

History of the Crusades. Episode 203. The Baltic Crusades. The Livonian Crusade Part IX. Life Is Not Fair. Praise God!

Hello Again.

Now, before we get started this week, I'd like to draw your attention to the work of one of my fellow podcasters, Kristaps Andrejsons, who hosts the "Eastern Border Podcast". Now Kristaps is Latvian, and his podcast covers topics primarily in modern times in Russia and the Baltic states. He did a particularly good episode on Chernobyl a while back. So if you're interested in what's been taking place in the Baltic region outside to the medieval era, just search for the Eastern Border Podcast on your favorite Pod-catcher. While we're on the subject of promotions, remember that the History of the Crusades Podcast is powered by Patreon. If you would like to support the History of the Crusades Podcast, you can sign up to become a patron. For the princely sum of one dollar per month, you will receive a bonus episode every fortnight. We are currently running a series on Joan of Arc and the Hundred Years War, and are just about at the point where Joan enters the battle, so, exciting. Thank you so much to everyone who's joined so far. I'm really enjoying researching and writing the new episodes, and I've got quite a few interesting things in the pipeline. If you would like to become a patron, just go Crusadespod.com and follow the link.

Okay, so last week we saw the Russian threat to the independence of the German settlements in Livonia cease, as Prince Vladimir withdrew his army from Livonia and headed back to Polotsk. But shortly after the Russian threat waned, another threat loomed large on the horizon, this time from the Danes. The Danish King Valdemar had previously expressed interest in taking territory along the southern shores of the Baltic Sea, and in the year 1206 King Valdemar and the most senior cleric in Denmark, the Archbishop of Lundt, landed at the island of Oesel in the Gulf of Riga to begin their conquest. Unfortunately for Danish expansionist ambitions, the expedition didn't go at all well. The attempt to drive the Estonian pirates off the island failed, and with no Danes willing to remain on the island to be permanently stationed inside the fort the Danes had built, the army and the King withdrew from the region and headed back to Denmark. The Archbishop of Lundt, however, headed over to Riga, and after showering them with a very welcome two shiploads of supplies, he spent the winter in the town with the Christians of Riga.

This, of course, set alarm bells ringing for Bishop Albert. An Archbishop had finally visited the fledgling Christian settlement in Livonia, but it wasn't an Archbishop from the Holy Roman Empire. No, he was from Denmark. The good news, of course, was that the Danish King and his Danish army had now withdrawn from the region, so whatever territorial designs the Danes had could be resolved not militarily, but diplomatically. Since the withdrawal of the Russians, the conversion of the Livonians had proceeded at a cracking pace. Perhaps deciding that no one was going to save them from these persistent and violent Germans, so they may as well throw their hands up and convert, many Livonians did exactly that. This, of course, meant that many Livonians were now also obligated to pay tithes to the church, with the Germans seeking a form of retribution by taxing the rebellious tribes heavily, while being lenient on the ones which had played no role in the recent uprising.

Priests had also been sent to explore the outlying regions and baptize the pagans they found there, and it wasn't just Livonians who were the targets of conversion. Our

Chronicler Henry of Livonia reports that a priest called Daniel traveled through the forests, converting the pagans until he eventually found himself at a place the locals called "Old Mountain", which was in the vicinity of the town of Riga. There he came across some Wends. The Wends had fled from the Christianization of Wendish territory, and from the incorporation of their homelands into the Holy Roman Empire. However, they had encountered some problems finding somewhere to settle. They had tried putting down roots in the land of the Kurs, but they seem to have made themselves an enemy of the Kuronian people, and had been driven out into the land of the Letts. They had been driven away from there as well, and were now trying to settle down in a camp on a mountain near Riga. According to Henry, the Wends rejoiced at the arrival of the priest Daniel into their midst and, probably overwhelmed at finally finding a friendly face and some welcoming arms, they all promptly converted to Christianity and were baptized, which meant that they were finally able to remain at their new mountain home without having to flee further.

So things are going well for the Germans in Livonia, which made it even more important that they didn't lose their gains to the Danish crown. So Bishop Albert decided to resolve the issue once and for all during his next trip to Saxony. Now, at this time in the Holy Roman Empire, it looked like the Civil War was about to come to an end. Without financial support from the English crown, Otto's attempts to seize the Imperial crown for Saxony seemed doomed, and everyone was betting on Philip of Hohenstaufen rising as victor at some stage in the near future. So the man to speak to about the Danish threat was clearly Philip of Hohenstaufen. With that in mind, Bishop Albert made his annual preaching tour of Saxony and Westphalia to drum up some crusaders for his next expedition to Livonia, but this time he preached as far as the low countries, before wheeling back around and finding himself, oh fancy that, in Philip's court. He was able to gain an audience with the man that everyone thought was about to become the next Holy Roman Emperor, and Philip made the momentous decision to invest Bishop Albert with Livonia as a vassal of the Holy Roman Empire. In the words of Henry of Livonia, Bishop Albert, and I quote, "received Livonia from the Empire" end quote. Philip of Hohenstaufen promised to send one hundred marks from the Imperial Treasury to Livonia each year, and Bishop Albert returned to Riga, satisfied that Livonia was now firmly under the wing of the Empire, and was no longer at risk of becoming a Danish or Russian province.

