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Anthony John Lappin with Elena Balzamo

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GENERAL ABBREVIATIONS

- APA* Archivio Penitenziario Vaticano.
- ASB* *Gamla papper angående Mora socken*: vol. 2. *Arvid Siggessons brevväxling*, ed. L. Sjödin, (Västerås: Bergh., 1932).
- ASV* Archivio Secreto Vaticano.
- BSH* Styffe, C.G. 1859–1884. *Bidrag till Skandinaviens historia ur utländska arkiver* (5 vols., Stockholm: Norstedt): vol. III. *Sverige under Karl Knutsson och Kristiern af Oldenburg, 1448–1470* (1870); vol. IV. *Sverige i Sten Sture den äldres tid, 1470–1503* (1875); vol. V. *Sverige under de yngre Sturarne, särdeles under Svante Nilsson, 1504–1520* (1884).
- COD* *Conciliorum oecumenicorum decreta*, eds. G. Alberigo, J.A. Dossetti, P. Joannou, C. Leonardi, P. Prodi & H. Jedin (2nd edn, Basel: Herder, 1962; 3rd edn, Bologna: EDB, 1973).
- DD* *Diplomatarium danicum*, ed. Det Danske Sprog- og Litteraturselskab (Copenhagen: C.A. Reitzels, 1938–): vol. I.3. *Diplomer 1170–1199 & Epistolæ abbatis Willelmi de Paraclito*, eds. C.A. Christensen, H. Nielsen & L. Weibull.
- DN* *Diplomatarium norvegicum: Oldbreve til kundskab om Norges indre og ydre forhold, sprog, slægter, sæder, lovgivning og rettergang i middelalderen* (23 vols., Oslo: Norsk historisk kjeldeskrift-institutt, 1849–2011).
- FMU* *Finlands medeltidsurkunder I–VIII*, ed. R. Hausen (Helsingfors: Staatrådets tryckerie, 1910–1935): I. 1400; II. 1401–1430; III. 1431–1450; IV. 1451–1480; V. 1481–1495; VI. 1496–1508; VII. 1509–1518; VIII. 1519–30
- GIR* *Konung Gustav den förstes registratur*, ed. J.A. Almqvist *et al.* (29 vols., Stockholm: Norstedt, 1861–1916), I. 1521–24; II. 1525; III. 1526; IV. 1527; V. 1528; VI. 1529; VII. 1530–31; VIII. 1532–33; IX. 1534; X. 1535; XI. 1536–37; XII. 1538–39; XIII. 1540–41; XIV. 1542; XV. 1543; XVI. 1544; XVII. 1545; XVIII. 1545–47; XIX. 1548; XX. 1549; XXI. 1550; XXII. 1551; XXIII. 1552; XXIV. 1552–53; XXV. 1555; XXVI. 1556; XXVII. 1557; XXVIII. 1558; XXIX. 1559–60
- GL* Gneuss, H. & M. Lapidge, 2014. *Anglo-Saxon manuscripts: A bibliographical handlist of manuscripts and manuscript fragments written or owned in England up to 1100* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press).
- HH* *Historiska Handlingar* (40 vols., Stockholm: Kungl. Samfundet för utgivande av handskrifter rörande Skandinaviens historia, 1861–1979): vol. VIII, ed. C.G. Styffe (1879).
- HS* Haddan, A.W. & W. Stubbs, eds. 1869–1879. *Councils and ecclesiastical documents relating to Great Britain and Ireland* (3 vols., Oxford: Clarendon Press).

- HSH Handlingar rörande Skandinaviens historia* (40 vols., Stockholm: Kungl. Samfundet för utgivande av handskrifter rörande Skandinaviens historia, 1816–1860).
- PL Patrologia Latina*, ed. J.-P. Migne, 221 vols. (Paris: the editor, 1841–1865).
- RPR Regesta Pontificum Romanorum ab condita ecclesia ad annum post Christum natum MCXCVIII. Edidit Philippus Jaffé*, 2nd edn, eds. S. Loewenfeld, F. Kaltenbruner & P. Ewald, vols. I & II (Leipzig: Veit).
- S* Sawyer, P.H. 1968. *Anglo-Saxon charters: An annotated list and bibliography* (London: Royal Historical Society), revised and updated S. Kelly, R. Rushforth *et al.* <http://www.esawyer.org.uk/about/index.html>

