

# KING VALDEMAR II AND TALLINN IN 1219 – JUST ANOTHER OF HIS CONQUESTS OR PART OF A GRAND PLAN?

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The Danish conquest of Tallinn in 1219 is a traditional highpoint in the historical narrative, both in Denmark and in Estonia. No general history in either of the two countries would be complete without it, and the episode has been retold in popular literature, in historical novels and romanticising paintings, and in films and even cartoons. But was it really considered something special by the Danish king and his contemporaries?

Was the conquest of Tallinn perhaps just another of many successful military expeditions and not worth mentioning afterwards? Or was it, on the contrary, part of a grandiose plan of coordinated crusading in the north and the south, in the Baltic and the Mediterranean, in Estonia and the Holy Land? The reason for posing these questions is that the conquest of Tallinn in 1219 does not seem to have been mentioned very often in medieval sources afterwards, and not in contexts where it would have been obvious. This paper is an attempt to place the conquest in context and discuss its possible importance to its contemporary political agents.<sup>1</sup>

After King Valdemar II the Victorious of Denmark (r. 1202–1241) had died in 1241, the well-informed English chronicler Matthew Paris first complained about the audacity of Valdemar, who had even dared to threaten to attack England. He then praised Saint Edward, who had saved England from Danish tyranny by letting Valdemar's son and heir die and leaving Denmark in a state of anarchy.

Matthew Paris summarised King Valdemar's eventful life as follows:

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<sup>1</sup> For a general introduction to Danish and Scandinavian history of the period, see Kirsi Salonen, Kurt Villads Jensen, *Scandinavia in the Middle Ages 900–1550. Between Two Oceans* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2023); for Danish crusades to Estonia, see Ane L. Bysted, Carsten Selch Jensen, Kurt Villads Jensen, John H. Lind, *Jerusalem in the North. Denmark and the Baltic Crusades 1100–1522* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2012).

This Valdemar, king of the Danes, died when he was 100 years old. He had reigned in Denmark for 40 years or more. Almost every day of his life, since he was old enough to bear weapons, he persecuted the infidels in Schytia, in Friesland, and in Russia. He conquered six large episcopates and had the same number of bishops ordained there.<sup>2</sup>

It is not totally clear what Matthew Paris was referring to in this short necrology. King Valdemar was not a full hundred years old when he died, but seventy, still a respectable age for a person who had actually spent most of his life in active fighting. The list of territories that Valdemar conquered from infidels is actually more interesting.<sup>3</sup> Friesland had been Christian for a long time, so including it here may simply have been a mistake on the part of Matthew Paris, or perhaps it reflects some rumours concerning the crusade against the Stedinger living along the River Weser (1233–34). They had been excommunicated and after losing a decisive battle, some of the survivors fled to Friesland;<sup>4</sup> on the other hand, we have no other indication of Valdemar having taken part in the crusade against the Stedinger.

Russia might refer to some not clearly defined territories belonging to the orthodox powers neighbouring on Livonia that Danish and German forces had invaded and plundered in the prolonged crusades of the 1210s and 1220s. It might also refer to far more recent events. Matthew Paris had written earlier in his work that the large Mongol army that had invaded Western Europe in 1239–40 had devastated Hungary but was bloodily defeated by a large coalition of Christian and Muslim kings. Afterwards the Danish and Hungarian kings had re-populated the deserted land. As many as 40 ships full of new colonists came from Denmark alone.<sup>5</sup> The chronology is not totally clear, and maybe Matthew mixed up some episodes.<sup>6</sup> He does not give the names of the Danish and Hungarian kings, but judging from

<sup>2</sup> Matthew Paris: *Matthæi Parisiensis, Monachi Sancti Albani, Chronica majora*, ed. by H. R. Luard, vols. 1–7 (London: Longmans and Company, 1872–1884); here vol. 4, 92): *Iste rex Dacorum Waldemaricus obiit centenarius ætate. Regnavit autem in Dacia quadraginta annis et aplius. Ipse fere omnibus diebus vitæ suæ, postquam aptus fuit armis, infideles persequebatur, scilicet in Sithia, et in Frisia et Ruscia. Unde in vita sua sex episcopatus magnos acquisivit et in eis totidem episcopos fecit ordinari.* Translations here and henceforth by the author.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Anti Selart, *Livonia, Rus' and the Baltic Crusades in the Thirteenth Century* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 28.

