STRONGHOLD V

Bishopric of Tallinn, 1219–1565

SUFFRAGAN OF LUND IN LIVONIA

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Editor-in-Chief's Dedication

I dedicate this, my first work about Tallinn, to my beloved school, Tallinn English College.

Editor-in-Chief's Acknowledgements

Although this work has six authors and two editors, many more people have contributed to it, for example with drawings, comments, and images. I sincerely thank all of them!

A Brief Overview

This book is about the medieval diocese of Tallinn (Reval); it is a continuation of the already published publications about the Saare-Lääne and Tartu dioceses. The Tallinn diocese has tended to fade into the background when looking at the medieval organization of Livonia, but it was still a powerful office bearer in its time. That is why we look at the Tallinn bishops in this work, opening up topics and problems related to their area of government. The second part of the book is dedicated to the construction work of the Tallinn bishops.

Other Information

Castles are presented chronologically, except in the chapter "Other Minor Castles".

All maps and schematics (except those where otherwise noted) have been compiled by the publisher. All maps and drawings are presented north-up.

The source for spatial and detailed elevation data in Estonia is the Land Board of Estonia. Spatial Data: Land Board 10.08.2022. Height Data: Land Board 2022.

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The source for European height data is the European Digital Elevation Model (EU-DEM), v1.1, Apr. 2016.

Historical road network is based on Holterman et al. (2025).

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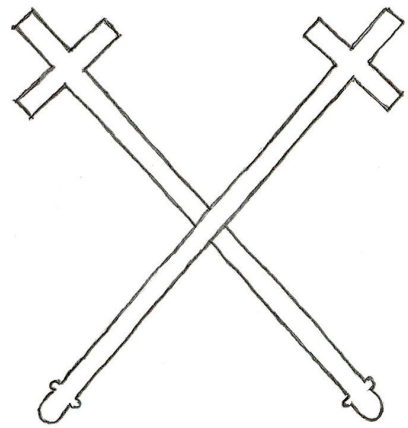
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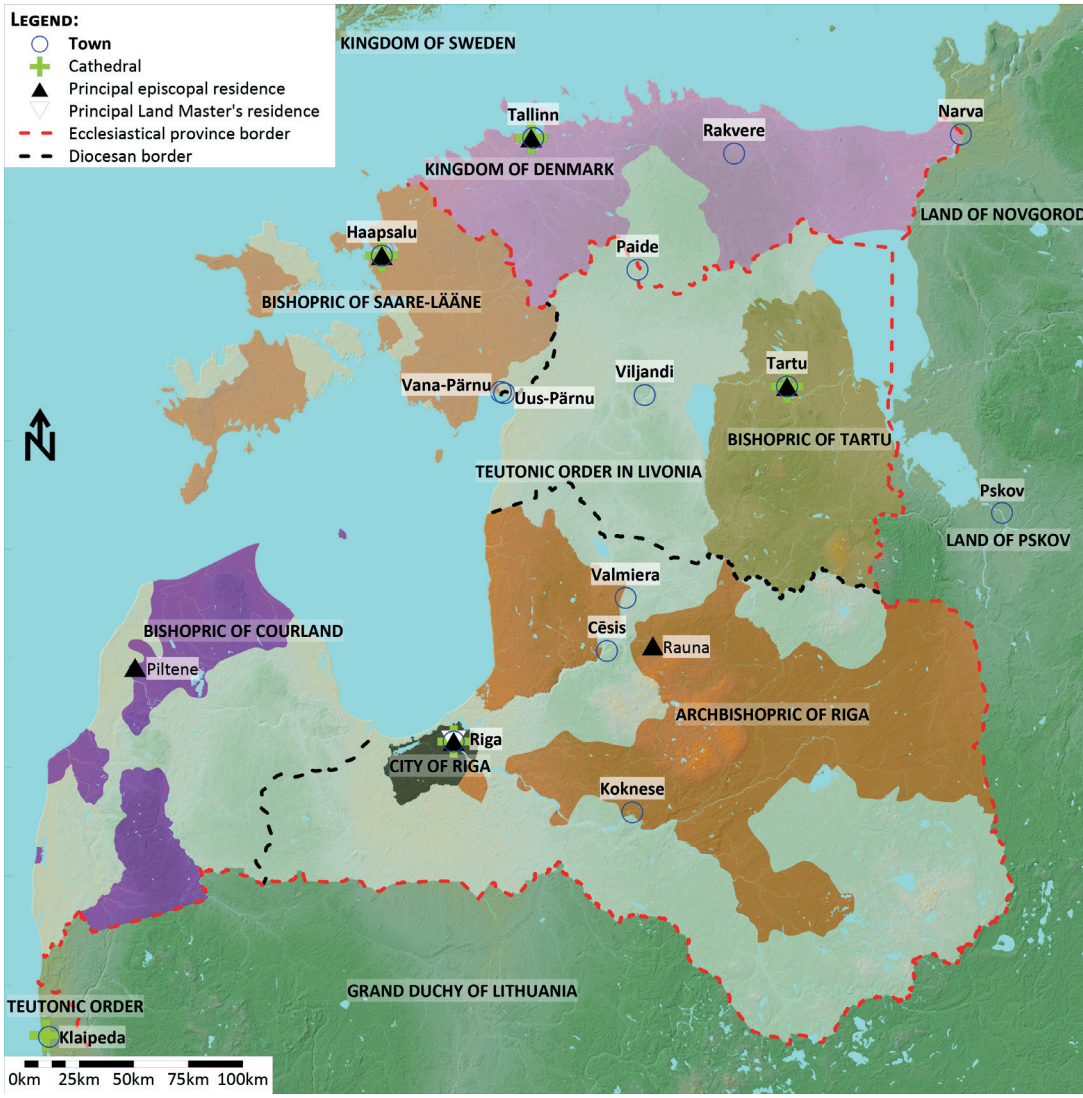
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Name of the Bishopric

