently away on his annual recruitment drive, so the Master of the Sword Brothers traveled to Riga to meet with representatives from the local community.

Now, just as an aside here, Livonia, at this point in time seems to be making its decisions in a very un-feudal-like manner. Perhaps due to the fact that the community is comprised of a number of completely separate groups, all trying to forge an existence in a challenging environment, they seem to make most of their decisions in a cooperative manner, after consultation with the men of the Church, the merchants, the Christianized Letts and Livonians, and other community groups. Anyway, this situation was no different. The Master of the Sword Brothers came to Riga to beg for assistance, and representatives from all the different community groups in Livonia came together to discuss and debate the matter. The arguments against helping the Sword Brothers were probably easy to discern, but a surprise group came out strongly in favor of providing assistance. That group was the Christianized Letts.

The land of the Letts was located on the border between Livonia and Estonia. Should Ungannia and Saccalia remain in pagan Estonian hands, then the Letts would have for their neighbours, not the Sword Brothers and Christianized subdued Estonians, but angry rebellious pagan Estonians who would be eyeing off the land of the Letts as they looked around for their next conquest. So the Letts argued forcibly for Livonian military intervention, and the Livonian community eventually agreed. However, the conditions they imposed on the Sword Brothers for providing this assistance were harsh. They demanded that Ungannia and Saccalia be divided into thirds. One third of the territory would go to Bishop Albert, one third to the Bishop of Estonia, and the Sword Brothers could retain the remaining one third of their former lands. I guess one third of Ungannia and Saccalia was better than nothing, so the Sword Brothers agreed to the terms, and the army of Livonia marched northwards to confront the Estonians.

However, as William Urban points out in his book "The Baltic Crusade", this army wasn't very large, and although they managed to capture and kill many Estonians, they were not able to dislodge the Estonians from any of the major strongholds, and they were forced to return to Livonia with all the major forts and castles still in Estonian hands. They knew that in order to mount a successful campaign against the Estonians, they were going to need

more men. Specifically, they were going to need more Crusade volunteers, so everyone was hoping that Bishop Albert's recruitment drive back in Saxony was going well.

Unfortunately, I am unable to shed any light whatsoever on how Bishop Albert's recruitment drive went, because Henry of Livonia just doesn't mention him. There is one Bishop, however, who has just had a massively successful recruitment drive back in the Holy Roman Empire, and is sailing back to Riga in the spring of 1223 with an impressively large group of crusade volunteers. But this Bishop isn't Bishop Albert, it's Bishop Bernard, the Bishop of Semigallia. Yes, it looks like all Bishop Albert's concerns about Bishop Bernard's ambitions may well have had some substance, because Bishop Bernard hasn't been preaching the Livonian Crusade, he's been preaching the Semigallian Crusade. Yes, the man who in a former existence was the famous warrior Bernard zur Lippe, and whose son is now the powerful Archbishop of Hamburg-Bremen, is planning to go conquering from his headquarters in Mesoten across Semigallian territory, converting and subduing the local pagans, and creating for himself a powerful and expansive new Bishopric.

The bad news for Bishop Bernard, however, was that as soon as his crusader army arrived in Riga, it was told it was urgently needed in Estonia. So Bishop Bernard gave a martyred sigh and led his army, not southwards towards Semigallia, but northwards into Estonia. Now, no doubt Bishop Bernard believes that this is just a temporary setback and that the following season he will be able to begin his empire-building work in Semigallia. Unfortunately for Bishop Bernard, I have some bad news for him. He will in fact die unexpectedly in around a year's time. As William Urban points out, Bishop Bernard's death meant that his family's ambitions to conquer lands in the Baltic region and carve out a Princedom for themselves vanished in a puff of smoke, and in fact, Semigallia will remain a small and insignificant Bishopric for many years to come. But of course, this is all very good news for Bishop Albert, who will see one of his chief rivals unexpectedly disappear.

Anyway, that's all a year or so into the future. At the moment, the apparently hale and hearty Bishop Bernard is leading 8,000 warriors into Estonia to take back Ungannia and Saccalia. Now there were two bits of bad news waiting for Bishop Bernard and his crusaders. The first was that the rebellious Estonians had managed to enlist Russian help in their fight to hold on to Estonia. The second piece of bad news was that the Estonians weren't barricaded inside pagan forts using pagan weaponry. No, the Estonians were holed up inside fancy, impressive, German-built strongholds, and even worse, seemed to be adept at using the advanced weaponry of European style siege warfare, meaning that the attacking crusaders would be facing formidable stone forts equipped with catapult machines and other similar defensive weapons.

The first fort which the Bishop and his crusaders tried to take back was the German-built a castle at Fellin. The design of the castle, and the fact that it was being defended by Estonians manning catapult machines, meant that it couldn't be stormed, so the only option available was a siege. The crusaders surrounded the castle, and with the Estonian supplies of food and water cut off they waited to see what would happen. Now, by this time it was high summer, and with no water the Estonians inside Fellin began to suffer. After two weeks of hot August days and hot August nights the Estonians had had enough. Here is Henry of Livonia describing what took place, and I quote "Since the heat was indeed exceedingly great, and there was a multitude of beasts and men in the fort, and they were perishing from hunger and first, there was a great pestilence because of the excessively great stench of those who had died in the fort, and the men began to get sick and die. The

rest who remained were not strong enough to defend themselves, and gave themselves, still alive, and all their belongings, into the Christians hands." End quote.

Following the fall of Fellin, the Crusaders accepted the surrender of the Estonians who had been defending the castle, but they also found some Russians who had been assisting the Estonians, and Henry of Livonia states that they executed the Russians, with the specific purpose of providing a deterrent and a warning against future Russian involvement in Estonia. William Urban points out that Russian involvement in Estonia did start to taper off at this time, but not because of the German treatment of Russian prisoners. No, the Mongols were coming.