<sup>4</sup> Megan Cassidy-Welch, “The Stedinger Crusade: War, Remembrance, and Absence in Thirteenth-Century Germany”, *Viator* 44 (2013), 159–174.

<sup>5</sup> Paris, *Matthæi Parisiensis, Monachi Sancti Albani, Chronica majora*, vol. 3, 639.

<sup>6</sup> The main Mongol invasion of Europe actually only began in earnest shortly before Valdemar II's death. Cf. Peter Jackson, *The Mongols and the West, 1221–1410* (Harlow: Pearson, 2005).

where he placed the description of the repopulation of the steppes around Hungary in his chronicle, they must have been Valdemar II and King Bela IV. The Russia that Valdemar conquered could therefore simply have been some unspecified territories in the steppes north of Hungary. Another possible interpretation is that Matthew mixed up Russia and Prussia, where Valdemar actually campaigned as a crusader in 1210.<sup>7</sup>

Matthew's Scythia is most probably another designation for Livonia, which was known but not very broadly in the 13<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>8</sup> It could even be more general and simply refer to peoples living around the Baltic Sea which, according to Adam of Bremen, was called the Scythian Sea.<sup>9</sup> Alternatively, it could be another word for Rus' or Russians as it was used by Saxo, who wrote around 1200.<sup>10</sup> By using two different names, Matthew Paris has imagined that it concerned two different peoples, although his geographical knowledge concerning Eastern Europe was feeble. Scythia for him is most probably Livonia.

If Scythia was Livonia, it is striking that Matthew Paris forgot it totally later in his chronicle. When he summarised the preceding half century's important events in 1250, he noted that

In the northern regions, a large part of Frisia and Russia, at the distance of 12 days travel, was conquered by King Valdemar, so that seven bishoprics were won for Christ.<sup>11</sup>

On the other hand, six, or in this case seven, bishoprics corresponds very well to the number of sees in Livonia in the mid-thirteenth century. The conclusion must be that Matthew was most probably writing about Valdemar's conquest of Tallinn and Livonia, but had only a very vague idea about its geographical location and extent. Matthew Paris probably began

<sup>7</sup> Thanks to Mihkel Mäesalu for the suggestion that Russia could actually be Prussia.

<sup>8</sup> But common in early modern historiography, cf. Stefan Donecker, "An Itinerant Sheep, and the Origins of the Livonians: Friedrich Menius's *Syntagma de origine livonorum* (1635)", *Journal of Baltic Studies* 43 (2012), 1–20.

<sup>9</sup> Adam of Bremen, *Adami Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum*, ed. by J. M. Lappenberg (Hannover: Hahn 1876), here IV, 10.

<sup>10</sup> Saxo, *Gesta Danorum. Danmarkshistorien*, vols. 1–2, ed. by Karsten Friis-Jensen, translated by Peter Zeeberg (Copenhagen: Det Danske Sprog- og Litteraturselskab, 2005), here 5.7.1. ff.

<sup>11</sup> *In partibus autem Aquilonaribus per Aldemarum regem Daciae magna Frisiae et Rusciae, scilicet iter duodecim dierum, pars capitur, ita ut septem episcopatus in ea Christo adquiruntur.* Paris, *Matthæi Parisiensis, Monachi Sancti Albani, Chronica majora*, vol. 5, 193.

writing this part of his chronicle in 1247 and continued until 1251.<sup>12</sup> The conquest may have been famous in 1219, but apparently not well known in England thirty years later.

### *Before the conquest of Tallinn*

Valdemar began his military career early. When he was 18 years old, he was installed as Duke of Southern Jutland in 1188, a position he held until he became king in 1202. From that point onward, Valdemar began a slow expansion into the borderland of Holstein year after year by way of minor battles and negotiations with local northern German princes. A combination of military, marriages, and money gained Valdemar enough support to eventually crush his most important enemy in the area, Count Adolf III of Schauenburg and Holstein, in a final, decisive battle in 1201. Thereafter, Valdemar could in 1204 place his sister's son, Albrecht of Orlamünde, as Count of Holstein, thus giving himself a devoted and faithful supporter in all his Baltic expeditions for the rest of his life.<sup>13</sup> Also in 1203, Valdemar became the lord of the city of Lübeck, which for the next more than 20 years not only gave him a solid income but also control over one of the most important commercial and military ports in the entire Baltic.<sup>14</sup> Having achieved all this, Valdemar could begin looking further to the East. He launched the first of his several expeditions to Estonia in 1206 and conquered part of Saaremaa, stationing a garrison in a fort which he, however, had to abandon and demolish that same year.