The name of the Diocese of Tallinn (*ecclesia Revaliensis*) came into use in the 1220s, after the Danish king appointed the bishops of Revala and Viru. Papal confirmation of the Bishop of Revala, proposed by the king, in 1220 probably primarily marked the prehistoric county of Revala. Later it became a title denoting the seat of the Bishop of Tallinn (Latin *Revalia*, German *Reval*).



Livonia in 1340.



Moon setting behind Tallinn. In the centre is Long Hermann (Pikk Hermann), the tallest tower of the Small Castle of Tallinn. To the left of it are the Alexander Nevsky Cathedral (built in the 19th century), the Church of the Holy Spirit, and the Church of St. Nicholas; to the right are the Cathedral and the Church of St. Olav. Three shots were taken at 3-minute intervals, i.e., the time interval from the first to the last is 6 minutes. Photo Martin Vällik, 2023.



Livonia in 1550.

History of the Bishopric

PRELUDE AND ESTABLISHMENT OF THE DIOCESE

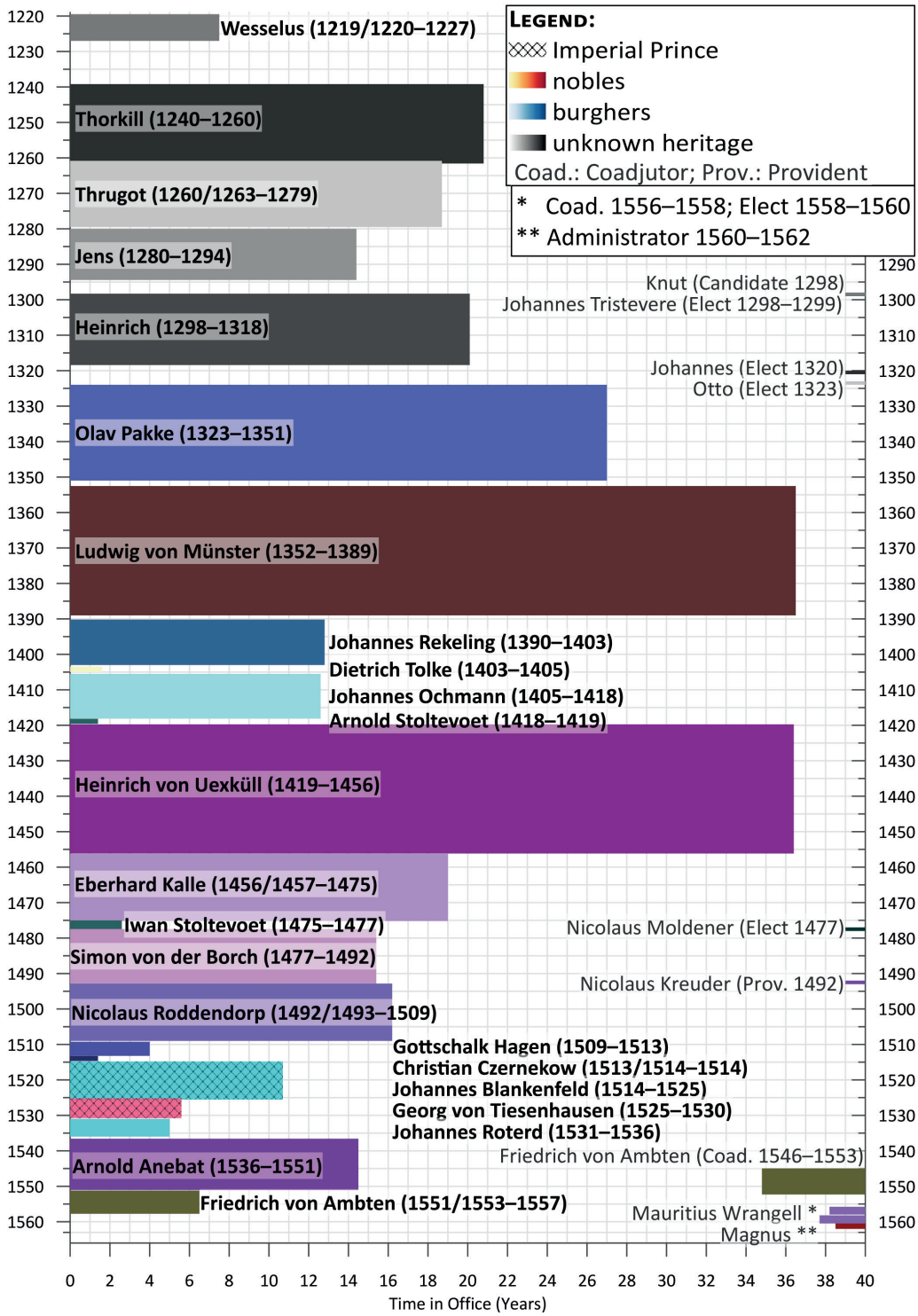
The Bishopric of Estonians or Estonia can be considered as the predecessor of the Dioceses of Tallinn as well as Tartu. The first known Bishop of Estonians was Fulco, a French Cistercian monk, who was probably appointed in the 1170s at the initiative of Archbishop Eskil of Lund [1137–1177]. However, nothing is known about Fulco's activities and he probably never reached Estonia. At the same time, the Danish kingdom, which expanded rapidly in the 12th–13th centuries, and its church maintained their interest in the territory of Estonia.

