Der inkriminierte Bischof. Verratsvorwürfe und politische Prozesse gegen Bischöfe im westgotischen und fränkischen Gallien (466–614)

Abstract
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My PhD thesis focuses on loyalty conflicts between bishops and kings in post-Roman Gaul. The main focus is on twenty case studies, aiming to analyze specific conflict situations during the years between 466 and 614 (hence covering the Visigothic and early Merovingian periods). The results of these case studies are eventually summarized and evaluated. In contrast to previous research on the late antique and early medieval episcopate dealing with different aspects of episcopal authority, the adopted approach consciously looks at situations where episcopal power was challenged and, at times, broken. On the one hand, the question of what kind of political and social constellations did bring about the studied conflicts proved to be instructive. On this, the following results have been reached:

1) In more than half of the analyzed cases, bishops were reproached of having plotted to "confer" "their" cities to foreign monarchs (*tradere civitatem suam*). This phenomenon is rooted in the entanglement of royal and episcopal control over early medieval cities. This relation could e. g. manifest itself in the fact that a king hardly managed to control a city, when its bishop had abandoned his loyalty towards him. Since early medieval monarchs strongly depended on the loyalty of their episcopate, they tried to bind bishops to themselves. They did this e. g. by reserving the right to confirm a newly elected bishop.

2) The bishop's affiliation to aristocratic networks could also contribute to disputes: This could particularly be the case, when these networks represented political interests that were opposed to the ruling dynasty.

3) Another relevant factor was the geographical divergence of bishoprics and 'public' administrative units. Conflicts could arise when borders of kingdoms were newly established without paying respect to ecclesiastical provinces that have often grown historically.

4) The royal practice of appointing politically loyal candidates as bishops often caused local clerics to feel disadvantaged. Consequently, they revolted against their new

bishop whom they considered as an "intruder". Paradoxically, comparable constellations gave way to accusations that the new bishop had become disloyal towards his royal supporter and wished another monarch to rule over the episcopal city.

5) The fifth group of conflict-generating factors can be labeled as "episcopal identity". In fact, expectations of kings and magnates towards episcopal behavior were easily prone to conflict when bishops were divided over the adequate reactions towards these expectations. Contested issues included as different matters as marriages of magnates infringing ecclesiastical norms, clerics involved in warfare, or restrictions of ecclesiastical autonomy. Put differently, contemporaries were mainly concerned with the question to what extend it was reconcilable with episcopal self-conceptions when bishops behaved according to royal interests.

On the other hand, the question how contemporaries dealt with these conflicts – that were, after all, not uncommon – helps us to understand relations between kings and bishops more deeply. In fact, it could be shown that contemporaries developed specific juridical mechanisms to settle disputes while respecting the different interests of the parties involved. Our sources suggest that these mechanisms were subject to change during the examined period. This transformation can be traced within the Merovingian kingdoms from the middle of the sixth century onwards and corresponds conspicuously with contemporary legal pronouncements on ecclesiastical and secular jurisdiction. While synodal decretals from Late Antiquity tend to recognize secular jurisdiction over bishops at least in criminal cases, in the 530s church councils start to consider it as a matter of fact that criminal bishops could only be tried by their peers. Moreover, the church requested the same privileges for all other clerics.

The "Merovingian" procedure aimed to uphold royal interests to condemn disloyal bishops, while at the same time it respected ecclesiastical requests of a clerical *privilegium fori*. The king accused the bishop before his assembled fellow-brethren who then convicted and deposed their colleague. The deposed prelate was from now on considered as an ordinary layman and could subsequently be condemned for a second time by the royal court (most bishops were exiled, though in the seventh century there are also some cases of capital punishment). In contrast to the Visigothic period, the common acceptance

of the Nicene Creed by bishops, kings and magnates alike might have been a crucial factor for the transformed procedure adopted in the early Merovingian period.

An additional aspect I studied was the way these conflicts are presented within contemporary sources. The narrative strategies used to style these episodes illustrate how the authors made use of them in order to propagate an idealized relation between monarch and bishop.