Albrecht of Orlamünde and King Valdemar chose a policy of delicate balancing between the different candidates from the Staufens and the Welf families to become King of the Romans and Emperor. Their policy regarding princes around Holstein and further east was cautious and often consisted in supporting the weakest party to uphold equilibrium. This was also the case in 1212–14 when Valdemar changed sides and abandoned his

<sup>12</sup> Nathan Greasley, "Revisiting the compilation of Matthew Paris's *Chronica majora*: new textual and manuscript evidence", *Journal of Medieval History* 47 (2021), 230–256.

<sup>13</sup> For Valdemar's early military career, see Kurt Villads Jensen, "Valdemar 2. Sejr som hærfører", *Militært lederskap – Endring over tid?*, ed. by Knut Arstad (Oslo: Forsvarsmuseet, 2021), 9–35.

<sup>14</sup> Lübeck surrendered in 1201, cf. Thomas Riis, *Das Mittelalterliche Dänische Ostseeimperium* (Kiel: Ludwig, 2005), 57. Valdemar was received in Lübeck as new lord in the summer of 1203, cf. Arnold of Lübeck: *Arnoldi chronica slavorum*, ed. by Georgius Heinricus Pertz (Hannover: Hahn, 1868) lib. VI, cap. 17; and confirmed the city privileges afterwards, *Diplomatarium Danicum* (henceforth DD) I:4, ed. by Niels Skyum-Nielsen (Copenhagen: Ejnar Munksgaards Forlag, 1958), no. 53, 111–114. The charter is undated.

ally of many years, the experienced King Otto IV of the Romans and since 1209 Holy Roman Emperor (1198–1218). Instead, Valdemar now supported the 18-year-old and inexperienced Frederick II Staufeu (r. 1212–1250). This became important in the Battle of Bouvines in Flanders on 27 July 1214, which totally changed the power balance of all Western Europe.<sup>15</sup> Otto and the English king fought against the King of France and with great barons on both sides. Otto lost and was politically disempowered for the few remaining years of his life.<sup>16</sup>

Frederick II did not participate in the battle, nor did Valdemar directly, but he kept Otto's many vassals in northern Germany occupied with defending themselves against his constant attacks so that they could not leave for Bouvines. It is difficult to estimate precisely how Valdemar did this and exactly when; the sources are too meagre. However, his support for Frederick and his weakening of Otto's military capacity was recognised. In December of 1214, Frederick issued a golden bull recognising the right of his own successors and of those of Valdemar to all land north of the River Elbe.<sup>17</sup> It was a decision that the young German ruler would soon regret.

In 1215, Frederick II was crowned King of the Romans in a huge ceremony in Aachen during which he took up the cross and promised to leave for the Holy Land.<sup>18</sup> This he did again and again in the years to come, yet many different reasons prevented him from following through on his promise and he had to repeatedly postpone his participation. He actually made serious preparations for crusading, including having ships built and collecting substantial economic means for the purpose. These crusading promises were constantly connected to political problems within Germany and the Holy Roman Empire, including organising Frederick's coronation as emperor by the pope in Rome, and the election of his son as King of the Romans and co-ruler. He eventually succeeded when his son was elected King of the Romans in April of 1220. One of his arguments supporting his son's election was that it would secure the continuity of rule in case

<sup>15</sup> John W. Baldwin, Walter Simons, "The Consequences of Bouvines", *French Historical Studies* 37 (2014), 243–269.

<sup>16</sup> He died in 1218. Cf. Bernd Ulrich Hucker, *Otto IV: der wiederentdeckte Kaiser. Eine Biographie* (Frankfurt a. M.: Insel, 2003).

<sup>17</sup> *Mecklenburgische Urkundenbuch* (henceforth MUB), ed. by Verein für Mecklenburgische Geschichte und Altertumskunde (Schwerin, 1863–), here 1:218, 203. Oliver Auge, "omnes terminus ultra Eldanam et Albiam Romano attinentes imperio – Der Metzger Vertrag von 1214 und die Frage der staatsrechtlichen Zugehörigkeit Nordelbingens bis 1225", *Deutsches Archiv für Erforschung des Mittelalters* 75 (2019), 57–69.

