

History of the Crusades. Episode 217. The Baltic Crusades. The Livonian Crusade Part XXIII. William of Modena.

Hello again. Last week we saw fortunes change in the Livonian Crusade, with everything going really well for Bishop Albert and everything going really very badly for Bishop Bernard of Semigallia who died unexpectedly, the Sword Brothers who lost land after struggling to reclaim their Estonian possessions from the local Estonians, and King Valdemar of Denmark. Now we pointed out last week that King Valdemar's captor Henry the Black, the Count of Schwerin, had opened the ransom negotiations for the release of the King of Denmark with an offer which everyone, probably including Henry the Black, thought was totally outrageous. That offer was: Denmark must withdraw from the land it was occupying in the Holy Roman Empire and pay Henry the Black the sum of 40,000 marks. Everyone knew that Denmark was never going to agree to these terms, but Henry the Black stuck to his demands and refused to negotiate further, meaning that the ransom process stalled and the Danish King remained in captivity, an outcome which may have been Henry's goal from the beginning.

Now, Henry had kidnapped King Valdemar in May 1223. By November 1225, more than two years after he was captured, his release was finally negotiated. You might remember from last week's episode that one of the reasons why Henry had made an outrageously high ransom demand and then had refused to negotiate on the terms was due to the fact that the King's captivity was the only favourable card he held. Both the Holy Roman Emperor and the Pope were staunch allies of the Danish monarch, and the only people really cheering his captivity were rebellious Saxon overlords, who were none too happy that their lands were being occupied by Denmark, and really, there was only a handful of them. As a result, Henry knew that as soon as King Valdemar was released, he and his family would likely be wiped out. Consequently, the only sensible way he could play his hand would be to drag out the negotiations for as long as possible, and he achieved this goal nicely.

Two years later though, everyone had had enough. Without King Valdemar's steady hand at the helm, the ship of the Kingdom of Denmark was taking water and looking like it might sink. Not only were the Danish territories in Estonia and the Holy Roman Empire looking like they might not last, the Kingdom of Denmark itself was looking shaky. So in November 1225, the chancellor of the Holy Roman Empire, Hermann of Salza, was given authority to reopen negotiations for the King's release. By this time, Henry the Black had increased his support base to encompass enough influential noblemen and men of the Church that Rome began to dial back its initial insistence that the kidnapper be excommunicated and thoroughly punished by the Church.

The final terms, which were agreed between the Chancellor and Henry the Black, were quite something. Astonishingly, Denmark was willing not just to meet Henry's outrageous initial demands, but it actually exceeded them. The final agreement was this. Within eight months of his release, King Valdemar must leave on Crusade for the Holy Land with at least one hundred ships under his command. Denmark had to vacate or land that it was currently occupying in the Holy Roman Empire, and King Valdemar himself must offer homage to the Emperor. Five of King Valdemar's relatives would be given to Henry the Black as hostages for a period of ten years, and the sum of 45,000 marks would be paid to Henry the Black as ransom for the King's release, 5,000 marks more than the outrageous amount initially proposed by Henry. In his book "The Baltic Crusade", William Urban reports that, before actually releasing the Danish king under the agreement, Henry the

Black joined with Archbishop Gerhard II and Prince Henry of Mecklenburg to take up arms against Denmark's most loyal supporters in Saxony. As a result, they captured Count Albert of Orlamunde, and defeated another influential Saxon lord. The rest of the nobility in Saxony formally surrendered to Henry and his compatriots, and only then, when he was sure that it was safe to do so, did Henry order King Valdemar's release from captivity.

So Denmark has been forced out of Saxony, and Danish fortunes in general are on the decline. This, of course, has major ramifications for the Baltic crusades. Denmark now has no desire whatsoever to expand its territories across the southern coast of the Baltic Sea. Forced to concentrate all of its resources on securing and stabilizing Denmark itself, the Danish crown is no longer in a position to provide support to the Sword Brothers, and its powerful vassals, such as Count Albert of Orlamunde, will no longer be conquering land on its behalf.

