

A Clergyman out of Control. Portrait of a Bishop Around the Year 1000

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The following short article is about actions of bishops and their interpretation as they are illustrated in the genre *Gesta episcoporum*.¹ Medieval contemporaries called this type of historiography about a bishop and his diocese by various names: *Chronicon*, *Historia*, *Vita*, *Gesta*, *Catalogus*, *Series episcoporum*. The outline that was used for this type of writing usually followed the chronological succession of the bishops. Ideally, the information about the bishops described their duties, be it their duties as pastor or secular ruler and warlord. This manner of religious historiography probably originates from the *Liber pontificalis*,² the original book of biographies about popes. The *Liber Pontificalis* was likely first compiled at the end of the 5th century and written down in the curial records starting in the year 520. The book of popes is structured in chronological order of their pontificates starting with Saint Peter.³ The *Liber pontificalis* influenced bishops chronicles, known as *Gestae episcoporum*, that can be found in Western and Central Europe between the 6th and 13th century.⁴ In 748, Paulus Diaconus wrote the first diocesan chronicle, the *Gesta episcoporum Mettensium*, North of the

¹ MARKUS MÜLLER, Die spätmittelalterliche Bistumsgeschichtsschreibung. Überlieferung und Entwicklung (Beihefte zum Archiv für Kulturgeschichte 44) 1998, p. 3.

² REINHOLD KAISER, Die *Gesta episcoporum* als Genus der Geschichtsschreibung, in: ANTON SCHARER, GEORG SCHEIBELREITER (Ed.), *Historiographie im frühen Mittelalter* (Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für österreichische Geschichtsforschung 32) 1994, p. 459–480. See also HELMUT FLACHENECKER, Kirchengeschichtsschreibung zwischen Liturgie und Statistik. Vom *Liber Pontificalis* zum Langzeitprojekt *Germania Sacra*, in: *Sborník Katolické teologické fakulty [Karlsuniversität Prag]* 5 (2003) p. 131–161.

³ *Lexikon des Mittelalters* 5 (1991) p. 1946–1947 (HARALD ZIMMERMANN).

⁴ A list of these *Gestae* for 6th to 13th century see MICHEL SOT, *Gesta episcoporum, Gesta Abbatum*, 1981, p. 41 [map].

Alps. His chronicle closely followed the example of the *Liber Pontificalis*. Despite all differences in terms of content, both historical sources have similarities in terms of structure and chronological order. In the *Gesta episcoporum Mettensium* chronicle, the bishops are sorted by numbers indicating the place in the succession of the first bishop. Furthermore, both sources often contain the diocesan foundation process described through hagiographical elements.

Occasionally, the chronicles include notes about cathedral and monastery buildings as well as the acquisition of relics, liturgical instruments, and books. The individual bishops were characterized by their standing with regard to King and Pope as well as in greater regard to their ability to acquire secular possessions. This demonstrates that the bishops chronicles possessed a practical as well as an administrative component. In most cases, cathedral chapters ordered the redaction of bishops chronicles. In the broader sense bishops chronicles are part of the administrative records of a cathedral. They include certificates for recording goods, rights, and claims that stood as secondary insurance in addition to the original documents. Moreover, the *Gestae episcoporum* wanted to strengthen the remembrance or *memoria* of the bishops and were used in the liturgy of Mass. In this context, they occasionally included prayers but almost always references to commemorate the deceased bishops.

In many dioceses, canonized bishops became patron saints. Unfortunately, this topic can only be briefly addressed in this lecture.⁵ The canonized bishops competed in reputation with patron saints like the Virgin Mary and the apostles Saint Peter and Paul as well as Saint Stephen, the first Christian martyr. Beginning in the Early Middle Ages, people in a given diocese began to venerate their first deceased bishops as saints – side by side with the common cathedral saints. Especially diocesan patron saints did not have to be identical with the first bishops, for instance Bishop Ulrich of Augsburg or Bishop Wolfgang of Regensburg (Ratisbon).⁶

The canonization of bishops reached its peak during the early and High Middle Ages. In the Late Middle Ages, bishops were no longer canonized in

⁵ HELMUT FLACHENECKER, Heilige Bischöfe als einheitsstiftende Klammer für mittelalterliche Diözesen, in: Römische Quartalschrift 97 (2002) p. 194-214.