<sup>18</sup> For Frederick, see Wolfgang Stürner, *Friedrich II*, vols. 1–2 (Darmstadt: WBG, 1992–2000).

Frederick were to die on the crusade. On 22 November 1220 in Rome, Pope Honorius III crowned Frederick emperor, who again took up the cross together with 400 high-ranking nobles. In January of 1219, Frederick had already promised Pope Honorius III to concentrate all his efforts on leaving for the crusade at Midsummer of 1219. He was later delayed but there is no reason to question the seriousness of his plans. He would leave in front of the largest crusader army the Germans had hitherto mustered at exactly the same time as Valdemar would leave for Tallinn.

Valdemar II of Denmark had prepared crusades further and further East during the 1210s. At a meeting in Schleswig at Midsummer of 1218, he had his son Valdemar the Young († 1231) crowned king and co-ruler at a diet in Schleswig, which was also closely connected to crusading. Sources are regrettably few compared to those on Frederick's meetings, but dukes, counts, and 15 bishops attended Valdemar's diet in Schleswig. Bishop Albert of Riga was present and pledged to help in the wars against the heathen.<sup>19</sup> We cannot prove it, but at least we can be confident in assuming that King Valdemar and a great deal of the local magnates had taken up the cross. It may have been bestowed upon them either by Bishop Albert, who had the privilege for preaching the crusade and for making the sign of the cross on the crusaders since 1215, or even more likely by Archbishop Andreas Sunesen who had been given far-reaching privileges in 1212 as papal legate with special responsibility for the mission in the Baltic.<sup>20</sup> In October of 1218, Valdemar had already sought and obtained permission from the pope to place all the land he could conquer from the heathens under the authority of the Danish church and himself. This was an important instrument in possible future negotiations with Bishop Albert and the church of Riga concerning ecclesiastical border lines.

In the late spring of 1219, Valdemar sailed for Estonia with the largest fleet that had hitherto been mustered from the Danish kingdom, 1,500 ships according to contemporary annals.<sup>21</sup> That number sounds big but it corresponds roughly to the 1,100 that Saxo, in his writing around the year 1200,

<sup>19</sup> *Annales Valdemarii*, in *Danmarks Middelalderlige Annaler*, ed. by Erik Kroman (Copenhagen: Selskabet for udgivelse af kilder til dansk historie, 1980), 79. Cf. Henry of Livonia: *Heinrici Chronicon Livoniae*, ed. by Leonid Arbusow, Albertus Bauer (Hannover: Hahn, 1955), XXII, 2.

<sup>20</sup> Torben K. Nielsen, Kurt Villads Jensen, "Pope Innocent III and Denmark", *Innocenzo III. Urbs et orbis*, ed. by Andrea Sommerlechner, ISIME e Società romana di storia patria (Roma: Società Romana di Storia Patria; 2003) (= Nuovi studi storici; 55), 1133–1168, here 1159–1164.

<sup>21</sup> The annals of Ribe, and the annals of Ryd, in *Danmarks Middelalderlige Annaler*, 170, 232, 259.

claimed that King Eric Emune of Denmark (r. 1134–1137) had collected on his expedition against Rügen in the mid-1130s,<sup>22</sup> and it would probably not be impossible if the entire *ledung* fleet was mobilised. On the other hand, later plans for a Danish crusade to the Holy Land include 100 ships. These numbers, however, are difficult to compare. In the case of Tallinn, the expedition could be expected to last for a couple of months, maybe even less, while a crusade to the Holy Land would take a couple of years and be attended by far fewer persons than the those going to Estonia.

Tallinn was conquered on the day of St Vitus, on 15 June, exactly as had happened to Arkona on Rügen in 1168. This was certainly not coincidental but must have been interpreted as a good omen, a confirmation that the expedition had divine support. It probably also had some local support in Estonia, of which, however, we know very little.<sup>23</sup>

