

History of the Crusades. Episode 208. The Baltic Crusades. The Livonian Crusade Part XIV. 1212 - 1215.

Hello again. Last week we saw some action on the Estonian front, with the Christians invading Estonia and conquering the town of Fellin, and the Estonians invading Christian territory and attempting to take the town of Treiden. The Estonians were unsuccessful in their attempts to take the Livonian town, and were slaughtered mercilessly by the German Crusaders. In a shrewd move, Bishop Albert appointed Abbott Theodoric as the new Bishop of Estonia, and then appointed a celebrated visiting warrior from Germany, Bernard zu Lippe, as the new Abbot of the monastery located at the mouth of the Daugava River.

When we left last week's episode, the Germans were planning a winter campaign, intending to strike deep into the heart of Estonia, and secure it for Theodoric so that he could start the conversion and subjugation of his new Bishopric. More than four thousand German cavalry and foot soldiers set out in the winter of 1211 to 1212, using the frozen rivers as highways to much of the land occupied by the various Estonian tribes.

Now I say "various Estonian tribes" here because this is an important point to remember. Estonia currently isn't a unified country, with all Estonians under the control of a central authority. No, Estonia is composed of a number of totally independent tribes, all speaking the same language and operating in the same region, but with their own agendas and their own goals. Conquering Estonia, therefore, would mean defeating every one of these separate tribes.

The German campaign started off really well, so well in fact that it set alarm bells ringing in the neighboring Russian Principality of Pskov. Some Estonians had appealed to Novgorod for aid, and a bunch of Russian fighters from Novgorod had duly made their way into Estonia to fight the invading Germans. Why didn't Pskov come to the assistance of the Estonians as well? Well, you might remember that an agreement has been reached between Pskov and Livonia, whereby Livonia pays an annual tribute to the Prince of Pskov in return for military assistance. Effectively, then the citizens of Pskov cannot join their Novgorod neighbors to go to the assistance of Estonia because their Prince has bound them to instead assist the Germans. Well, there was one way to fix that. The citizens of Pskov rose up and overthrew their German-loving Prince, then took off for Estonia, now free to join in the fight on the side of the Estonians. In his book "The Baltic Crusade", William Urban points out that a number of Estonian tribes who weren't occupied fighting the Germans noticed that the town of Pskov was now undefended, and proceeded to attack and pillage it, illustrating nicely the fact that Estonia was made up of separate tribes, each operating independently, with no central overseeing or controlling entity.

Russian involvement in Estonia changed the course of the campaign. While the Russians weren't able to drive the Germans out of Estonia, they were able to prevent them from conquering it. When Bishop Albert sailed back to Livonia in the spring of 1212, he decided to call an end to the fighting in Estonia. He organized a truce with the Russians, and withdrew the German troops from Estonia. Both the Sword Brothers and military historians have criticized this move, arguing that Bishop Albert was too quick to throw in the towel and that a more concerted effort may have seen the Germans take Estonia. But it was Bishop Albert's call to make, and he decided to leave Estonia alone for the present time.

Bishop Albert spent the remainder of his time in Livonia that year, adjudicating disputes between the Livonians and the Sword Brothers, and trying to appease the Sword Brothers.

It didn't go well. William Urban points out that at this time, the Sword Brothers and Bishop Albert both had similar goals. They wanted to create new Christian domains out of the pagan lands around the Baltic Sea and place themselves at the head of a new, powerful and expanding Christian state.

Trouble was, both Bishop Albert and the Sword Brothers couldn't be in charge of this new territory at the same time. For the Sword Brothers, this fact was becoming intolerable. They didn't want Bishop Albert coming to the defense of Livonians who were complaining about the Sword Brothers' heavy-handed methods of rule in Livonia. They didn't want Bishop Albert to have the authority to force them to withdraw from Estonia when there was still a chance of victory. Put simply, the Sword Brothers no longer wanted to be ruled over by Bishop Albert. They wanted their independence, and the only way to achieve this was to appeal directly to Pope Innocent, so that's what they did.

A delegation of Sword Brothers made the long journey to Rome, to seek their formal independence from the Bishop of Riga. Pope Innocent, however, denied their request. Not to be deterred, the Sword Brothers made the bold move of then approaching Emperor Otto IV and seeing if they might have more success there.