Yes, in 1223 the Mongols wiped out a large Russian force at the Battle of the Kalka River, which was fought in present day Ukraine, and all over Russia alarm bells were starting to ring about this dangerous new threat. Accordingly, even the northern Principalities of Russia (Pskov, Novgorod and Polotsk) will send aid to their southern Russian neighbors to counter the Mongol invaders. As a result, Estonia will take a back seat in Russian affairs as the more pressing need to push back against the Mongol invasion took precedence. The long term result of this change in policy was that Russia, in the words of William Urban, will forfeit their hegemony over eastern Estonia, leaving Denmark and the Holy Roman Empire as the sole remaining external powers battling for territory there.

Now, while Bishop Bernard and his crusaders were enjoying some successes against the Estonians and the Russians, the Sword Brothers were not so lucky. They attempted to recapture one of the key strongholds in the region of Ungannia, but due to the recent reduction in their forces they just didn't have enough men to succeed. To make matters worse, it was clear that they still considered themselves aligned to the Danes, so they repeatedly sent Brothers to the assistance of Danish fighters who were also struggling to hold on to their positions. As William Urban points out, despite the risk of further alienating Bishop Albert and the Livonians, it was clear that the Sword Brothers still viewed the Danish Crown as their main ally.

So I'm guessing that the Sword Brothers were really keen to see King Valdemar freed from captivity so that he could reward them for their loyalty, and assist them to regain their lost territory. But unfortunately for both the Sword Brothers and the Danish monarch, that doesn't look like it will be happening any time soon. Henry the Black, the Count of Schwerin who had kidnapped the Danish King, is currently under immense pressure from Rome, from Denmark, and even from the Holy Roman Emperor to release King Valdemar, but it's very much in his interests not to do so. Why? Well, because King Valdemar is the only card of any value that Henry the Black holds. He is a nobleman whose lands are currently occupied by Denmark, a situation which both the Emperor and the Pope seem happy to let continue. So Henry the Black knows that as soon as he releases King Valdemar, he will be annihilated.

Accordingly, he has been doing everything he can to delay the Danish King's release. To that end he opened ransom negotiations by demanding terms that were totally outrageous. He not only demanded that Denmark withdraw from land that they currently occupied in Saxony, he also stipulated that the King was to pay him personally the astonishing sum of 40,000 marks. Everyone knew that neither of these things were going to happen, but Henry knew that the game would be over if he backed down. So the negotiations dragged on and on and on.

By the spring of 1224, Bishop Albert and his brother Bishop Hermann were ready to leave Saxony to sail back to Riga with the current season's crusade volunteers. King Valdemar has now been imprisoned for nearly a year, and the whole saga was actually working out really well for Bishop Albert. Without the interference of the Danish King, the two Bishops were free to preach the Crusade without restriction. The two Bishops even managed to visit King Valdemar in his prison, Bishop Albert no doubt doing his best to keep the smirk off his face as he obtained leave from the Danish monarch to formally install Bishop Hermann as the new Bishop of Estonia. At this stage, Bishop Albert was likely feeling pretty happy with himself. The three greatest threats to his power in Livonia, King Valdemar, the Sword Brothers and Bishop Bernard were all going through a really bad time, with Bishop Bernard winning the Bad Times Prize on account of the fact that he had recently died unexpectedly.

When Bishop Albert arrived back in Livonia in 1224, he immediately started throwing his weight around, telling the Sword Brothers that their former territory in Estonia was now going to be divided up as follows. Bishop Albert awarded himself the coastal lands to the west, gave Ungannia to his brother, the newly confirmed Bishop of Estonia Bishop Hermann, and generously told the Sword Brothers that they could keep Saccalia. Bishop Albert then led his crusaders on a quest to reconquer Ungannia from the Estonians, which was actually stunningly successful. A total lack of mercy was shown during this campaign by the crusaders. When they attacked a Russian garrisoned stronghold in Ungannia they slew every single Estonian and every a single Russian in the garrison when they overthrew the stronghold, all except one man, a Russian who was spared so that he could travel back to Russia and report on the event. As a result, Ungannia ended up surrendering to Bishop Hermann. Word of the crusader victories spread around Estonia, resulting in the coastal regions in the west submitting themselves to Bishop Albert. Even the pirates of Oesel seemed rattled. They freed Bishop Albert's brother Theodoric, who had been kept as a prisoner on Oesel since the start of the uprisings.

With Bishop Albert's fortunes rising to dizzying heights, he decided to take advantage of his run of good luck to try to consolidate his hold on Livonia and Estonia before King Valdemar was set free. So Bishop Albert wrote to Rome requesting that the Pope send a Papal Legate to Livonia. You see, Bishop Albert was, despite the amount of power he was currently wielding, still just a Bishop. He wasn't an Archbishop, and he didn't have the authority to make and enforce decisions which would keep the Sword Brothers, the citizens of Riga, the visiting merchants, and the pagans securely in line. The Pope agreed and made arrangements for the very capable, very well respected, and very savvy Bishop of Modena, Bishop William, to travel to Livonia as his representative.

Now this move will have huge ramifications for Bishop Albert's plans for the Baltic states. The impact of the Papal Legate's visit will be felt in ways that Bishop Albert could only have guessed at. Why? Well, because the game is pretty much over for King Valdemar of Denmark, and, as we all know, power abhors a vacuum. The crumbling of Danish ambitions in Estonia and the forced withdrawal of Denmark from Saxony will see the rise in influence, not of Bishop Albert, but of the Papal Legate Bishop William of Modena. Join me next week as we see the downfall of King Valdemar II of Denmark, and welcome the arrival to the Baltic shores of the Papal Legate. Until next week, bye for now.

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