The conquest of Tallinn was the beginning of troubled years for the new Danish crusader state. A dispute arose immediately with the Order of the Brethren of the Sword and with Bishop Albert of Riga about how to divide the newly conquered territories. A compromise was reached only after King Valdemar had blockaded the port of Lübeck in 1219–20 and thereby effectively prevented Riga and the Order from obtaining provisions and new recruits from Western Europe.<sup>24</sup> In 1221, the Osilians from the island of Saaremaa attacked the Danes in Tallinn and were only defeated with difficulties. The following year, Valdemar himself came with a new fleet on a punitive expedition and to further expand Denmark's conquered territories. The Estonian response was strong. When Valdemar had left, war broke out in 1223 in northern Estonia. The Danish garrisons in the castles were killed in large numbers and the survivors fled to Tallinn. The rebellious Estonians even caught the Danish commander Ebbe in Järva. They tore out his heart, roasted it, and ate it in order to gain strength against the Christians. The Estonians began systematically re-paganising society.<sup>25</sup> This happened in late January or early February of 1223. Judging by what had happened in earlier years, it was predictable that a new fleet with crusaders would have been sent from Denmark to Estonia to restore order

<sup>22</sup> Saxo, *Gesta Danorum*, 14.1.6.

<sup>23</sup> Marika Mägi, Carsten Selch Jensen, Kersti Markus, Janus Møller Jensen, *Taanlaste ristisõda Eestis* (Tallinn: Argo, 2019). Here the authors stress more than earlier researchers that such a large military expedition so far from Denmark would have been impossible without local allies to assist with logistics and information.

<sup>24</sup> Carsten Selch Jensen, Kurt Villads Jensen, John H. Lind, "Communicating crusades and crusading communications in the Baltic region", *Scandinavian Economic History Review*, 49 (2001), 5–25.

<sup>25</sup> Henry of Livonia, *Heinrici Chronicon Livoniae*, XXVI, 6.

and Christian supremacy. It would have set sail in the spring when the Baltic Sea had become navigable again, and it could very well have been led by King Valdemar in person. Before all that could take place, however, the situation changed dramatically when Valdemar was imprisoned and politically pacified for years.

### *A night on Lyø*

On the night between 6 and 7 May 1223 on the small island of Lyø in southern Denmark, King Valdemar and his son were attacked, wounded, and taken to a boat, which sailed hastily to Germany. They were transported to the castle of Dannenberg on the southern bank of the River Elbe, beyond the range of Danish power. The mastermind behind this kidnapping was Count Henry I of Schwerin, since 1214 a vassal of King Valdemar II of Denmark and no longer a liegeman of any of the rulers of the Holy Roman Empire. In former years, Henry had been on crusade to the Middle East at the same time as several other vassals or members of Valdemar's family: for example, Henry's son Count Niels of Halland, Duke Kasimir of Pomerania, and several of the vassals of Albrecht of Orlamünde. This crusading activity had taken place in the years 1217–20 and clearly indicates that Valdemar had interest in the common crusading initiatives of the time, but he also took advantage of the engagements in the Fifth Crusade in other ways. While Henry of Schwerin was away, Valdemar had infringed upon his land and taken control of several of his castles under various pretexts. One contemporary source even claims that he had raped Count Henry's wife.<sup>26</sup> There were plenty of reasons for Henry's strong reaction, although the news of a vassal abducting his lord was generally reproached and received with shock by contemporaries.

King Valdemar was in high demand. In the summer of 1223, Emperor Frederick II already began negotiating with Count Henry about simply buying Valdemar in return for money and promises of strong military assistance against Valdemar's future acts of retaliation against Henry.<sup>27</sup> One of Frederick's goals was to pressure Valdemar to renounce his claims on all land north of the River Elbe that the Golden Bull of late 1214 had bestowed

<sup>26</sup> In general, see Kurt Villads Jensen, "Once and Future Crusades. Past and Projected Plans of Emperor Frederick II and King Valdemar II of Denmark, c. 1214–1227," *The Crusades: History and Memory. Proceedings of the Ninth Conference of the Society for the Study of the Crusades and the Latin East*, Odense, 27 June – 1 July 2016, vol. 2, ed. by Kurt Villads Jensen, Torben Kjersgaard Nielsen (Brepols: Turnhout, 2021), 77–94.

<sup>27</sup> DD 1:5, no. 214.



upon him. Now nine years later, Fredrick was in a much stronger position and regretted his former decision. He wanted to regain control over these important regions.

In late October of 1223, things became very complicated when Pope Honorius III intervened. He must have been informed about what had happened, probably by Danish nobles and ecclesiastics. He now strongly condemned the abduction and demanded that Valdemar be released immediately. “You have put a grand and great blemish on your honour”, he wrote to Henry.<sup>28</sup> It would stick to him and his descendants forever if he did not wash it away immediately by releasing Valdemar. Denmark was under the protection of the Church, Honorius wrote, and Valdemar was under the very special protection of the church because he had personally taken a vow to participate in a general crusade to the Holy Land. If he were to be prevented from participating in person, he would send his son, and they would send 100 or at least 50 knights. Valdemar had taken up the cross after negotiations and following the advice of the pope, but he had done so in secret.<sup>29</sup> He did not wear the cross publicly but was nevertheless under the full protection of the pope.