Now, unfortunately for Philip of Hohenstaufen, he will be assassinated a year or so after this event by an angry Bavarian, becoming the first ever King of Germany to be murdered whilst in office. So just when Philip was within a whisker of defeating the Saxons and claiming the Imperial Crown, the Empire will be plunged back into a state of civil war, with the pendulum of success swinging back towards Otto of Saxony, who will take full advantage of Philip's untimely murder to make huge gains for Saxony. But all this Imperial drama, which will play out during the year 1208, doesn't change the fact that Livonia is now an Imperial vassal. Bishop Albert now has actual legal and diplomatic grounds to resist Danish attempts to muscle in on his territory. By the time Bishop Albert sailed back to the Livonia in 1207, with an unusually large contingent of crusade volunteers and a couple of German noblemen, the Danish Archbishop had departed from Riga and had headed back home.

So at the moment, in the year 1207, things were looking up for Bishop Albert and his Christian settlements in Livonia, so far as external threats were concerned. Not only had he managed to deflect Danish territorial ambitions in the region, the Germans in Livonia now seemed to be getting on better with the Russians. Not long after he arrived back in Riga, a Russian overlord from a place which the Germans called Kokenhausen on the

Daugava River, which was located in border territory between Livonia and the Principality of Polotsk near the region controlled by the Lithuanians, arrived in Riga. Now this was clearly an important event, as this overlord was the first Russian to make contact with the German Christians following their failed attack on Holm. So Bishop Albert rolled out the red carpet and received the Russian with as much hospitality and warmth as he could muster. This holding out of German hands to the neighboring Russians seems to have worked, because after having stayed in Bishop Albert's own residence for two nights the Russian requested German assistance. He was having trouble with the Lithuanians who kept raiding Kokenhausen. Could Bishop Albert lend a hand? Of course Bishop Albert could. When the negotiations were finalized, it was agreed that Bishop Albert would send men and weapons to Kokenhausen, and in return the overlord would grant to the Germans half of his territory, along with the fort in Kokenhausen, which seems like an extremely generous deal for the Bishop, so his lavish hospitality definitely paid off.

So it really seems like Bishop Albert has everything in hand. The Danes have been taken care of, Livonians of being converted in droves, churches are springing up all over Livonia, and now even the Russians are seeming to accept the fact that the Germans are now a permanent presence in Livonia, and are beginning to work with them instead of against them. But, just when Bishop Albert thought he could kick back and relax in his residence at Riga, with all the threats taken care of, a surprising new problem emerged. This threat wasn't an external one, but an internal one. The threat came from the military Order which Bishop Albert had established, the Sword Brothers.

Now at the same time as Christianity, was spreading across Livonia, and as Riga and the other German settlements in Livonia seemed to be flourishing, the Sword Brothers were also expanding, with more Brothers being admitted into the Order. However, the wealth of the Order had not increased. Upon joining the Order, a Sword Brother would take an oath of poverty, and no Brother could own private property. However, William Urban points out in his book "The Baltic Crusade" that the Order of the Sword Brothers likely aspired to rise in wealth and prestige to a level matching that of the larger, better known Orders such as the Knights Templar and the Knights Hospitaller. As they saw the visiting German merchants grow in wealth from the work the Sword Brothers had done in making Livonia safe for its Christian occupants, they probably started wondering why they couldn't share in the spoils.

And to be fair to the Sword Brothers, they did have quite a tough gig. They were stationed in Livonia permanently, having to endure the harsh winters, while the volunteer crusaders and merchants returned to the milder climate of the Holy Roman Empire. As missionary work expanded out across Livonia, Sword Brothers were likely to be called upon to provide military support wherever and whenever it was required, whether in the heat of summer, where they sweated inside their armor or in the depths of winter, when the same suit of armor would be rattling with the sound of its shivering occupant inside. Our Chronicler, Henry of Livonia, describes the outlook of the Sword Brothers at this time in the following way, and I quote, "It happened also at the same time that the Lord increased from day to day the number and retinue of the Brothers of the militia. It seemed to them, however, that just as their numbers and labors increased, so ought their possessions and goods to increase, in order that those who bore the burden of the day, and the heats in wars and other continual labors, should likewise receive the reward of their labors, the penny a day." End quote.