Now the Sword Brothers were new to the game of international diplomacy and relations, and they probably hadn't really thought this thing through. By this time in his papacy, Pope Innocent was wielding a great deal of power. He had launched a raft of Crusades which had changed the political landscape, not just of Europe, but of Egypt, the Holy Land, and the Byzantine Empire. He had also bettered the Kings of England, France and Spain at the game of thrones, and pretty much had them all under his thumb. So really, Pope Innocent wasn't the sort of man that you wanted to get off side. By going to Emperor Otto to try and obtain the relief that Pope Innocent had denied them, the Sword Brothers were making an enemy of a formidable Pope.

Emperor Otto, however, was thrilled to be approached by the Sword Brothers. Not one to miss an opportunity to score a hit against Pope Innocent, he happily granted to the Sword Brothers everything they desired. Yes, of course the Order can now be independent from Bishop Albert. Yes, of course Bishop Albert can now have no authority whatsoever over the lands administered by the Sword Brothers in Livonia. Yes, of course Bishop Albert can no longer direct the Order's military activities. Mightily pleased that they had managed to outfox Pope innocent and achieve their goals, the Sword Brothers made their way back to Livonia, but their celebration didn't last very long.

Emperor Otto was in all sorts of trouble at this point in time. You will remember that Otto spent the start of his reign in Italy, initially assisting Pope Innocent but then back-flipping and taking land for the Empire. As a result, he was excommunicated in 1215. Well, now five years have passed, and Otto is joining the growing ranks of kings in Europe who have learned the hard way not to cross Pope Innocent. Now, remember that Otto also clashed swords with the Pope's man in Sicily, one Frederick Hohenstaufen. Well, Pope Innocent has been doing all he can to garner support for Frederick in Germany, and he's been doing pretty well. Unsurprisingly, many noblemen in the Holy Roman Empire thought that Otto shouldn't have spent so long in Italy playing whack-a-mole with the Papal forces there. There was, of course, the small problem of the King of Denmark occupying land in Saxony, and quite a few noblemen thought that Otto would have been better served spending his energies booting King Valdemar out of Imperial territory. Gradually, Frederick

and Pope Innocent built on the growing tensions within the Empire, and slowly increased Frederick's support base and his power.

In the year 1211 a number of Imperial Princes and Archbishops had elected Frederick to the position of King of the Romans. In 1212, Frederick's army entered German territory and clashed with Otto's forces. To Otto's horror, many of his supporters deserted him and declared for Frederick, forcing him to withdraw to Cologne. With Pope Innocent working furiously behind the scenes, Frederick garnered enough support to be elected King of Germany in 1212, although his support base was limited to southern Germany; the north still held for Otto. Realizing that he was now in a sticky situation, Otto formed an alliance with King John of England. Lucky, lucky Otto. King John came up with a fabulous (not) plan to invade France, and Otto wholeheartedly lent his support to this venture. Really, Otto at this stage was risking everything on King John's roll of the dice. If Otto and John managed to defeat King Philip II of France, then the resulting boost in prestige would see Frederick's push for the Imperial crown slide away, and Otto could get back to ruling the Holy Roman Empire without having to worry about Frederick "Stupor Mundi" Hohenstaufen.

But we all know how King John's invasion of France panned out. It went about as well as every other venture King John attempted during his reign. It was a total, unmitigated disaster. Philip and Otto ended up coming head to head at the Battle of Bouvines. The battle was a close run affair, but towards the end of the clash, Otto's horse, injured and terrified, galloped from the battlefield, carrying a protesting Otto on its back. Otto's horse went careering out of control away from the battlefield, and his confused forces, seeing the Emperor departing at speed, decided that they best follow him. The day was lost. Otto's horse had lost him the Battle of Bouvines, and, it turns out, the Empire. During his absence, Frederick had managed to take more territory back home, and in the year 1215, Otto was forced to abdicate.