We do not know when Valdemar had taken up the cross and promised to go to the Middle East. If we assume that the meeting in Schleswig in 1218 ended with a promise to go on a crusade to Tallinn, it was probably after that and after the conquest of Tallinn in 1219. One possibility is 1220 because Pope Honorius issued letters in November to Denmark’s neighbours strictly forbidding them to attack the country or the dependencies of Valdemar or his successor. This would fit in well with the first negotiations concerning a larger crusade but in reality, Valdemar could have given his vow to the pope or a papal representative<sup>30</sup> at any time between the summer of 1219 and the spring of 1223. Why Valdemar took up the cross in secret is also uncertain. It may simply have been to preserve greater flexibility in negotiations with other rulers and especially with Fredrick II if they did not know that he had promised to leave the country for a longer stretch of time, but this is mere speculation.

The intervention by Pope Honorius made things more complicated for Count Henry but it does not seem to have had any significant influence upon Fredrick II. He began negotiating directly with Valdemar and the Danish

<sup>28</sup> DD 1:5, no. 222.

<sup>29</sup> DD 1:5, no. 222: ... *non baiulat signum crucis in publice, illud tamen ad nostrum exhortationem susceptum baiulat in occulto* ...

<sup>30</sup> DD 1:5, no. 222: *nobis promissione facta*, ‘having made the promise to us’, is the formulation of Pope Honorius III.

interim government through the Grand Master of the Teutonic Knights, Hermann von Salza. They seem to have reached an agreement on 4 July 1224.<sup>31</sup> In return for his release, Valdemar promised to renounce his sovereign claim on land north of the River Elbe, to acknowledge the overlordship of Fredrick II over the Kingdom of Denmark, and to hold Denmark only as a vassal of Frederick II. Valdemar also promised to go on a crusade to the Holy Land with a fleet of 100 ships consisting of fast longships, the *snekker*, as well as large but slow war ships of the cog type. He planned to leave in August of 1225 for a period of two years, during which he would serve the king of Jerusalem over the course of the crusade.

This agreement was part of a much larger plan. We know from other sources that Fredrick was once again planning to go on crusade and that he also intended to leave in August of 1225. He would equip a fleet of 100 *calendra*, large war transport ships, and 50 fast galleys. Together with Valdemar's fleet, it would have been a formidable military contribution for regaining Jerusalem. It was part of Fredrick's plans, and actually of those of Pope Honorius, that Fredrick should marry Isabella, the heiress to the throne of Jerusalem, and by a coup replace Isabella's father and take over the crown as King of Jerusalem.<sup>32</sup> Hermann von Salza would have known about these marriage arrangements in July of 1224 but it is uncertain whether or not Valdemar would have known about them. In any case, when Valdemar promised to serve the king of Jerusalem, that would actually have meant Fredrick a year later.

All these plans came to nought because the Danish magnates who were negotiating with Hermann flatly refused. They went back home with the ransom money they had brought and began negotiating directly with Count Henry of Schwerin. It was not until November of 1225 that they reached an agreement. Valdemar was released in return for a very large sum of money and other valuables together with political promises and guarantees in the form of hostages, but without any mention of crusade participation.

The grand plans for liberating Jerusalem were not totally buried, at least not by the pope. Honorius III continued to remind Valdemar of his crusading promise during the year 1226 and absolved him from breaking his oath and not paying the remaining part of his ransom to Henry of Schwerin, because that would have prevented him from going on a crusade. Honorius also wrote and explained this to Henry, who certainly must not have been happy about the decision. At the same time, the pope also wrote to

<sup>31</sup> DD 1:6, no. 16.

<sup>32</sup> Stürner, *Friedrich II*, vol. 2, 91.

Emperor Fredrick and urged him to respect the alliance between the two rulers. It is not specified which alliance Honorius was referring to, but from his letter's context it seems most probable that he was insisting that Fredrick and Valdemar had agreed and promised to go on a common crusade.