Bishops and bad behaviour:

Scandinavian examples of bishops who violated ecclesiastical norms

Kirsi Salonen

Introduction

Numerous archival documents as well as various literary texts, such as the *Decameron* or *The Canterbury tales*, include stories about the multitude of sins and crimes committed by medieval clerics. The existence of such documentation is somewhat controversial due to the fact that according to ecclesiastical norms, members of clergy—and especially bishops as their superiors—should abstain from sins and crimes because they were expected to set a good example of how Christians should conduct their lives.¹ However, as these texts testify, the ideal of well-behaving clergy never became universally true and numerous clerics and bishops from all over the Latin West failed to behave according to the norms—and Scandinavian bishops did not make an exception to this rule.

This article will deal with bad behaviour of Scandinavian bishops in the Middle Ages, although first we should define when an ecclesiastical person was behaving badly. Since it is impossible to judge their table manners or attitude towards others, I have taken as my starting point the regulations of medieval canon law and defined “bad behaviour” as simply being a violation of relevant ecclesiastical regulations.

It is difficult to say what might have been the most common way for bishops to behave badly, because they must have committed many sins and crimes in secret, and these left no traces in written documentation. However, using the existing sources, it is possible to distinguish three sins or crimes committed relatively often by medieval Scandinavian bishops, namely: 1) disregard for celibacy regulations; 2) violating the principles regarding the position and obligations of a bishop; and 3) violent behaviour.

Most of the information on Scandinavian bishops’ misbehaviour comes from ec-

1 In *Liber Extra*, promulgated by Pope Gregory IX in 1234, see for example X 3.1–4 and X 5.8–39, in *Corpus Iuris Canonici*, coll. 449–464, 790–913.

clesiastical source material, which includes both local sources and documentation in the central archives of the Catholic church, the Vatican Secret Archives. In addition to the usual papal register series, the Registers of supplications,² the Lateran Registers³ and the Vatican Registers,⁴ the registers of the Apostolic Penitentiary⁵ which was the so-called “supreme tribunal in the matters of conscience”, offer us real glimpses of everyday life and of clerics who were guilty of crimes or sins and therefore turned to the authority of the office in order to plead pardon from their misbehaviour. All of these sources together with local source materials have been used in this contribution.

Breaking celibacy

According to the ideal of clerical celibacy developed in the spirit of the Gregorian reform, the Second Lateran Council (in 1139) stipulated that men in the higher holy orders (sub-deacons, deacons and priests) were supposed to live chastely.⁶ Despite these regulations, as Ludwig Schmutge has pointed out, it was common in all parts of Christendom that priests kept concubines and had children by them even though they could not have all the same rights as children born in legitimate marriages had. It has often been thought that priests who broke the celibacy rules were less-educated rural priests, who did not care—or perhaps even know—about the ecclesiastical regulations, but this is not true. There are numerous examples from all over the Latin West of members of higher clergy, including abbots, bishops and even popes (the best example of them being the Borgia pope, Alexander VI), who had offspring with their concubines. But a general problem for evaluating the sexual continence (or actually: incontinence) of priests and bishops has been the lack of suitable source material describing this issue. Fortunately, the archives of the Apostolic Penitentiary contain hints about the reality behind the celibacy regulations.⁷

Based on the spirit of the Gregorian reform, canon law stipulated that an illegitimate child could not become priest.⁸ Since there was a large number of illegitimate children in the Middle Ages and many of them were qualified for and eager to enter an ecclesiastical career, the church introduced the possibility of receiving a papal dispensation which allowed illegitimate children entrance to the priesthood. It was Pope Gregory IX (1227–1241) who reserved the right to grant such dispensations to papal

