

## FOREWORD

# ESTONIA AND DENMARK IN THE MIDDLE AGES

Mihkel Mäesalu, Stefan Pajung

The Danish Baltic Sea Empire of the Valdemarian era (1157–1241) reached its largest territorial extent in the year 1222, whereas the next winter saw the beginning of a series of events which led to its downfall. It was precisely in Estonia where the political and military fortunes of King Valdemar II (1202–41) first took a sharp turn.

By subjugating the island of Saaremaa in the summer of 1222, Valdemar II secured his position of political dominance not only in Estonia, but also in most of the territory which over the course of the 13<sup>th</sup> century would become known as Medieval Livonia. After subjecting the natives of Saaremaa to his rule, the victorious crusader king hosted both Bishop Albert of Riga and Master Volquin of the Order of the Brethren of the Sword at the royal castle he was building in Saaremaa. Both Albert and Volquin swore eternal obedience to the king and vowed to render military service to him against the heathens and the Rus', thus acknowledging the King of Denmark as their superior. Furthermore, the bishop and the master agreed that the whole of Estonia would belong to the Danish kingdom and the Archibishopric of Lund, with the exception of the South-Estonian provinces of Sakala and Ugandi, which were to belong to the Order of the Brethren of the Sword and to be ecclesiastically subject to the Bishop of Riga.<sup>1</sup> Valdemar's success in Saaremaa heralded a future where the King of Denmark would be the dominant political power in Medieval Livonia.

An uprising against Danish lordship began in Saaremaa in the winter of 1222–23 and quickly spread throughout Estonia, including the areas

<sup>1</sup> *Heinrici chronicon Livoniae, editio altera*, ed. by Leonid Arbusow and Albert Bauer, *Scriptores rerum Germanicarum in usum scholarum ex Monumentis Germaniae Historicas separatis editi* (Hannover: Hahn, 1955), XVI: 2; Mihkel Mäesalu, "Päpstliche Gewalt im Kreuzzugsgebiet: Gründete Wilhelm von Modena in Estland einen "Pufferstaat"?“, *Forschungen zur baltischen Geschichte* 6 (2011), 17–18.

ruled by the Brethren of the Sword. Soon Tallinn remained the only place in Estonia that was still in crusader hands. The Brethren of the Sword and the Bishops of Riga and Semigallia at first cooperated with the Danish Administration in Tallinn in re-subjugating the Estonians to crusader rule, but soon started taking over areas that had previously been in Danish hands. The uprising of 1223–24 eventually led to the establishment of the bishoprics of Tartu and Osilia, and the limiting of the area of Danish rule to only Northern Estonia.<sup>2</sup> Thus it had a lasting effect on the formation of the political map of Medieval Livonia.

Danish rule over large parts of Northern Germany ended a few years after the Estonian uprising since Valdemar II had been captured by the Count of Schwerin in May of 1223. By the end of 1226, the Brethren of the Sword, as well as the Bishops of Riga and Tartu, were allied with the enemies of Valdemar II in Northern Germany, and conquered all Danish-held lands in Estonia the next year.<sup>3</sup> Even though Valdemar II regained Northern Estonia in 1238, the Danish Kingdom never again attained such a position of dominance in Livonia as it had had in the year 1222.

As 800 years have passed since these events, which have shaped the history of both Estonia and Denmark, it is imperative to commemorate Valdemar's final – albeit short-lived – success as a crusader, and the successful – though similarly short-lived – uprising of the Estonians with a special issue of the Estonian Historical Journal on Estonia and Denmark in the Middle Ages.

All five papers published here are based on presentations given at the conference on Danish-Estonian Relations in the Middle Ages held in Tallinn on 10–12 September 2021, which was organised by the Tallinn City Museum and the Museum of National History at Frederiksborg as part of a post-doctoral research project funded by the Carlsberg Foundation. This volume contains half of the total of 10 papers that were presented at the conference, but an additional three papers have already been published elsewhere.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Mihkel Mäesalu, "A Crusader Conflict Mediated by a Papal Legate: The Chronicle of Henry of Livonia as a Legal Text", *The Medieval Chronicle VIII*, ed. by Erik Kooper and Sjoerd Levelt (New York – Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2013), 233–246.

<sup>3</sup> Mäesalu, "Päpstliche Gewalt im Kreuzzugsgebiet", 24–29.

<sup>4</sup> Kristjan Kaljusaar, "Exploiting the Conquerors: Socio-Political Strategies of Estonian Elites during the Crusades and Christianisation, 1200–1300", *Baltic Crusades and Societal Innovation in Medieval Livonia, 1200–1350*, ed. by Anti Selart, *The Northern World* 93 (Leiden – Boston: Brill, 2022), 55–89; Mihkel Mäesalu and Stefan Pajung, *Danish-Estonian Relations in the Middle Ages*, Studies from the Museum of National History at Frederiksborg 6 (Hillerød: The Museum of National History at Frederiksborg, 2022), chapters 5 and 7.