Crusaders from Riga were also very interested in the same area, and in 1211 a new bishop of the Estonians (also Estonia) was appointed. This was Theoderich, a close collaborator of Bishop Albert of Riga, who was also named Bishop of Lihula, based on his planned residence. In 1218, Albert, Theoderich, and Bishop Bernhard zur Lippe of Semigallia [1218–1224] held negotiations with King Valdemar II of Denmark [1202–1241]. Theoderich remained in Denmark as a result and began to cooperate closely with the king. It is possible that he then submitted ecclesiastically to the Archbishop of Lund, i.e., became his suffragan, and the king received the right to annex territories conquered from the pagans to his state and church. In any case, Theoderich participated in Valdemar's campaign to North Estonia in the summer of 1219, where he was killed in the Battle of Tallinn (Lindanise) on June 15. The king appointed his chaplain Wesselus (also Wescelin or Wesselin) as the new bishop of Estonia, while Bishop Albert appointed his brother Hermann. In 1220, the Pope referred to Wesselus as the Bishop of Revala and to Hermann as the Bishop of Lihula; the diocesan boundaries were not detailed. In the same year, the Danish king appointed Bishop Ostrad of Viru (Virumaa or Vironia), who, like Wesselus, was a suffragan of the Archbishop of Lund.

According to the treaty signed in Saaremaa in 1222 between Valdemar II and the Crusaders of Riga, both West and North Estonia were to come under the secular rule of the Danish king, which would be divided between bishops subordinate to the Archbishop of Lund, including those of Revala (or Tallinn) and Viru.[1] The agreement failed due to an Estonian uprising that broke out in the winter of 1222 and Valdemar II's imprisonment by the Count of Schwerin (1223), after which the Rigans conquered most of Estonia. Danish power was limited to North Estonia, but in 1227 the Order of the Brothers of the Sword also conquered this. Bishop Wesselus was probably in Germany from 1225

[1] It can be assumed that if Danish rule had continued in Western Estonia, a separate bishopric subordinate to Lund would have been established there.

Bishops of Tallinn



List of the bishops of Tallinn.

onwards, and there is no further news of him after 1227. The office of the bishop of Tallinn remained vacant, although it was not abolished.

In 1232, the pope temporarily gave the administration of the vacant Livonian bishoprics (including Tallinn) to his legate Baudouin of Aulne. However, Baudouin, who came into conflict with the Brothers of the Sword, did not achieve success, and the office of the bishop of Tallinn remained vacant.



Great seal of Bishop Thorkill from 1253. EAA.2069.3.173.

In 1234, the next legate to try and resolve the problems of North Estonia was Guillelmus (Wilhelm), former bishop of Modena, who had already been papal envoy to Livonia in the 1220s. Denmark regained possession of North Estonia following the Treaty of Stensby (1238) which Guillelmus mediated. Valdemar II then appointed the second bishop of Tallinn, Thorkill, a priest from the Diocese of Ribe [ordained 1240, died 1260]. The bishop of Tallinn then also administered the Diocese of Viru, which consisted of Virumaa (Viru) and Järvamaa (Järva); the latter had been donated by the king to the Teutonic Order with the Treaty of Stensby.

During Thorkill's reign, the real foundations of the Diocese of Tallinn were laid: most episcopal estates were acquired and the church's relations with the vassals of North Estonia and the city of Tallinn were regulated. At the same time, the bishop was often at the royal court, acting as an intermediary between the king and the powers of North Estonia, i.e., the vassals and the city of Tallinn. The king and bishop collaborated to prevent Dietrich von Minden, who had been appointed Bishop of Viru by Archbishop Albert Suerbeer of Prussia and Livonia (later, of Riga) in 1247, from arriving in Livonia, and Thorkill effectively merged the Diocese of Viru with Tallinn.



Fragment of a seal of Bishop Thorkill found in the village of Pühajõe in Virumaa in March 2017. Photo Ivar Leimus.

In 1240, Valdemar II donated 80 ploughlands in Revala to the bishop of Tallinn; in return, he reserved the right to appoint bishops and emphasized that if subsequent Danish kings were to lose this right, the donated lands would also be taken back. In addition, he also donated 40 ploughlands in Viru to Thorkill, as the administrator of the diocese, but only until a bishop was appointed there. In the autumn of 1241, the donations, including the names of specific villages, were confirmed by the new king, Erik IV [1241–1249], who ordered his captain to hand them over to the bishop.[2] In 1249, the king gave the bishop another 14 ploughlands.