2 *ASV, Reg. Suppl.*

3 *ASV, Reg. Lat.*

4 *ASV, Reg. Vat.*

5 *APA, Reg. Matrim. et Div.*

6 Canons 6 and 7, edited in *COD*, 198.

7 Schmutge 1995, 17–22, 25–31, 33, and *passim*; Schmutge *et al.* 1996, 147–151; Salonen 2001, 157–159.

8 On legislation concerning illegitimate children, see Landau 1994, *passim*.

authority, and his successors delegated this authority to the officials of the Penitentiary.⁹ The right to grant such dispensations offers an excellent possibility for researchers, because thanks to the delegated authority, the late medieval records of the Penitentiary contain almost 38,000 petitions from illegitimate children, who needed such a dispensation.¹⁰ Illegitimate children turning to the Penitentiary were not guilty of any criminal or sinful acts, but these petitions are relevant for the theme of this article when the illegitimacy of the petitioners arose from the fact that their fathers were bishops.

In fact, illegitimacy petitions in the Penitentiary registers always mention—in addition to obvious information such as the name and home diocese of the petitioner—the social background of the parents of the supplicant, that is, the reason why he or she was an illegitimate child.¹¹ The Penitentiary sources list a few reasons for illegitimacy. First, a child could be result of an extramarital relationship, when the parents could not marry since one or both of them was married. Secondly, the parents might both be unmarried—either because they did not want to get married or because they could not marry for some reason, such as due to the existence of one of the ecclesiastical marriage impediments. Or thirdly, the parents could not be married because the father belonged to the upper clergy which could not marry. The last category includes also references to bishop-fathers.¹²

The corpus of almost 38,000 petitions to the Penitentiary from the year 1449 until the year 1533 contains as many as 117 examples of bishop-fathers from different parts of Christendom, which means that it was neither common for bishops to have children but nor was it unheard of, either.¹³ Most of the bishop-fathers mentioned in the Penitentiary sources originated from the central areas of Christendom, but the material also included one Scandinavian case. This indicates that northern bishops were not less attracted to women than their much more numerous southern peers. The Scandinavian illegitimacy petition to the Penitentiary is dated to January 1484 and it is a direct testimony concerning a Scandinavian bishop who had not respected the celibacy regulations. With this petition, a certain Petrus Johannes from the Danish diocese of Århus requested a dispensation from illegitimacy stating that his father was a bishop and his mother an unmarried woman.¹⁴ The text of this short petition does, however,

9 The Penitentiary had the powers to grant dispensations from illegitimacy from the pontificate of Gregory IX (1227–1241) onwards. Göller 1911, I, 20–23; Schmugge 1995, 33–40; Salonen 2001, 196–197.

10 Schmugge 1995, *passim*.

11 Some examples of illegitimacy petitions in the Penitentiary registers are edited in Salonen & Schmugge 2008, 126–134.

12 Schmugge 1995, 181–196.

13 Schmugge 1995, 183, 214–219.

14 *APA, Reg. Matrim. et Div.* 33, fol. 255^r: Petrus Johannes scolaris Arusiensis diocesis de episcopo genitus et soluta. Fiat de speciali, Julius Episcopus Bretonoriensis, regens (Peter John, student

not reveal anything about the identity of the father. The only mentioned detail is the fact that he was a bishop.

There are, fortunately, some possibilities to try to unveil the identity of the anonymous bishop–father of Petrus. Since it was typical for Scandinavian petitioners to identify themselves in the Penitentiary petitions with their first name and patronym, Petrus Johannes (even though it is not in the genitive as usual, but this is probably just a mistake of the scribe) could indicate that the first name of Petrus’s father was Johannes—or Jens, Hans or Jöns in Danish. A check on the names of Danish bishops from the second half of the 15th century¹⁵ revealed that the most probable candidate as Petrus’s episcopal father would be Bishop Jens Iversen Lange of Århus—which also fits well because Århus was Petrus’s home diocese.¹⁶ What makes this case interesting—also for scholars interested in medieval genealogy of the Danish nobility—is that medieval sources or modern biographies based on them do not mention anything about possible offspring of Jens Iversen Lange.¹⁷

Perjury

In some specific cases bishops could commit a crime connected to the obligations related to their position. This might sound strange, but is true. A typical crime of this kind was perjury. According to canon law, a person who had sworn an oath (*iuramentum*) was bound to keep it and had to act in accordance with what he had promised. If he failed to keep the promise, he was considered a perjurer and was punished by ecclesiastical sanctions. The church considered perjury such a severe violation of canon law that it belonged to the group of sins which could be absolved only by the pope. Clerics guilty of perjury were typically punished, in addition to excommunication and irregularity bound to it, by a lifetime suspension from their office and benefice.¹⁸

But how could a bishop become guilty of perjury simply by being a bishop? When

from Århus diocese, born from bishop and unmarried woman [requests for a dispensation from illegitimacy]. Granted by special [powers given to the Penitentiary], Julius, bishop of Bertinoro, *regens*).