⁶ AUGUST LEIDL (Ed.), Bistumspatrone in Deutschland. Festschrift für Jakob Torsy, 1984.

the Empire. This was probably due to the fact that the contemporary perception of bishops had changed. Bishops were seen as princes of the Holy Roman Empire and had the primary goal of expanding and securing their secular prince-bishoprics, meaning the secular possessions of their cathedral.⁷

The following example describes Bishop Megingaud of Eichstaett (991–1014/1015)⁸ who was anything but holy. Megingaud was bishop of the Diocese of Eichstaett which canonically belonged to the Archdiocese of Mainz and was located between Franconia and the Duchy of Bavaria. The biography of Bishop Megingaud in the *De Gestis Episcoporum Eistetensium* contains a unique description of him. The biography was composed by an unknown writer from the monastery of Herrieden, a town in South-Western Franconia⁹ around the year 1078. However the bishops chronicles as a whole were never fully completed.¹⁰ The biographies of bishops like the *Pontifikale Gundekarianum*,¹¹ a liturgical book by Bishop Gundekar of Eichstaett, including instructions and texts about Catholic rituals that are performed or guided by a bishop, served the purpose of self-insurance (self-affirmation) for the Church of Eichstaett in the troubled times of the Investiture Controversy. The unknown author of the Bishop Megingaud biography dedicated his work to his friend, a canon of the Cathedral called ‚G.‘ (only the first letter is mentioned!) from Wuerzburg. The author himself belonged to the Cathedral Chapter of Eichstaett and was episcopal chaplain. In this role he was a close confidant of Bishop Gundekar II (1057–1075).¹²

Bishop Megingaud was descended from a noble family and was related to the Roman Emperor Henry II. For this reason, during assemblies at the royal

⁷ ODILO ENGELS, Der Reichsbischof (10. und 11. Jahrhundert), in: PETER BERGLAR, ODILO ENGELS (Ed.), *Der Bischof in seiner Zeit. Bischofstypus und Bischofsideal im Spiegel der Kölner Kirche. Festgabe für Joseph Kardinal Höffner, Erzbischof von Köln*, 1986, p. 41–94.

⁸ About his activities see ALFRED WENDEHORST, *Das Bistum Eichstätt 1. Die Bischofsreihe bis 1535* (Germania Sacra N. F. 45) 2006, p. 48–51.

⁹ STEFAN WEINFURTER, *Die Geschichte der Eichstätter Bischöfe des Anonymus Haserensis. Edition – Übersetzung – Kommentar* (Eichstätter Studien N. F. 24) 1987.

¹⁰ A biography about empress Agnes is only announced.

¹¹ The manuscript is produced during the reign of bishop Gundekar II: ANDREAS BAUCH, ERNST REITER (Eds.), *Das Pontifikale Gundekarianum. Facsimile und Kommentarband*, 1987. – STEFAN WEINFURTER, *Sancta Aureatensis Ecclesia. Zur Geschichte Eichstätts in ottonisch-salischen Zeit*, in *Zeitschrift für bayerische Landesgeschichte* 49 (1986) p. 3–40. here p. 4 [reprint: STEFAN WEINFURTER, *Eichstätt im Mittelalter. Kloster – Bistum – Fürstentum*, 2010, p. 53–92].

