

History of the Crusades. Episode 213. The Baltic Crusades. The Livonian Crusade Part XIX. Danish Ascendancy.

Hello again. Last week we saw the Danes conquer the Estonian stronghold of Reval, with the loss of Bishop Theodoric, who had been the Bishop of Estonia. King Valdemar appointed his chaplain as the new Estonian Bishop, naming him the Bishop of Reval. The Germans meanwhile, headed in a southerly direction, conquering the Semigallian stronghold of Mesoten and naming it the new administrative site for Bishop Bernard, who completed his transition from famous Saxon warrior to head of a monastery in Livonia, to the new Bishop of Semigallia.

Now, the Crusaders and German fighters who defeated Mesoten marched back to Riga, but had only rested for two weeks when word came in that they were needed in Estonia. The pirates of Oesel, who had remained defiantly pagan, had taken advantage of the frozen sea around their island to march to mainland Estonia and de-convert some of the Christianized Estonians there. They didn't march all the way north to the Danish centre of power in Reval, but instead attacked some Estonians further south, who had converted to the Livonian Church. So an army was assembled, composed of Germans, Letts, Livonians and Christianized Estonians, and they all marched into Estonia to drive back the invading Estonian pirates.

The German Crusaders were the first fighters to come across the pirates. Our chronicler, Henry of Livonia, reports that Duke Albrecht of Saxony with his army, together with the Master of the Sword Brothers with men from his Order, came across some fleeing Estonian villagers, who reported that the pirates had, and I quote, "struck our land an exceedingly great blow", end quote. The Germans advanced and soon came upon burning villages, and then upon the men from Oesel themselves.

The Germans and Letts then launched themselves at the pirates and fierce hand to hand fighting ensued. Henry of Livonia reports that some local village women who had been captured by the men from Oesel joined in the fight, attacking the pirates with clubs. Henry states, and I quote, "The Germans pursued them, that is the pirates from Oesel, from the village into the field, killing them through the fields up to their sacred grove, stained their holy woods with the blood of many of their slain men. The Letts followed around the village and met some fugitives, whom they scattered here and there. They killed them, took away their horses and carried off their spoils." End quote.

The casualty list at the end of the fighting, according to Henry of Livonia, numbered 500 Estonians from Oesel dead that the Germans had counted, while many more dead lay scattered in the fields and on the roads. The toll on the Christian side was two Germans dead and two Letts. Pretty happy with their victory, the Germans sent a message to Reval informing the Danes of their success. The Danes of Reval then sent back a reply, thanking the Germans and Letts for attacking the pagans and advising them that the whole of Estonia now belonged to the King of Denmark, since Bishop Albert had given the land to the Danish King. Accordingly, the Bishop of Reval asked that the pagan hostages be sent to Reval.

This all came as a bit of a shock to the Master of the Sword Brothers, particularly the bit about Bishop Albert having given Estonia away. To the Germans, the Danes may well have conquered northern Estonia, but the southern portion of the region had long been subject to the Church of Livonia and, to the Germans at least, it was not a Danish but a

German possession. However, since Bishop Albert wasn't there to clarify the situation, the Master of the Sword Brothers decided to hand the hostages over, but he did so making it clear to the Duke of Saxony and the other people who had gathered around, that in the eyes of the Sword Brothers all of Estonia, except for the island of Oesel and the region around Reval, had been Christianized in the name of the Church of Livonia, and that the handing over of the hostages was not to be seen as an admission that all of mainland of Estonia was now a Danish possession.

Now, the more the Master of the Sword Brothers thought about this situation, the angrier he became. Tensions between the Order and Bishop Albert were always high, and now it seemed to the Master that Bishop Albert had tricked them out of land in Estonia. With Bishop Albert having recently sailed back to Lubeck on his annual recruitment drive, the Master decided to have a crack at resolving the problem himself. In a sneaky move, the Master ordered a prominent anti-Bishop-Albert Sword Brother to travel all the way to Denmark to seek an audience with King Valdemar to put the record straight. This brother, Rudolph of Wenden, did as he was asked. He managed to meet with the Danish King, and in an astonishing move, he pledged the services of the Sword Brothers to the Danes. And in return, King Valdemar gifted the regions of Saccalia and Ungannia in Estonia to the Sword Brothers. So, deepening their dispute with the Bishop Albert, the Sword Brothers have effectively gone behind Bishop Albert's back, and have thrown themselves at the feet of the Danish King, managing to secure for themselves in the process a goodly portion of the interior of Estonia.