15 *Hierarchia catholica*.

16 The only other Danish bishop with the first name Jens, Hans or Jöns was Bishop Jens Pedersen Jernskjæg of Roskilde (bishop 1431–1448). He is, however, a less obvious candidate for Petrus’s father if we take into consideration the fact that dispensations from an illegitimate birth were typically petitioned by young men before they intended to receive the priestly ordination, which usually took place when they were (at least) 25 years old. If Petrus had been at the age of *c.* 25 when he presented his petition to the Penitentiary in 1484, he would have been born at the end of the 1450s, which is some ten years after Bishop Jens Pedersen’s death, in 1448: Erslev 1894, 455.

17 Jexlev & Andersen 1979–1984; Netterstrøm 2012.

18 Zapp 1986; Helmholtz 1996, 145–173; Salonen 2001, 152–153.

a bishop received his appointment from the pope, he had to swear an oath to visit the Holy See regularly in order to report to the pope about the state of affairs in his diocese. These visits are known as *visita ad limina sanctorum apostolorum Petri et Pauli*. The frequency of paying these visits varied depending on how far away one's bishopric was situated from the papal curia: Italian bishops had to make their *visita ad limina* each year, those living north of the Alps every second year, and those living across the sea (like the Scandinavian bishops) had to visit the curia every third or fifth year, depending on what the pope demanded. If a bishop did not pay these visits regularly, he broke his oath and was guilty of perjury.¹⁹

We know from the Vatican sources that the popes were not too strict in checking the frequency of various bishops's visits *ad limina* or in insisting upon the fulfilment of the promise. Nor was it obligatory to make these visits personally, and a bishop could authorize someone else to take care of the visit on his behalf. Despite the flexibility—or perhaps because of it—some bishops did not take care of their visits and were therefore accused of perjury. This was not an accusation one could take lightly, because a perjurer incurred excommunication, which in the case of a bishop automatically meant that he was considered irregular and could not perform his episcopal functions before he had reconciled with the pope and received absolution and dispensation.

The Vatican sources contain references to the case of Bishop Konrad Bitz of Turku, a good example of such a violation. Konrad Bitz received his episcopal consecration in 1460 from Pope Pius II in Siena and promised to visit the Holy See every fifth year—which he did not do. When the Finnish bishop in 1473—some 13 years later—finally sent his representative to Rome, Pius II's successor, Sixtus IV, was not amused by the delay. The pope declared that Bishop Konrad was perjured and thereby excommunicated and irregular. In order to lift the ecclesiastical punishments, the representative of Bishop Konrad formulated a petition to the pope and asked for absolution from his sin and for dispensation so that he could continue in his ecclesiastical career. In addition to that, the petition of the Finnish bishop included a request for a permit that he should not pay a visit to the Holy See for the next 20 years. On 4 June 1473, Pope Sixtus agreed with the two first requests—because that was what the papal curia usually did if the request was canonically correct and composed in the right way—but he refused to grant the perjured bishop a licence to ignore his future visits. The representative of Bishop Konrad understood the subtle hint and eleven days later renewed the petition of his superior for absolution and dispensation and, wisely, no longer mentioned the wish to ignore the visitation. This time Pope Sixtus was clement and granted Bishop Konrad the requested absolution and dispensation, and in addition to that, the pope decided—on his “own” initiative which was the correct way to proceed in these cases—that Bishop Konrad should visit the papal curia every fifth year, but that

19 Paravicini Bagliani 1998, 14.

he was absolved from the first visit. We do not know whether Bishop Konrad visited the papal curia in 1483—that is ten years from the previous one—but papal sources tell that he had done so at least during 1488—and these sources do not mention any subsequent accusations of perjury.²⁰