It all came to nought. Valdemar preferred to try to get revenge and regain political power through war. After a series of provocations and minor skirmishes against Count Henry and his allies, the two parties met at the Battle of Bornhöved on 22 July 1227, which ended in a major defeat for Valdemar. His military possibilities were now severely reduced, he had to pay the ransom, Danish expansion in the Baltic came to a halt, and plans for crusades to the Middle East seem to have been abandoned.

### *What happened to Tallinn?*

King Valdemar was actively engaged in two crusading projects, the one to Tallinn in 1219, which he led in person, and the one to the Holy Land in the 1220s in which he should have played a significant role, but secondary to that of Emperor Fredrick. The first was successful in the sense that it led to a conquest and after some years to Danish political control and the conversion of the conquered territories to Christianity. The second was never realised.

Valdemar's two crusades are difficult to compare because the historical sources on them are very different. Both are mentioned directly and indirectly in charters from popes and lay rulers, and the crusade to Estonia is described in the narrative of Henry of Livonia, but they are not mentioned together in one single source. It is always dangerous to use silence in argumentation, and to draw conclusions from the fact that something is not mentioned. Yet it is remarkable that Pope Honorius did not mention the conquest of Tallinn when he intervened to protect Valdemar. It would have seemed obvious to refer to it as an argument in his favour, as an argument that he had a special position in the eyes of the church, and as an argument that Valdemar's promises of future crusades were trustworthy. This did not happen, which could perhaps indicate that the conquest of Tallinn has been considered epochal and decisive in Danish and Estonian historiography, but did not merit being mentioned by medieval popes.

On the other hand, we have the statements of Matthew Paris that opened this short article. To him, writing from England, Valdemar's crusading in the Eastern Baltic was the great achievement that he was famous for and for which he would be remembered. So, our conclusion should be more cautious and should not outrightly dismiss Tallinn's importance. The silence

of the sources instead reflects differences in knowledge, and differences in interests among the agents of the time.

Narrative sources do not mention Valdemar's plans for participating in the crusade to Jerusalem because those plans may have been known to few persons outside the papal and imperial curias, but mostly because he did not go. Had he been in the Holy Land, Matthew Paris and many others would certainly have mentioned that as well. The charters, and especially those from Pope Honorius, did not mention the Estonian crusade, perhaps because it was over and completed in 1223–26 when Honorius promoted a crusading alliance between Valdemar and Fredrick. In this respect, he was prospective and looked towards the future, not retrospective and looking back at the past, which was characteristic of many medieval charters with political content. Another explanation may also have been that the episode was so well known to Fredrick and Henry of Schwerin that it was not necessary to mention it.

The conquest of Tallinn was a major victory for King Valdemar, which we can conclude not only from the detailed description provided by Henry of Livonia and the summary of his life by Matthew Paris, but also because it actually established a new political dominance in Estonia and furthered large-scale conversion to Christianity in the region. When viewed in the light of the discussions that immediately followed concerning a large crusade to the Middle East, Tallinn was not just another of Valdemar's conquests in the Baltic and not just an attempt to gain political control, and in the end economic income. It was part of a very large plan for supporting crusading in both North and South, and for becoming a great and renowned crusader.

KEYWORDS: Crusade; Holy Land; King Valdemar's imprisonment; Fredrick II; Count Henry of Schwerin

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**KOKKUVÕTE:** *Kuningas Valdemar II ja Tallinn aastal 1219 – kas lihtsalt üks tema vallutustest või osa suuremast plaanist?*

Tallinna vallutamine aastal 1219 on nii Taanis kui Eestis rahvusliku ajaloo-narratiivi oluline sõlmpunkt. Neid sündmusi on ümber jutustatud populaarteaduslikes käsitlustes, ajalooromaanides, romantiseeritult kujutatud maalidel, filmides ja joonisfilmides. Kuid kas seda pidasid oluliseks ka Taani kuningas ise ja tema kaasaegsed? Artikkel analüüsib 1219. aasta vallutust kuningas Valdemar II varasemate sõjakäikude ning kuninga Lähis-Ida ristiretke kavatsuste taustal.

**MÄRKSONAD:** ristsõda; Püha Maa; kuningas Valdemari vangipõli; Friedrich II; Schwerini krahv Henry

KURT VILLADS JENSEN on keskaja ajaloo professor Stockholmi Ülikoolis.\*

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*Figure 1.* Danish King's Garden. Author Karl Laane, 1962. RA, EFA.683.o.195840