¹² Vgl. WEINFURTER, *Anonymus* (like note 9) p. 24–27. – ANDREAS BAUCH, *Gundekar II., Bischof von Eichstätt*, in: *Fränkische Lebensbilder* 6 (1975) p. 1–29.

court, he did not rise from his seat when the Emperor entered the room like the other bishops. Bishop Megingaud justified his odd behaviour – according to the text – with the following statement: „I am the older relative and both the writings of pagans and those of the Church demand that the elderly have to be honoured.“¹³ The author of Megingaud’s biography describes him as poorly educated, strict and sometimes even hot-tempered. In his writing, he sympathizes with Megingaud because of two main points that far outweigh the bishop’s bizarre traits: Firstly, his straightforwardness; the author clearly differentiates Bishop Megingaud from the other church reformers at the end of the 11th century, whom he blames for being ambivalent. Secondly, his uncompromising attitude; Megingaud refused to cede territory of the Eichstaett diocese to the diocese of Bamberg, newly founded in 1007.

During the time of the southern expansion of the diocese of Bamberg, Bishop Megingaud stood up to Emperor Henry II. The anonymous writer states: „... only our fighter from God (= Bishop Megingaud) rooted in his character traits and his origin, stood firm against him and did not want to accept this disadvantageous (territorial) exchange until the end of his life.“¹⁴ However, it seems that the diocese of Eichstaett did not put up resistance from the start. Bishop Megingaud signed the synod resolutions of Frankfurt that confirmed the foundation of the diocese of Bamberg canonically as well as with the corresponding legal provisions of the Empire.¹⁵ Therefore, it is possible that Emperor Henry II did not target Eichstaett’s territory until a later point in time. Maybe he started aiming for it in 1009 when the towns Velden and Kemnath as well as Hersbruck were given to the diocese of Bamberg in 1011. Not until Megingaud’s successor Gundekar became bishop in 1016, the territory between the rivers Pegnitz and Schwabach were annexed to the diocese of Bamberg.¹⁶ Prior to becoming bishop, Gundekar was cathedral curator in Bamberg and therefore a confidant of Emperor Henry II. The anonymous writer of Herrieden defames Gundekar because of his supposedly low social standing, but does not conceal that Gundekar – under the influence

¹³ WEINFURTER, Anonymus (like note 9) cap. 24, p. 54.

¹⁴ WEINFURTER, Anonymus (like note 9) cap. 25, p. 54.

¹⁵ FRANZ MACHILEK, Das Protokoll der Frankfurter Synode vom 1. November 1007 und die Errichtung des Bistums Bamberg, in: JOSEF URBAN (Ed.), Das Bistum Bamberg um 1007. Festgabe zum Millennium (Studien zur Bamberger Bistumsgeschichte 3), 2006, p. 16–44.

¹⁶ FRANZ HEIDINGSFELDER, Die Regesten der Bischöfe von Eichstätt, 1915–1938 nr. 155.

of his new chaplains and counsellors – resisted the royal requests for territory, if only for a while.

The following details known about Bishop Megingaud are not known about any other bishop during that time. For example: Bishop Megingaud was a proponent of short Masses and long feasts. A canon with the name Vastolf had to change his name, since his name (F)Vast-olf (= fast) reminded Megingaud too much of fasting. At the canon's confirmation, he renamed him in Ezz(Eat)-olf [The prefix means eating!].¹⁷ In general, the bishop did not like Lent very much since he found it unbearably long. On the Sundays during Lent, the Bishop had servants put up a big fish¹⁸ in the cathedral choir, so that the canons would sing faster due to the seductive sight of the fish. In turn that enabled him to have lunch even sooner. Furthermore, Megingaud changed the Terce, or Third Hour, at 9 am to the None, or Ninth Hour, at 3 pm and „went to eat immediately“. He was unusually quick at consecrating oil and churches, and only used a few liturgical words when it came to the ordination of priests. Older priests that still knew Megingaud told the unknown author that some of them were ordained in the Forest of Weißenburg. This is due to the fact that Megingaud was hunting in the forest and found a few minutes for their ordination.¹⁹ The Bishop was a master in swearing as well. The source tells us about Megingaud's cursing: „When he travelled to Rome, prior to this he wanted to receive absolution for his sins from the canons of Eichstaett cathedral, he asked them for forgiveness of a hundred curses in advance. After he had promptly used up all hundred ‚excused/forgiven‘ curses, he sent a messenger back to Eichstaett to ask for more dispensation. But again he exceeded them in number and degree.“