In case any of you are scratching your heads at the "penny a day" reference, it refers to a biblical quote from Matthew Chapter Twenty. Now, oddly, I read Matthew Chapter Twenty, and while I'm certainly no expert in biblical interpretation, I actually think that it says the opposite of what the Sword Brothers were trying to say. Okay, so I'm going to digress for a moment. Matthew Chapter Twenty, also known as the "parable of labors in a vineyard", goes a little something like this. A man goes out early one morning to hire laborers to work in his vineyard. There are a bunch of blokes hanging around in the marketplace seeking work, and he hires them for the agreed amount of a penny for the day. The men go to the vineyard and start working. Later on in the day, the vineyard owner goes to the marketplace again where he hires some more laborers, again agreeing to pay them one penny for the day's work. At the eleventh hour of the day, that is, only one hour prior to knock-off time, he goes to the marketplace again and hires some more men on the same terms. One hour later, the end of the working day rolled around, and the vineyard owner paid every laborer a penny. The men who were hired at the beginning of the day got cranky, pointing out that they had, and I quote from the King James' version of the New Testament, "borne the burden and heat of the day" end quote. The vineyard owner rightly pointed out that the men had all agreed to work for a penny, so that was what he was going to be paying them. End of parable.

Now the Sword Brothers seemed to be quoting from this parable in support of their claim for more spoils from Livonia, but surely the whole point of the parable is that they knew what they were signing up for when they took their oath, and just because everyone else is now getting a better deal and getting richer doesn't mean that the Sword Brothers now deserve more than they originally agreed to. Or to quote from an interpretation of the parable that I found on the Internet site "bible.org", and I quote, "Life is not fair. Praise God!" End quote. Anyway, I guess the Sword Brothers and myself I just going to have to agree to disagree on the meaning of Matthew Chapter Twenty.

The Sword Brothers, not happy with their penny, approached Bishop Albert with a proposal. What was the proposal? That the Bishop immediately grant to the Sword Brothers one third of the area of Livonia which was currently under the control of the Church, and one third of any pagan lands which would at any time in the future become Christianized. Now, this put Bishop Albert into a bit of a bind. He needed to keep the Sword Brothers onside. They were essential to protect the lands and people already conquered by the Church, and they were also essential to any future conquests which may be made. But what they were asking for was not just a pile of pennies. The newly Christianized pagans were required to pay tithes to the Church, so with an ever increasing number of pagans being baptized and acquiring the obligation to make regular payments to the church, requesting that one third of current Christian Livonia and one third of future conquests be granted to the Order of the Sword Brothers was a massive ask.

In his book "The Baltic Crusade", William Urban speculates that the Sword Brothers may have had a word with the Danes when the Archbishop of Lundt spent the winter in Riga, and the Danish Archbishop may have given Danish support to the Sword Brothers' moving against Bishop Albert if he failed to agree to their demands. Also, we can't discount the fact that, although the Master of the Sword Brothers was directly accountable to Bishop Albert, the Order itself was under Papal control and answerable only to Pope Innocent and not Bishop Albert. William Urban points out that Bishop Albert had recently placed Livonia under vassalage to Philip of Hohenstaufen, and Pope Innocent had excommunicated Philip of Hohenstaufen back in the year 1201, so it's likely that the Sword Brothers could use this as extra leverage.

In the end, Bishop Albert ceded to some of the Sword Brothers demands. Rightly pointing out that he couldn't grant what he did not yet possess, he rejected their proposal that they be awarded one third of all future conquests, but he did see to their demand that they be granted one third of all current holdings. Bishop Albert proposed that the Sword Brothers divide Christian Livonia into three equal parts. He, Bishop Albert, would then choose the part that he wanted, the Sword Brothers would choose out of the two remaining segments which one they wanted, and the one left over would remain with Bishop Albert. But the Sword Brothers rejected this. Clearly believing that they had enough leverage to force the Bishop to grant them the future one third that they had also asked for, they dug their heels in, and declared no deal. With negotiations having stalled, the Sword Brothers then took their claim directly to Pope Innocent. Pope Innocent kind of came down on Bishop Albert's side. He declared that the land not yet acquired by the Church in Livonia belonged only to God and couldn't be assigned to anyone, leaving the Sword Brothers no claim to one third of the future conquests. He agreed with the Sword Brothers, however, that they should be granted one third of all current lands held by the Bishop, with the proviso that one quarter of all the tithes collected in those lands be sent by the Sword Brothers back to the Bishop.

The Sword Brothers duly divided Christian Livonia into three equal parts, with Bishop Albert choosing the region which covered Caupo's lands, which ran northwards around the Gulf of Riga and included Treiden, the village where Theodoric had once been saved by a horse. The Sword Brothers then chose the segment to the south of this, and Bishop Albert got the rest. So the matter has been resolved. But it left Christian Livonia divided, with parts of it being administered by the Sword Brothers and their officials, and other parts falling under the direct control of the Bishop. As William Urban points out, it also cemented a level of mistrust and division between the Bishop and the Order he had created, something which will continue until the eventual demise of the Order a few decades down the track.

Join me next week, as Bishop Albert is confronted with the problem of administering a divided Livonia and also has to deal with some pretty major headaches back in the Holy Roman Empire. Until next week, bye for now.

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