

## History of the Crusades. Episode 218. The Baltic Crusades. The Livonian Crusade Part XXIV. 1227 - A Finishing Point.

Hello again. Last week we saw the Papal Legate, William of Modena, effectively bring Livonia and Estonia under Papal control, after he visited the region and established a raft of rules under which the area ought to be governed. In the Holy Roman Empire, we saw King Valdemar II of Denmark, finally freed after two years in captivity, move to reclaim the territory he had occupied in Saxony, after Pope Honorius III deemed the terms of his release to be invalid. When we last left King Valdemar, he was having a break for the winter, having scored some easy victories against his three opponents: his former captor Henry the Black; Archbishop Gerhard II; and Count Adolf of Holstein. He had also blocked the port of Lubeck with the Danish navy.

Now, as I mentioned last time, everyone expected King Valdemar to defeat his opponents when he returned to the battlefield in early 1227, and in anticipation of this taking place everyone scrambled to shore up their positions and protect their interests, with some surprising results. In his book "The Baltic Crusade", William Urban reports that Bishop Albert of Riga and Bishop Hermann of Estonia had traveled to the Imperial Court at Nuremberg in December 1225, and had both been recognized as Princes of the Holy Roman Empire, a move which elevated the status of the two Bishops and gave them more power to resist advances by the Danish King into the Baltic region. They then approached Pope Honorius and asked him to place some Papal pressure on King Valdemar to lift the blockade of Lubeck, a move which was, according to William Urban, only partially effective. Then, something weird happened.

It seems that the impending victory of the Danish monarch posed such a threat to the interests of the Bishops of Riga and Estonia, and the Sword Brothers, and the citizens of Livonia, and even the citizens of Lubeck, that they actually created formal alliances amongst themselves against the Danish Crown. Yes, you heard right. Although the Sword Brothers have been clashing with Bishop Albert and the citizens of Livonia since, well, forever, the threat posed by the soon-to-be victorious Danish King was so great that it pushed these opposing forces into an alliance. In fact, "alliance" is probably too weak a word for what took place. It was more like a total merging of interests between the Sword Brothers, and the people of Livonia. William Urban reports, and I quote "The Knights became citizens, and the citizens became associate members of the Order. The Knights paid taxes, and the citizens raised contributions for the Order, and each defended the rights and privileges of the other." End quote.

William Urban points out that this move was totally unprecedented. Nothing like this had ever happened before, although he does point out that really, the members of the Sword Brothers and the German merchants and crusaders, in many instances, had a lot in common. Many merchants were deeply religious and were well trained in the use of weapons to defend themselves against pirates and the like, and the merchant guilds to which so many of them belonged, were in some way, not dissimilar to a religious Order. Likewise, members of the Sword Brothers may have seen the members of the merchant class as their equals. They probably had similar family ties back in the Holy Roman Empire. So in some ways, maybe it wasn't that strange that, faced with the Danish threat, the Sword Brothers and the German merchants and crusaders of Livonia effectively developed very close ties and merged interests. But in other ways, it was a weird and unexpected development.

Now, relations between these previously antagonistic parties entered the twilight zone of shared interests due to the fact that King Valdemar was about to defeat his lesser opponents following his winter break from battle, and was therefore going to move back into the Saxon lands he had occupied in the Holy Roman Empire, and was once again going to look to expand the reach of his Kingdom into Estonia. But in a shock move, this didn't happen at all. What did happen was the Battle of Bornhoved.

Now, unfortunately, there's not a lot of information available about what exactly took place at the Battle of Bornhoved. We do know that Archbishop Gerhard II, Duke Albrecht of Saxony, Henry the Black, and Count Adolf of Holstein, and their armies, defeated King Valdemar and his forces as they attempted to move into Holstein. In his book "The Baltic Crusade", William Urban describes narrative accounts of the battle, and of events in this period in time in general, as being very poor. The Battle of Bornhoved, after all, was a total game changer. Everyone had expected that King Valdemar would easily defeat his opponents, and that things would then go back to how they were before he was captured. But no, he was defeated, and a quarter of a century of Danish dominance in Saxony came to an abrupt end, as did Danish ambitions for expansion in the Baltic region. To reinforce his point about the lack of detail contained in contemporary accounts of the battle, William Urban points us to this description of what took place taken from a German Chronicle, and I quote, "Then the Archbishop of Bremen and Duke Albrecht of Saxony and Count Adolf and Count Henry of Schwerin met in Lubeck and went against the king. They met at Bornhoved on Mary Magdalene's Day. There was a great battle. The King lost and Duke Otto of Luneburg was captured, and most of the King's people were slain or captured." End quote.