Even Saint Willibald had to intervene in person and warn Megingaud in a prayer not to treat his people in such a harsh way. The bishop promised to change „and calmed down at least in a certain way.“ Megingaud whipped a royal representative who claimed to not carry any supplies with him. However, this statement turned out to be a lie. After this, the Bishop appeased the representative whose honour had been violated by giving him a marten fur. Similar things happened to a younger clergyman who was sent to Eichstaett on behalf of the Bishop of Wuerzburg. The clergyman had a gyrfalcon that

¹⁷ WEINFURTER, Anonymus (like note 9) cap. 16, p. 50.

¹⁸ The fish ‚Hausen‘ belonged to the family of sturgeons.

¹⁹ WEINFURTER, Anonymus (like note 9) cap. 18, p. 50–51.

Megingaud badly wanted to have. In a dishonest operation he tricked the clergyman into giving him the falcon and rewarded the betrayed man with money. This example, which is only mentioned in passing, provides us with insight into the nobility's passion for hunting. Hunting with falcons held great significance. The Bishop of Eichstaett and the Bishop of Wuerzburg „maintained, by the way, a close and cordial relationship due to regular gift exchanges. Our bishop (Bishop Megingaud) sent big fishes [*husos*], also known as sturgeons, silky coats and fine fabrics with which he was blessed in a plentitude. In turn the other gave the best wines of which he possessed a massive collection and our ruler did not.“ The anonymous writer of Herrieden also describes the Bishop of Wuerzburg²⁰ in his anecdotal writings using coarse speech. During the yearly delivery of wine, ahead of the actual wagon carrying the wine, the Bishop of Wuerzburg sent a courier who threw bags filled with grape must to Megingauds feet. Since Megingaud had already sent his gifts to Wuerzburg, he was very upset about this feigned affront and yelled at the courier: „You rascal! Your Lord did not deserve my noble gifts The foolish Emperor did not know what he was doing when he bestowed upon him such an important diocese.“ Not until the courier managed to explain the joke and Megingaud was convinced that the barrels of wine were about to come, he did switch from cursing to praise: „May the Lord God bless my dearest friend and his gifts! In fact, he is a real asset/ornament in the line of bishops from Wuerzburg. The wise Emperor could never have given the noblest diocese to anyone other than him.“

As with any other handed down stories, it is difficult to tell how much of its content actually reflects the truth. However, the image of Megingaud as a hot-tempered, rough and pleasure-seeking nobleman remains – a man who pursued his own beliefs/opinions in a direct way as the head of the diocese of Eichstaett. Piety and pastoral care clearly were of secondary importance. No thoughts on asceticism and prayers are mentioned in the biography.

In 995, Duke Henry of Bavaria gave Bishop Megingaud the abbey of Niederaltaich. He wanted Megingaud to reform the monks. Nonetheless, it was not long before the Duke saw the consequences of his misjudgement. On December 27, 996, the Duke gave the abbey of Niederaltaich to Godehard

²⁰ The bishop must be Bishop Henry Ist. See ALFRED WENDEHORST, in: *Fränkische Lebensbilder* 17 (1998), p. 1–8.

who was a reformist and later became Bishop of Hildesheim.²¹ Megingaud was not a good fit for implementing monastic reform.

Even Emperor Henry II faced difficulties with Megingaud's straightforwardness. This is exemplified not only by the expansion of the diocese of Bamberg, but also by the payment of tributes (*Taxae pro communibus servitiis*) to the Emperor. „Once Emperor Henry ... wanted to host a festive event for himself and others, he ordered our bishop ... to bring him a vast amount of tributes on his way to Regensburg (Ratisbon) that would have terrified even an archbishop. When the royal courier told him in detail the tributes that he needed to deliver to the King and mentioned at the end a massive number of barrels of wine, Megingaud yelled: You rascal, your ruler clearly must have lost his mind!“ The Bishop refused to pay the required tributes. After he had calmed down a little, he sent some fine fabrics made in Eichstaett. On a side note, this incident demonstrates that a ruler was able to request tributes from bishops even if he was not in the corresponding diocese. And the amount of tributes was not fixed but rather determined by royal needs.²²

