

History of the Crusades. Episode 238. The Baltic Crusades. The Livonian Crusade Part XXXI. The Southern Push Part 3.

Hello again. Last week we saw the Teutonic Order largely conquer two of the three regions they were attempting to Christianize in their move to push southwards from Livonia, to create a land bridge between Livonia and Prussia. Kurland was now mostly Christianized, and due to their alliance with the Teutonic Order, Semigallia also had agreed to convert to Christianity. Samogitia, however, was still defiantly pagan, and their attempts to repel the Latin Christians from their lands were being assisted by the Lithuanian warlord Mindaugas. Now, at the same time as they are fighting the pagans the Teutonic Order is battling another opponent on a different front, that opponent being the extremely ambitious Archbishop Albert Suerbeer of Prussia, a man who is seeking to undermine the Teutonic Order by any means possible, so as to reduce their power in Prussia and elevate his own.

Now, one of the power plays Archbishop Albert was making at this time was to promote a campaign to bring Latin Christianity to the Russians. This would divert the attention of the Papacy away from the successes of the Teutonic Order in Kurland and Semigallia, and would force the Order to divert their resources to the new conflict. However, the Teutonic Order deftly negated the Archbishop's ploy by throwing everything they had into their conflict against the Lithuanians and the Samogitians. The crusader armies burned, plundered and slaughtered as they ranged across the pagan lands, and as a consequence, in the year 1250 Mindaugas requested a meeting with the Master of the Order. Master Andreas agreed to travel deep into Lithuania to meet Mindaugas at his residence. So, traveling with a large armed retinue, Master Andreas made his way to Mindaugas' hall.

Master Andreas and his fellow knights were received politely by Mindaugas and his wife, and were then treated to an impressive feast. At the end of the feast, Mindaugas rose and thanked Master Andreas for coming to meet with him. Master Andreas then made an astonishing offer to Mindaugas, stating, according to the chronicles, and I quote: "If you were a Christian, I could give you great honor, and could win a crown for you, unless I died first." End quote. So basically the Teutonic Order would recognize Mindaugas as a King in exchange for Lithuania agreeing to become Christianized, and allowing Christian merchants to trade within their lands. Mindaugas agreed, and as a bonus he also turned Samogitia over to the Teutonic Order.

This was a savvy move on Mindaugas' part. He had been the protector of the defiant region of Samogitia, but it was pretty clear that once Mindaugas became a Christian King that alliance would be broken, and the Samogitians would want nothing more to do with him. So Mindaugas gifting Samogitia to the Order came at absolutely no cost to Mindaugas himself.

Mindaugas and the Teutonic Master swore oaths on their new pact, so now the situation is: Kurland is Christianized; Semigallia is Christianized; Lithuania is Christianized; and only Samogitia is holding firm as a pagan region, with the poor Samogitians now fighting everyone, including their former allies the Lithuanians.

Along with the Samogitians there was one other person who was seething with rage about this turn of events, and that of course was Archbishop Albert Suerbeer of Prussia. His ploy to turn the spotlight away from the Teutonic Order and focus instead on bringing Latin Christianity to Russia had failed spectacularly, and now all anyone wanted to talk about in the ecclesiastical halls of power was the astonishing latest accomplishment of the Teutonic Order, who had apparently achieved the unachievable, by bringing Latin Christianity to Lithuania.

The trouble for Archbishop Albert was that he hadn't merely wished that the Teutonic Order would fail to achieve their desired outcomes in their southern push from Livonia, he had actively worked to undermine their efforts. We saw in last week's episode how, when the Papacy sent a new legate to Prussia, Archbishop Albert threatened to excommunicate anyone who assisted him. Well, the Archbishop employed the same underhand tactics against the Teutonic Order: working behind the scenes to undermine the military campaigns being fought by the Order; threatening excommunications to ensure he could muscle in to disrupt the Order's plans; making and then breaking agreements; and generally making a thorough nuisance of himself. Now however, the stars had all aligned for the Teutonic Order, and they had succeeded despite the Archbishop's best efforts to prevent them from doing so.