This, of course, did not sit well with Bishop Albert. In defiance of both the Sword Brothers and the Danish Crown, he ordered that priests from Livonia continue to travel to Ungannia and Saccalia to convert the locals, and collect taxes which would go into his coffers and not those of the Sword Brothers. In a move designed to antagonize the Danish king, Bishop Albert managed to get word to his brother Herman, who was an Abbott in Bremen, that he was about to be appointed as the new Bishop of Estonia, replacing Bishop Theodoric. Bishop Albert then convinced the Archbishop of Magdeburg, to consecrate Abbott Hermann as the new Bishop of Estonia, meaning that now there were two Bishops of Estonia, a Danish one and a German one.

To the citizens of Riga, this was all a bit much. In his book "The Baltic Crusade", William Urban reports that the various merchants, churchmen and locals living in Riga made their disapproval of the whole situation known to both the Sword Brothers and men in the upper echelons of the Church in Riga. Their anger was so heartfelt that William Urban reports that they managed to force the Sword Brothers to renounce their agreement with the Danish King, and give back control over Ungannia and Saccalia. However, the people of Riga were unable to heal the rift between their Bishop and the Sword Brothers, and tensions between them two rose to dangerous new levels.

Meanwhile, back in Central Europe, Bishop Albert received word that the Archbishop of Lundt, Denmark's most senior cleric, who had been living in Reval in Estonia, had lodged a formal complaint with King Valdemar about Bishop Albert. Deciding that he needed to resolve this complaint at the highest possible level, Bishop Albert immediately made plans to travel to Rome, and a team of Danish diplomats representing King Valdemar followed hot on his heels. Really, Bishop Albert probably should have thought this through a little more. He was pitching himself against a King, and not just any king, but a powerful, experienced monarch at the height of his power. Really, this meeting was never going to go well for Bishop Albert. In an attempt to outmaneuver King Valdemar, Bishop Albert

requested that the Pope raise him to the position of Archbishop, meaning that he would have more power, and would have more leverage against the Archbishop of Lundt. The Pope said "No". Bishop Albert then asked the Pope to intervene so that more German crusaders could travel to Livonia from Lubeck. The Pope said "No". A suddenly desperate Bishop Albert then decided to seek an audience with the Holy Roman Emperor. The Emperor said "No". Frederick II refused to meet with Bishop Albert, but instead passed a message to the Bishop advising him to make peace with the Danish King.

So this is possibly the first time that we have seen Bishop Albert misread the political landscape and embark on an ambitious venture that really was never going to work. The result of this lapse in judgment was increased tensions between Bishop Albert and the Danish crown, and increased tensions between Bishop Albert and the Sword Brothers. However, William Urban notes in his book "The Baltic Crusade" that Bishop Albert's troubles didn't end there. No, tensions were also rising between Bishop Albert and a powerful new player on the Livonian political landscape, the new Bishop of Semigallia, Bishop Bernard.

Now, Bishop Bernard was kind of a unique figure in the ecclesiastical hierarchy. Most men of the Church reached lofty positions within the church by starting off on the lower rungs, being educated in a monastery, and slowly winding their way up the ladder until they reached a position of power. Not so Bishop Bernard. He, of course, had arrived in Livonia with a reputation as the famous warrior Bernard zur Lippe. Bishop Albert had been appointed him as the Abbot of the monastery at the mouth of the Daugava, a move designed to keep the talented military man in Livonia, while simultaneously keeping him out of the clutches of the Sword Brothers. When Bishop Albert required a Bishop to conquer and administer the strategically important pagan lands to the south of Livonia, Bernard zur Lippe seemed like he was made for the role. However, Bernard's unorthodox road to becoming a Bishop meant that he was well connected to influential families back in the Holy Roman Empire. Being a celebrated warrior meant that he had forged connections with a number of influential people and families, and had also fathered a number of children, some of whom were now powerful men in their own right. In fact, William Urban reports that shortly after Bernard was appointed as the Bishop of Semigallia, back in the Holy Roman Empire one of Bernard's sons was elected as The Archbishop of Hamburg-Bremen.