Now, back in Livonia, major power shifts are also underway. I mentioned last week that around this time, Bishop Albert made the fateful decision to request that Pope Honorius send a Papal Legate to Riga. Now, I can see why Bishop Albert may have decided that this would be a good idea. For more than twenty years now, Bishop Albert has been struggling to consolidate his hold on Livonia, with the local pagans, the Russians, the Danes and the Sword Brothers all resisting his efforts to pull them into line, and all pursuing their own agendas for the region, agendas which were contrary to Bishop Albert's own visions for Livonia and Estonia. Now, with Denmark out of the picture, and their close ally the Sword Brothers on the ropes, Bishop Albert is closer than ever to prevailing. But he's still only a Bishop. He just doesn't have the power or authority to prevent the many grabs for power and uprisings that threaten to destabilize the region. The Papacy at the present time, under Pope Honorius III is rising in power, and I guess Bishop Albert thought that with a little assistance from Rome he could finally sit back and see his hard work pay off, as the Church he had established in Livonia grew enough in power and prestige that everyone would bow down before it and resistance would crumble.

Unfortunately for Bishop Albert, that's not how things played out at all. The man the Pope sent to do his bidding in the Baltic region was Bishop William of Modena, a thoroughly reputable, competent administrator who was widely admired for his honesty and his dedication to Rome. And that's the part which Bishop Albert really should have paid more attention to. William of Modena is not Bishop Albert's man in the Baltic, he's the Pope's man in the Baltic. The decisions made by William will be ones which favor Rome, not the Bishop of Riga, and this will have a significant impact on how the Livonian Crusade plays out from here on in.

The Papal Legate, William of Modena, arrived in Riga with his retinue in the summer of 1225 and immediately got to work. He started off by familiarizing himself with the region and its people. He travelled across Livonia and even into Estonia, meeting local leaders and tribal elders, hearing their complaints and deciding how the region ought to be administered in a way which promoted peace, suppressed warfare, and elevated the Church. As William Urban points out, the result of this extensive period of consultation was the enactment of a complex series of agreements and treaties, which covered just about every aspect of private and public life in Livonia. Of the mountains of agreements which were negotiated, two stand out from the pack: the agreement covering relations between the Bishop and the Sword Brothers; and the agreement concerning the disposition of Estonia. Since both these agreements will have a profound impact on the future of the Baltic Crusades, we shall discuss them both in turn.

Now, the Papal Legate could see for himself that relations between Bishop Albert and the Sword Brothers were strained, and like any competent administrator, he wanted to lay down some firm rules which would resolve the problem. Both Emperor Frederick II and Pope Honorius had recently made separate pronouncements which guaranteed the rights of newly converted Christians in the region, in a series of documents known as the Baltic Manifestos. Via some complex twisting and turning, the Papal Legate managed to use these documents to set out the duties that the Bishop and the Sword Brothers had, not only to the converts, but to each other. The manner in which William of Modena made his pronouncements ended up favoring the Sword Brothers over the Bishop, with the result that the Order didn't collapse and wane in power like everyone was expecting following the loss of its Danish backers, but under the guidance of the Papacy actually found a new lease of life.

Now the ruling of Estonia was a more difficult problem. It looked like the Danes and the Germans both wanted to hold onto the land they had conquered in the region. According to William Urban in his book "The Baltic Crusade", the Papal Legate laid down some rules by which he thought Estonia should be governed, and then departed back to central Europe. However, in his absence, an elderly German crusader led a rebellion against the new rules. When William received news of this, he imposed an ecclesiastical Censure which restored order, and then, and this is the important part, formally took control of both the German and the Danish regions in Estonia, sidelining Bishop Albert completely.