Not surprisingly, one of the first things the Order did following their diplomatic coup in securing Lithuania for the Church was to request that Rome recall Archbishop Albert from his duties in the region. Also unsurprisingly, this wasn't something the ambitious Archbishop was going to do without a fight, So in the end Pope Innocent IV ordered Master Andreas and Archbishop Albert to travel to Rome and submit their dispute to the Papal Court for arbitration. Attempts to resolve the conflict between the two men commenced in the spring of the year 1250, but six months later it was clear that resolving the matter by negotiation and arbitration was not going to be possible, so Pope Innocent impaneled a special court at Lyon to hear the matter and settle the dispute once and for all.

You will all be pleased to know that one of the men appointed to the court to hear this dispute was William of Modena, who of course is no longer William of Modena, but Cardinal-Bishop William. The good news was that Cardinal-Bishop William was, as usual, well acquainted with all of the background issues to the conflict, and was, as usual, able to ask probing questions of all the witnesses, and quickly get to the heart of the matter. The bad news was that Cardinal-Bishop William was very ill, and was working against time to complete the hearings

and draw up his recommendations. In the end he managed to do it.

He determined that the Teutonic Order should receive two thirds of the land in Prussia and Kurland, with the remaining third being divided between local Bishoprics. Pope Innocent also granted the Teutonic Order permission to crown Mindaugas as the King of Lithuania, meaning that Lithuania would be recognized as a Christian Kingdom under the protection of the Teutonic Knights. As for Albert Suerbeer, Pope Innocent decided to shift him sideways, removing him from the position of Archbishop of Prussia, and instead raising the Bishopric of Riga to an Archbishopric, and adding Semigallia to the region administered by Riga, and nominating Albert Suerbeer to be the first Archbishop of Riga, once the current Bishop of Riga, the elderly, frail Bishop Nicholas, died. So everyone was pretty happy with the outcome. Albert Suerbeer traveled back to Lubeck to conclude his affairs there, and made preparations to travel to Livonia to take up his new role as the first Archbishop of Riga. Master Andreas traveled to Livonia and began to make preparations for the lavish coronation ceremony which would see Mindaugas crowned as a Christian King.

Master Andreas himself had been struggling with bouts of poor health, and had requested that he be allowed to retire to the Holy Roman Empire. His replacement, a man called Eberhard of Seine, arrived in Livonia in the year 1252, enabling Master Andreas to return to Germany. Cardinal-Bishop William, formerly William of Modena, died not long after Pope Innocent endorsed the recommendations from his hearing. After decades of faithful service to the Church, and being the go-to man for any dispute arising anywhere in central or eastern Europe, his loss must have been keenly felt across the region.

In fact, someone of William of Modena's talent for dispute resolution would have been put to good use in the Kingdom of Denmark at the current time, as the civil war was about to take an odd new turn. At the same time as Albert Suerbeer was in Lubeck packing his belongings into boxes and shoring up his contact list with anyone who could empower him in his new position in Riga, the brother of King Eric of Denmark, Duke Abel of Schleswig, was moving his armies northwards in the direction of Denmark. King Eric traveled to Schleswig to try and resolve the matter before the armies entered Danish territory, but it's safe to say that King Eric possessed none of William of Modena's conflict resolution skills.

Apparently tension between the two brothers was nearing boiling point, when King Eric decided to take himself to a quiet corner of his brother's hall to play a game of chess. This made Duke Abel furious, and apparently he approached his brother and asked him if he remembered how once long ago Abel's daughters had been forced to flee their home in the snow, barefoot and in disguise, due to the actions of Eric's men. Apparently King Eric was totally engrossed in his game of chess, and woefully misjudged the intensity of Duke Abel's

feelings at this point in time. Without looking up from his chessboard, King Eric responded that he would buy the girls a new pair of shoes each, and then something inside Duke Abel snapped. He called his guards and ordered them to place his brother, the King of Denmark, in chains, along with all of his retinue.