So we now have a new Emperor, Emperor Frederick II. How does this affect the Livonian Crusade? Well, for starters, the Sword Brothers quickly realized that they had backed the wrong horse. They had incurred a great deal of Papal displeasure by going to Emperor Otto behind Pope Innocent's back. Now Otto was no longer Emperor, but Pope Innocent was still Pope, so the Sword Brothers decided that they best head back to Rome to try to mend their Papal bridge. Not only did they decide to try and fix the cracks in the relationship between the Order and the Church which had appeared following their efforts at Imperial intrigue, they decided again to present their arguments against Bishop Albert asserting control over the Order.

Bishop Albert was busy doing his annual recruitment drive in Germany, so Bishop Theodoric was sent to Rome in his stead, to argue the case for the Bishop. As usual, Theodoric did a fabulous job, and Pope Innocent came down on Bishop Albert's side of the argument. In addition, the Pope reaffirmed Livonia's independence from Church affairs back in the Holy Roman Empire, and ordered Church officials in the northern part of the Empire to send priests to Riga to assist with the ongoing conversion and guidance of the local people.

Talking about the northern part of the Holy Roman Empire, how has the ascension of Frederick II to the throne affected affairs in the north? Has Frederick driven King Valdemar out of Saxony? No, no he hasn't. Despite being lobbied by northern Imperial Lords and nobleman to expel the Danish crown from Imperial territory, Frederick had done no such

thing. Instead, he had come to an understanding with King Valdemar, that understanding being: King Valdemar could remain in Saxony and Frederick would turn a blind eye to his occupation. In his book "The Baltic Crusade", William Urban reports that local German noblemen reacted to this decision in one of two ways. Some lords threw their hands up into the air and decided to submit to Danish rule, which after all, seemed to be here to stay and seemed to be endorsed by their new Emperor. Other noblemen, however, decided to fight back. Forging on without the assistance of their Emperor, they plotted and intrigued amongst themselves, looking for ways to overthrow their Danish occupiers.

So in summary, by the year 1215 we have a new Holy Roman Emperor, Frederick II, but Saxony is still being occupied in part by King Valdemar of Denmark, and that situation doesn't look like it's going to change any time soon. And just in case anyone is wondering about the fight between Bishop Valdemar and Gerhard of Oldenburg to see who will become the Archbishop of Hamburg-Bremen, well it's still going. Yes, three years down the track and both men are still digging in their heels and hoping for victory. Looks like they both really, really want to become Archbishop.

Now, usually we spend one episode looking at a year's worth of events in Livonia and the Holy Roman Empire. In this episode, however, we have jumped from the year 1212 to the year 1215, so what has been happening in Livonia during this period of time? Well, as you can imagine, there have been almost continual border skirmishes between the Crusaders, Letts, and Livonians, and the surrounding people, particularly the Estonians, but nothing of real significance. Probably the most notable change which has occurred during this period was a rise in warfare atrocities to a new level of nastiness. As has often been the case throughout the history of warfare, one side kills women and children during a battle, so the other side retaliates by targeting the women and children of the opposing forces until the level of atrocities escalates to stomach-churning levels. William Urban points out that the fact that the Livonian Crusade had been going on for so long fueled the hostilities between the Christians and the pagans, and by early 1215, blood soaked events along Livonia's borders seemed to be occurring on a regular basis.

Now, for most of these years, during Bishop Albert's absence, another Bishop from Germany has stepped up to administer Livonia, that Bishop being Bishop Philip of Ratzeburg. He was one of the three bishops who had accompanied Bishop Albert to Livonia in the year 1210. Between them, Bishop Philip of Ratzeburg and Bishop Theodoric of Estonia have been doing their best to protect Livonia's border territories from invading pagans, keep the Sword Brothers in check, tend to their flocks, and keep Christian Livonia ticking along nicely.

And it's very handy that the Bishops have managed to keep everything in order because the most important Church meeting in the entire medieval period is about to take place in Rome. Yes, in November of 1215, the Fourth Lateran Council will convene, and hundreds upon hundreds of senior clergymen will pour into Rome from across Europe.

Join me next week, as we see Bishop Theodoric and Bishop Philip become stranded on Oesel Island in Estonia on their way to Rome, and we see Bishop Albert used the mass gathering of Christians in Rome to spruik the Livonian Crusade. Until next week, bye for now.

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