In 1253, the bishop acquired another 40 ploughlands from the Teutonic Order in Järva, ceding the right to collect tithes there to the Order. In 1259 he made an agreement with the vassals of North Estonia, determining the amount of the ecclesiastical tax, the synodal tax, to be collected from their estates.

[2] It has often been thought that Erik IV's grants date to 1249, but 1241 is more likely.

Diocese of Viru

The Diocese of Viru (*ecclesia Wironensis*) was founded by Archbishop Andreas Sunesen of Lund [1201–1223] in 1220 after the people of Viru and Järva were subjugated to the rule of the Danish king. Archbishop Andreas, who was staying in Tallinn for a longer period of time at the time, consecrated a clergyman named Ostrad as bishop of the ancient counties of Viru and Järva. The diocese belonged to the Archbishopric of Lund. Similar to other Danish dioceses, the bishop of Viru owned some villages, but he had no secular authority. The location of the cathedral is unknown, and it remains unclear whether it was ever built. Paul Johansen assumed that it was planned to be built in the village of Tõrma. However, in the 13th century, cathedrals were mostly located in castles, which is why Tarvanpää (Rakvere) or Agelinde (Äntu Punamägi) could be considered as its location.

There is very little information about Bishop Ostrad's activities and the baptism of the counties of Viru and Järva. Paul Johansen assumed that the tally of villages in the Great Estonian List of the Danish Census Book was compiled by the priests who performed the baptisms. By reconstructing hypothetical travel routes of the priests, he concluded that approximately 13 priests performed baptisms in the counties of Viru and Järva. Since it is not possible to actually date the travel routes of the scribes of the census book as reconstructed by Johansen, they cannot be directly linked to the baptismal routes of 1220. These village lists could just as well have been compiled at some other time between 1220 and 1240. Therefore, the number of Danish missionaries who participated in the baptism of Viru and Järva is unknown.

The decision of the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) made membership in a parish mandatory for every Latin Christian, which meant that a network of parishes also had to be created for the newly founded diocese. At the beginning of 1223, the rebelling people of Viru and Järva expelled their priests—therefore, by then an initial network of parishes had already been established.

It is assumed that the parish network founded by Ostrad is reflected in the Great Estonian List of the Danish Census Book. In Viru, as of 1240, there were two parishes in the pre-historic *kiligunda* of Lemmu—Võhu (Viru-Jaagupi) and Katkuküla (Simuna)—and also in Rebala—Haljala and *Toruestaeuaerae* (Kadrina). Mahu, *Askaelae* and the *kiligunda* of Alutaguse all belonged to Mahu (later Viru-Nigula) Parish. Since Järva was in the possession of the Teutonic Order at the time the Great Estonian List was compiled, this province is not reflected in the list. In 1252, there were three church parishes in Järva County—Keika (Järva-Jaani), Ambla, and Ämbra (Peetri), whose territories were identical to the *kiligundae*. The church of one of them, Keika, was definitely established in the 1220s, while the first mention of the others was only in 1252. Therefore, it is entirely conceivable that during the time of Ostrad, Keika Parish encompassed the entire county of Järva, and Ambla and Ämbra were only founded during the time of Bishop Thorkill.

How long Ostrad served as bishop is unknown, as is the time and place of his death. In any case, the power struggles of the 1220s did not destroy the diocese. During the rule of the Brothers of the Sword from 1227 to 1238, Viru is mentioned as a diocese with a vacant or absent bishop. In 1234, only two priests served in the entire diocese: Bertram in Viru and Robert in Järva.

With the Treaty of Stensby (1238), part of the bishopric—Järva—remained under the rule of the Teutonic Order, while the other part—Viru—came under Danish rule. The Teutonic Order was