Now I hope you haven't just dropped your cup of tea or gotten off at the wrong train stop as you stagger around in a dazed state of shock at this news, because really, no one saw this coming, especially not Bishop Albert. In fact, this is a plot twist which is so unexpected that I think we should just repeat it. The extremely powerful position of the Archbishop of Hamburg-Bremen, a position that had been fought over for many years by Bishop Valdemar, Burchard von Stumpfenhusen and Gerhardt of Oldenburg, is now being occupied by the son of Bernard zur Lippe.

Now, despite Bishop Alberts, best efforts over the years, the Archbishop of Hamburg-Bremen still wields a great deal of power over Livonia and over Bishop Albert's ability to preach the Crusade in Saxony. And just when Bishop Albert is coming to terms with face planting in his dealings with the Danish crown and the Sword Brothers, a nasty, complex new political storm is brewing. Word comes in that Gerhard II, the new Archbishop of Hamburg-Bremen and the son of the bishop of Semigallia, has just decreed that Bishop Albert can no longer preach the Livonian Crusade in northern Saxony, and pilgrims and crusaders are now prohibited from embarking on ships sailing out of Lubeck.

If Bishop Albert thought that his previous problems were political minefields, well this one tops them all. Bishop Albert is left to ponder what role, if any, Bishop Bernard has played in his son's decision. Did the Archbishop consult with his father before placing these restrictions on Bishop Albert? You would have to say that that would be likely. If so, the move must be one which the Archbishop believes would end up favoring his ambitious father. Is the Archbishop's hampering of Bishop Albert's crusading efforts the first move in Bishop Bernard making a play for the much more powerful position of Bishop of Riga, and ousting Bishop Albert from his post? It has to be a possibility. And of course, to make things much, much worse, the Archbishop of Hamburg-Bremen, with his Archbishopric stretching across Danish-occupied territory in Saxony, has strong political ties to the Danish Crown.

Bishop Albert comes to the realization around this time that he really needs to watch his back. The man he has elevated to power, and has moved into play to protect Riga and Christianized Livonia, has suddenly become one of Bishop Albert's most dangerous threats. It was suddenly not inconceivable that Bishop Bernard could combine forces with the Danish Crown and the Sword Brothers to do some major empire building of his own behalf, conquering territory to enrich himself and his Bishopric, and possibly sidelining Bishop Albert. Without his regular army of volunteer crusaders visiting Livonia each year, and without the assistance of the Sword Brothers, Bishop Albert had no means by which he could extend his territory, or even defend Livonia from being swallowed up by neighboring regions. Bishop Bernard in contrast, with Danish interests and the Sword Brothers in his corner, was free to conquer and expand at will.

Bishop Albert knew that he had been forced into a corner. In March of the year 1221, he threw his hands into the air and admitted defeat. He traveled to the Danish court, along with the man he had appointed as the Bishop of Estonia, his brother Bishop Herman, and the two men formally ceded all of Estonia and Livonia to the Danish crown. In return, King Valdemar agreed to allow Crusaders to once again use the port of Lubeck as a departure point for Crusades to Livonia.

So, is this the end for Bishop Albert? Is resistance against the Danish crown in Livonia and Estonia now futile? Well, no. While Bishop Albert has been forced to kneel at the feet of King Valdemar of Denmark, the citizens of Riga and the Christianized pagans of Livonia are not really just going to stand by and watch their Bishop be humiliated by the Danish monarch. Join me next week as the toxic politics of the Livonian Crusade rise to new levels. Until next week, bye for now.

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