Hmm, for a major battle which alters permanently the political landscape of central Europe, that definitely is a little light on detail. Still, even if we don't know exactly what took place, the result was indisputable: Denmark was now out of Saxony.

Now, while this may have had the Saxons cheering and partying in the streets, they shouldn't get too excited. During the twenty five year period of Danish occupation, Saxony had actually flourished. Lubeck had been one of the many Saxon cities under Danish control, and the Danes had overseen a period of massive commercial growth in the town, with countless ships coming and going from the busy port, many of them heading to Gottland and then onto Riga. Likewise, in Livonia fear of the Danish king had provided a kind of unifying force, well, at least sometimes. As William Urban reports in his book "The Baltic Crusade", the victors of the battle failed to take advantage of their new exalted positions. Henry the Black, in fact, died shortly after the battle, and his County of Schwerin remained a minor player on the Imperial political stage. Archbishop Gerhard immediately became bogged down in a long-running dispute with some rebellious peasants near Bremen, and while Albrecht Duke of Saxony and Count Adolf of Holstein both rose in prestige, neither of them really played the exit of Denmark to their advantage. The only place which really seemed to thrive following the Danish exit was Lubeck, which as a city and as a centre for trade went from strength to strength.

Back in Livonia, the heyday of the Livonian Crusade is about to come to an end. There will be one last victory for the Crusaders, and this victory ends the chronicle of Henry of Livonia, who wisely perhaps decides to end his tale of the Livonian Crusade on a high note for the Latin Christians. After this victory, the crusading spotlight in the Baltic won't shine as strongly over the Livonian Crusade. Other crusades will start up, spreading crusaders and resources more thinly over the region, and Livonia will slowly fade into the

background. But wait, I'm getting ahead of myself. Firstly, we need to discuss this final victory.

Now, since the beginning of the Livonian Crusade, there has been one group of pagans who have obviously and successfully resisted every attempt at conversion and have worked tirelessly to prevent both Danish and German occupation of their island. Yes, I'm talking about the pirates of Oesel. Well, in January 1227, the Latin Christians decided that it was time to vanquish this pesky band of pagan pirates once and for all.

Henry of Livonia reports that the decision to mount a campaign against the pirates of Oesel was sparked by the Papal Legate William of Modena. He was preparing to depart from Livonia in 1226, and while he was languishing on board a ship waiting for favorable winds to blow him out of the Gulf of Riga, a band of pirate ships appeared on the horizon. Being blown into the Gulf of Riga by the same winds which were preventing William of Modena being blown out of the Gulf of Riga, William watched on as the pirates approached Oesel, their ships laden with spoils from their latest raiding venture into Sweden. Now, apparently amongst the booty they had scored from their latest raid were a great many captives, including women and girls from Sweden. Henry of Livonia reports that William of Modena learned, although he doesn't say how William learned this fact, that the Swedish women and girls would either be taken as wives by the pirates or would be sold on to other pagans. When he also learned that the pirates regularly burned churches and killed priests in the Christian lands they raided, William of Modena decided that enough was enough, and when he landed in Gotland he started recruiting for a crusade against Oesel. Interestingly, Henry of Livonia reports that William wasn't exactly overrun with volunteers for this Crusade. Probably reflecting the current political state in the Holy Roman Empire, the Danes present in Gotland just weren't interested, and neither were the Gottlanders. The German merchants of Gotland were the only people who volunteered. The German crusaders made their way to Riga and informed the happy Rigans that they had come to help them vanquish the pirates of Oesel.