Violent behaviour

Since the Ten Commandments and the teachings of Jesus condemned violent behaviour of Christians, the members of clergy were obviously supposed to avoid the use of violence and especially not to kill anyone. Canon law punished violent clerics severely with excommunication, irregularity and suspension.²¹ A priest or bishop could not underestimate the consequences of these punishments, because they banned the guilty person from carrying out his priestly or episcopal functions and consequently he was in danger of losing his office, and thereby his income. Those guilty of such offences had to apply to the pope in order to gain absolution and dispensation, which would eventually restore the sinner to his priestly or episcopal rights.²²

Despite the ecclesiastical norms forbidding clerical violence, many bishops were involved in violent acts, especially in warfare, and their behaviour did not change over the course of centuries. One of the first well-known cases of a bishop guilty of violent deeds is that of the Finnish bishop Thomas, who had to resign his position in 1245 because he had ordered someone to be mutilated, which resulted in the death of the victim. It is questionable whether this alone forced him to resign, because a papal document related to his early retirement refers also to the fact that he had admitted falsifying a papal letter. Unfortunately, the short source text is so imprecise that we do not know what had made the bishop order the mutilation of the deceased but it is enough to testify that bishops have been guilty of violence and that they had to carry the consequences of their actions.²³

20 *FMU* vol. IV, 3547 (= *ASV, Reg. Suppl.* 691, fols. 117^v–118^r); *FMU* vol. IV, 3549 (= *ASV, Reg. Suppl.* 691, fol. 269^{r-v}). See also Salonen 2005, 436–440; 2014, 86–87.

21 The ecclesiastical legislation concerning the use of violence, both by clergy and towards them, is enormous. The most well-known decree regarding violence towards clerics is the constitution 15 (“*Si quis suadente diabolo*”) of the Second Lateran Council celebrated in Rome in 1139. It ruled that anyone who laid violent hand on members of the clergy or monastic orders incurred automatic excommunication, which could be absolved only by the pope. For a short but comprehensive presentation of the ecclesiastical norms, see Clarke 2011.

22 If a cleric participated in a violent act, he was immediately (*ipso facto*) excommunicated and considered irregular because of the defect of perfection of leniency (*ex defectu perfectae lenitatis*). In order to lift the excommunication and the irregularity, violent clerics had to turn to the pope, who alone could grant them absolution from the excommunication and dispensation which liberated them from the irregularity. These tasks were typically delegated to the officials of the Apostolic Penitentiary from 1360s onwards: Salonen 2001, 128–132.

23 *FMU* vol. I, 88: “[...] quendam fecerit mutilari, qui hujusmodi occasione mortem incurrit, ac quasdam litteras apostolicas presumpserit diabolico instinctu falsare [...]”.

Bishop Konrad Bitz of Turku, whom we met earlier, was in his turn guilty of participation in warfare. The papal documentation from his representative's visit to Rome during 1473, mentions that, in addition to being a perjurer and many other things, Bishop Konrad was under excommunication because he had participated in warfare by sending his troops against his enemies and by consenting to the capture of the archbishop of Uppsala.²⁴ The wars mentioned in the bishop's petitions refer to the ongoing civil war in Sweden between the supporters of Swedish and Danish kings from the middle of the 15th century onwards.

Bishop Konrad had to answer to the pope for his violent behaviour and he received the necessary absolution and dispensation, so that we have written testimony about his misbehaviour. But in his defence, it must be stressed that he was certainly not the only Scandinavian bishop guilty of such a crime. It is a well-known fact that most Swedish bishops participated in internal political struggles and thus they should have incurred ecclesiastical sanctions too. However, there is very little information about their cases in the Vatican source material.