Now, what happened next is a bit murky, but it seems that Duke Abel ordered the King to be transported to a dungeon which could only be reached by boat. It is likely, but not certain, that Duke Abel then arranged for his brother to be assassinated during the journey. As King Eric was being transported by boat, a second boat approached. King Eric, realizing what was about to happen, asked for a priest to hear his last confession. That request was granted, then King Eric was beheaded and his body dumped in the Baltic Sea, where it was found the following day by some fishermen.

Duke Abel declared himself innocent of any part in his brother's murder, and was himself crowned King of Denmark in November of 1250. Not surprisingly, King Abel was not a popular monarch, and questions over his brother's death stuck to him like glue throughout his short reign. He raised taxes, and when a bunch of pesky peasants from Frisia declared that they wouldn't pay any of the new taxes, King Abel led an army into Frisia to teach them a lesson. However King Abel received his own lesson at the hands of a wheelwright, who killed the King during a skirmish on a bridge. King Abel was only 33 years old when he was killed, and had reigned for less than two years, which was the shortest reign of any Danish monarch since the 9th Century.

But King Abel wasn't quite finished yet. No, the ghost of King Abel did a pretty good job of terrifying his ungrateful subjects. Apparently strange noises were heard while the King's body was lying in state inside Schleswig Castle, and things got so bad that some monks refused to enter the Cathedral at night. Once King Abel's body was buried, apparently there were still some issues, so someone thoughtfully drove a stake through King Abel's chest to make sure he stayed where he was. While that act may well have prevented King Abel from turning into a vampire, Buffy the Vampire Slayer style, every now and again someone would report seeing a spooky man riding a spooky horse on a hunt through the woods of Schleswig, and people would speculate that this was just the unquiet ghost of King Abel, haunting the forests of Schleswig, unable to atone for the sin of the murder of his brother the King.

Ah goodness, how did we end up here? Oh yes, the Danish civil war. Well, you might be interested to know that the untimely death of King Abel of Denmark didn't resolve problems with the Danish Crown. Abel had a son, but no one really wanted anything more to do with anyone directly related to spooky King Abel, so it was decided that King Valdemar II's third-eldest son should be elevated to the throne, and he was crowned King Christopher I of Denmark on Christmas Day in the year 1252, while King Abel's descendants remained within

the regions of Schleswig and Holstein.

Now, all of this instability in Denmark affected not only the Kingdom of Denmark itself but the surrounding regions, as alliances were formed, sides were taken, and everyone tried to salvage what they could from the situation. Albert Suerbeer the official Bishop of Lubeck and the soon-to-be Archbishop of Riga, was one of the many regional power players caught up in all the drama. Once Christopher I was crowned King of Denmark, the city of Lubeck declared itself opposed to the new King, and began making threatening sword-waving gestures towards the Kingdom of Denmark. Albert Suerbeer was fully occupied doing the best he could to shore up alliances for the people of Lubeck, in case their conflict with Denmark degenerated into full-blown warfare. He worked behind the scenes to obtain a promise of military protection from nearby Holstein, and probably more importantly, he worked to form trading alliances between Lubeck, Hamburg and Riga. His motive may have been quite a personal one. He likely wanted to ensure the prosperity of Riga, and to solidify its alliances with cities outside the reach of the Teutonic Order, but by removing tolls and taxes and ensuring the free movement of trade between the three towns, his actions became another building block leading to the eventual formation of the Hanseatic League.

Not to be outdone, the Teutonic Order was also laying its own foundations for its future prosperity in the Baltic region. To date of course, all ships carrying crusaders to Livonia had set sail from Lubeck, but now the Order sought to establish a new port which would protect crusaders traveling overland from Prussia into Livonia, and would also be a safer place for ships to depart from during the winter months. The Order chose for their new base, a position along the coast, about halfway between Prussia and Livonia, a place just to the north of Samland on the Samogitian coast, at present-day Memel. They started work on building a castle at Memel in the year 1252, and the castle and port proved to be not only an important way-point for crusaders making their way to Livonia, but also a vital stronghold in their wars against Samogitia. Join me next week, as people from both Samland and Samogitia do their best to destroy the castle at Memel, and we also see Albert Suerbeer travel to Livonia to take up his new position. Until next week, bye for now.

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