Now, luckily for the Crusaders, the winter of 1226 to 1227 seemed to be a particularly harsh one. As a result the sea froze over. Henry of Livonia reports that, and I quote, "The waters were as hard as stone," end quote. As a consequence, a decision was made to launch a military campaign against the inhabitants of Oesel, with the frozen sea being used to transport the Latin Christians to the island. Towards the end of January, the Crusaders from Gotland, the Rigans, the Livonians, the Letts, and the Christianized Estonians mustered at Riga, 20,000 of them according to Henry of Livonia and, led by Bishop Albert and the Master of the Sword Brothers, they began the cold march to Oesel. Henry of Livonia reports, and I quote "As they trod on the ice with their horses and vehicles they made a noise like a great peal of thunder, with the clashing of arms, the shaking of the vehicles, and the movement and sound of men and horses falling and getting up here and there over the ice, which was smooth as glass because of the south winds and the rain water which had fallen at that time and the cold that followed. They crossed the sea with great labor, until at last, they joyfully came to the Oeselian coast" end quote.

The Latin Christians began by attacking and eventually defeating a fort on the island of Mona, an island to the north of Oesel which is separated from Oesel by a narrow strait of water. Or, in this situation, solid ice. The men of Mona put up fierce resistance, but the Germans, armed with a bunch of catapult machines, managed to breach the walls of the fort, then climbed to the top of the fortification, scrambling up the icy stones and logs while fighting off the defenders with swords and lances. The Germans managed to enter the fort

and immediately began to kill or capture all those inside, while the Letts and Livonians surrounded the fort to prevent any escapes. They then took the town of Mona, looting and seizing anything of value, driving away the horses and livestock, and burning anything that wasn't worth taking.

Having reduced the fort at Mona to a pile of ashes, the Crusaders then decided to tackle the largest and most solidly fortified stronghold on Oesel, the fort of Waldia. While the Crusaders besieged the fort and busied themselves constructing a vast array of catapult machines and siege engines, the Livonians, Letts, Estonians, and some Germans roamed the countryside, destroying food stores, taking horses and cattle, and burning any villages they came across. As stones from the catapult machines began smashing into the walls of the fort, and as reports came in of the fate of the people at Mona, the people of Waldia decided to surrender, handing hostages over to the Latin Christians and agreeing to be baptized. As word of the surrender of Waldia spread across the island, messengers came from across Oesel, seeking peace and agreeing to abandon worship of their God Tharapita, free the Swedish captives they had recently taken, and accept the Christian faith.

The seemingly impossible had happened. The pirates of Oesel had surrendered and the people of Oesel had been baptized into the Christian faith. Thus ends Henry of Livonia's Chronicle. I'll read you the final paragraph of his work. It's quite long, but I'm going to read it anyway, and I quote. "Thus does Riga always water the nations. Thus did she now water Oesel in the middle of the sea. By washing, she purges sin and grants the kingdom of the skies. To vanquish rebels, to baptize those who come freely and humbly, to receive hostages and tribute, to free all the Christian captives, to return with victory, what Kings have been hitherto unable to do, the Blessed Virgin accomplishes through her Rigan servants, to the honor of Her name. When this is finished, when it is done, when Tharapita is thrown out, when Pharaoh is drowned, when captives are freed, return with joy, O Rigans. Brilliantly triumphal victory always follows you. Glory be to the Lord. Praise to the Lord beyond the stars. Finis." End quote.

Thus ends Henry of Livonia's account of the Livonian Crusade, and thus ends, in fact, our examination of the Livonian Crusade, for the time being. Now, don't panic, we will be coming back. In his book "The Baltic Crusade", William Urban continues with the Livonian Crusade for another fifty or so years, and then, in a book entitled "The Livonian Crusade" he takes the Crusade right up to the sixteenth century. So if this podcast was a book, we would be placing a bookmark at this spot and leaving the book on the bedside table. We won't be putting it back on the shelf. No, it's going to be staying on the bedside table, where we can easily pick it back up and read a little more as we need to.

But next week we will be starting a new Crusade, the Prussian Crusade, as I don't want events in the rest of the Baltic region to get away from us while we concentrate on the Livonian and Estonian regions. So join me next week as we start a whole new chapter in the Baltic Crusades, as we begin our examination of the Prussian Crusade. Until next week, bye for now.

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