With Estonia now under Papal control, Rome made a number of significant decisions. With the pirates of Oesel still actively engaging the Latin Christians and trying to ferment rebellion amongst the locals, and with occasional fighting breaking out between the Danes and the Germans in Estonia, William of Modena decided that some German noblemen should be brought in to impose some order on the Estonian population. This was something that hadn't happened in Livonia, and it had the effect of taking Estonia further out of Bishop Albert's control, and it paved the way for the establishment of a German feudal system in Estonia, essentially laying the groundwork for the creation of a new set of lords, German Baltic lords.

Okay, let's leave the administration of Livonia and Estonia for the moment and take a look at what is happening in Europe. Is there drama? Oh, yes, there is drama aplenty. Now, King Valdemar was finally released from captivity in December 1225. According to the terms of his release he had to embark on a Crusade to the Holy Land, departing no later than August 1226 with a fleet of at least one hundred ships. Now this, of course, will be a major undertaking, so if we duck over to Denmark in early 1226 we would expect to see King Valdemar deep in preparations, with all his time being taken up with organizing his ships, his supplies and his men so they can all depart for the Holy Land prior to the August deadline. But if we check in on King Valdemar in the first part of the year 1226, we do find him busily preparing his forces, but he won't be taking them to the Holy Land. No King Valdemar is preparing to invade Saxony.

Now this, of course, was exactly what Henry the Black had feared would happen, which was why King Valdemar was only released on the condition that he mount a major expedition to the Holy Land, something which would occupy his time and ensure that he was well away from the northern reaches of the Holy Roman Empire for a lengthy period. Hostages, including three of King Valdemar's youngest sons, were handed over to ensure that the Danish monarch would stick to his end of the agreement. Yet here he is, breaking

the terms of his release and getting ready to take back his former territory in the Holy Roman Empire by force. So, you might be wondering, how did this come about? Well, it happened a little something like this.

Upon his release, Denmark forwarded 18,000 marks to Henry the Black as an initial payment of the ransom, and King Valdemar's three youngest sons had presented themselves at Henry the Black's court as hostages. So, so far so good. However, King Valdemar, unsurprisingly, decided to sit back and ponder if there was any way of regaining the territory he had lost in the Holy Roman Empire. King Valdemar had always been a close ally of Rome, and the Papacy had always supported the interests of the Danish Crown, so King Valdemar contacted Pope Honorius, and as a result of that contact, Pope Honorius ended up declaring that the oaths made by King Valdemar as part of his terms of release were invalid, because they had been made under duress. With his promise to go on Crusade and his promise to stay out of the Holy Roman Empire now apparently disappearing in a puff of Papal smoke, King Valdemar was free to invade Saxony. Woohoo!

As the Danish army prepared to march into Imperial territory, the Saxon Lords were forced to choose sides. In the end, only three Lords decided to stand against the invasion: Henry the Black, obviously; Archbishop Gerhard II; and Count Adolf of Holstein. Now, in case anyone is wondering why Prince Henry of Mecklenburg isn't lining up to resist the Danes with his close allies, well, he had recently died, and his young successor wasn't confident enough to oppose the Danish Crown. Everyone else seemed to be content to sit back and see how things played out before declaring their allegiances.

So with only three Lords having declared against him, King Valdemar rubbed his hands together with glee, and in the autumn of 1226 he invaded Holstein from the north, while one of his nephews, Otto of Luneburg, invaded from the south. At the same time, the Danish naval fleet blocked all shipping, coming and going from Lubeck. As everyone expected, the invasion began really well for Denmark. Hamburg fell to the Danish King, and when winter arrived, and he called an end to the campaigning season, it seemed to everyone who was anyone that the following year, 1227, would see Denmark prevail, and King Valdemar would once again rule over the northern reaches of the Holy Roman Empire, leaving him free once again to turn his attentions to expanding Danish territory in Estonia.

But everyone who was anyone was wrong. The year 1227 will actually see King Valdemar face-plant spectacularly, putting an end to both Danish dreams of permanently extending their territory down into Saxony, and also of extending Danish territory around the Baltic Sea. Join me next week as we take a look at what takes place, in what will be, in fact, our last episode, for the moment, on the Livonian Crusade. Until next week, bye for now.

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