The best example of a Swedish bishop who was involved in political wars in Scandinavia is probably Hemming Gadh of Linköping. Gadh was a well-known curialist, who had established excellent networks within the papal curia while he was staying in Rome for years as the representative of the Swedish Regent, Sten Sture the Elder. The latter rewarded his faithful servant by installing him into the See of Linköping in 1501. Hemming Gadh, however, never became a consecrated bishop, but was forced to act as *electus* until the end of his career because Pope Alexander VI refused to consecrate him. We do not know the reason for the refusal of the pope but can only guess his motivations. Perhaps he did it because of Hemming Gadh's misbehaviour, perhaps for some other reason—rumours said, for example, that it was Hemming who had assassinated his predecessor. In addition to this it is known that Electus Hemming was actively participating in warfare on Swedish soil.²⁵

However, it must be underlined, in defence of both Hemming Gadh and Konrad Bitz, that their active participation in warfare and intrigues resulted partly from the fact that they were bishops. According to Swedish customs, bishops were automatically members of the State Council and as such they immediately became part of the political conflicts in the country. As a result, it was impossible for men in their position to keep out of controversies.

24 *FMU* vol. IV, 3547 (= *ASV, Reg. Suppl.* 691, fols. 117^v–118^r); *FMU* vol. IV, 3549 (= *ASV, Reg. Suppl.* 691, fol. 269^{r-v}). For further examples of bishops' military exploits, see Villads Jensen, and Skoog, in this volume.

25 Regarding Hemming Gadh, see Carlsson 1915; and further Balzamo in this volume.

Conclusions

What we have had until now are single stories about Scandinavian bishops who were guilty of crimes and sins a bishop should not have committed. As the head of a diocese one expects to find a bishop who was a good model for the faithful in his bishopric, but this was not always the case. Bishops were human and sometimes they were drawn to the pleasures of the flesh, as the case of the bishop-father, Jens Lange of Århus, has demonstrated.

We also saw that sometimes the sins committed by bishops were connected to their office. Had Konrad Bitz not been a bishop, he would not have sworn to the pope to visit the papal curia regularly and thus become a perjurer when he failed to do so. But we also saw that the position of a bishop in the Scandinavian kingdom(s) as a member of the Swedish Council of Realm could easily cause the bishops to be guilty of violence, because they almost automatically had to participate in warfare, as we saw with the examples of Konrad Bitz of Turku or Hemming Gadh of Linköping. It is clear that these persons did not necessarily enjoy leading armies but their presence—be that actual or only instigating—in warfare was an integral part of their leading position in the society.

Since the aim of this article is not to try to explain away the incorrect behaviour of bishops, I will close with a prime example of a Scandinavian bishop who might simply have been an unpleasant person—so to say the Alexander VI of Scandinavia—and violated in many different ways both ecclesiastical law and the local civil law.

Johannes Gerechini—or in Scandinavian Jöns Gerekeson/Jón Gerreksson—was born somewhere in Denmark around 1380. He studied at the University of Cologne and started his ecclesiastical career as a canon in Århus. Later he became the chancellor to the Union King Eric of Pomerania, who in 1408 appointed Johannes as archbishop of Uppsala against the will of the Uppsala chapter. Johannes, who from the very beginning was disliked by his chapter, did not make himself more popular by ignoring his duties and preferring to dedicate himself to pleasure. According to medieval sources—which we have to interpret with caution because they are written by his political adversaries—he lived a luxurious life accompanied by women of dubious morals and did not hesitate to use violence against his enemies. When he ran out of money, he not only took bribes and borrowed money without paying it back, but also embezzled church property. He also kept a young woman from Stockholm as his concubine and had two children with her. We know all this because his abuses led to an official complaint from the Uppsala chapter to Pope Martin V, who commissioned the bishop of Riga to investigate the situation—and against all expectations, the papal commissioner eventually found Johannes not guilty. Nevertheless, Johannes Gerechini drew the right conclusion and abdicated from the See of Uppsala in 1421.

His ecclesiastical career did, however, not end with the abdication: he was subsequently appointed bishop to the Icelandic diocese of Skálholt in 1426. Four years later he arrived at the island and was formally ordained. In Iceland as in Uppsala, the locals soon tired of him, particularly the anti-English policy he led on the island. The surviving sources do not say anything direct about the motives or the details of events but describe briefly how he finished his days: on 20 July 1433, the locals took the law into their own hands, captured their bishop, stuffed him in a sack, and drowned him.²⁶

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²⁶ See Losman n.d.

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