Although the unknown author sympathized with Bishop Megingaud, he only began to criticize his passion of hunting towards the end of his long remarks. This passion induced him to exchange land near Eichstaett for hunting grounds far away (in Stoettera) close to the Hungarian border. The author states the following in the biography: „All bishops who followed him did not draw so much as half a penny's value from his hunting (area).“²³ This criticism is closely connected with the efforts of the cathedral chapter to keep the possessions of the Church of Eichstaett together. For this reason, diocesan possessions in the neighbouring area of the so-called ‚Noerdlinger Ries‘ were much more attractive than possessions in far away Austria. Stoettera is located between Wiener Neustadt (Vienna New Town) and Lake Neusiedl. Even in 1456, the church in a village called Marz, which is located south of Stoettera, was still dedicated to Saint Willibald. This suggests former possessions of Eichstaett.²⁴

²¹ HEIDINGSFELDER, Regesten (like note 16) nr. 145.

²² See CARLRICHARD BRÜHL, Fodrum, gestum, servitium regis 1, p. 209.

²³ WEINFURTER, Anonymus (like note 9) cap. 16–25, p. 78–84.

²⁴ KARL LECHNER, Die Babenberger, ³1985, p. 319 note 18.

The diocese of Eichstaett possessed territories in the Bavarian Ostmark (Eastern march; which today belongs to Austria). These possessions came from the holdings of the monastery of Herrieden, which was annexed to Eichstaett cathedral's chapter in 888. Once again: The unknown author originates from said monastery. Similar to other dioceses, the kings of the 9th through the 11th century included the diocese of Eichstaett in the border security ventures in the southeast. An important base was the Austrian spot of Melk. During Megingaud's time as Bishop, there was a proprietary church of the diocese of Eichstaett in Melk that was dedicated to Saint Peter. According to certain sources, a vassal/liege man from Eichstaett, Margrave Henry, possibly resided in Melk. During the Investiture Controversy, Eichstaett likely lost its possessions in Melk.²⁵ Taken in this context, the following note in the biography about Bishop Megingaud gains credence: On October 13th, 1014, Bishop Megingaud buried the mortal remains of the Irish Colomann, who had suffered martyrdom close to Stockerau in 1012, in Melk after a festive relic translation.²⁶ However, in 1017, Thietmar Bishop of Merseburg reported that the residents of the border area between Bavaria and Moravia caught a *peregrinus Colomannus*, a foreigner named Colomann, and hanged him as a spy. The tree on which Colomann died soon began to bloom.²⁷ But this description cannot be approved, because there is no documentation about Colomann's veneration as a saint until 1156/57. In 1170, there is evidence that an altar in the church of Melk was dedicated to him.

Lastly, during the rule of Bishop Megingaud, the first coins were minted in Eichstaett.²⁸ Henry II initiated the minting of coins, first as Bavarian Duke and later as Roman Emperor. Apart from this, the relationship between the Bishop and the Emperor was rather tense despite the fact that they were related. Neither Megingaud's visits at the Royal Court, nor Henry II's visits are documented by the sources. However, in 1001/1002 Bishop Megingaud participated in an expedition to Italy together with Emperor Otto III, Henry's predecessor.

²⁵ LECHNER, Babenberger (like note 24) p. 63; ERNST KLEBEL, Eichstaett und Herrieden im Osten, in: ERNST KLEBEL, Probleme der bayerischen Verfassungsgeschichte (Schriftenreihe zur Bayerischen Landesgeschichte 57) p. 332–340.

²⁶ Annales Mellicenses 1014: *Hoc anno sanctus Cholomannus a Megingaudo Heibstatensi episcopo Mediliccha sepultus est*, in: MGH SS 9 (1851), p. 497. See HEIDINGSFELDER, Regesten (like note 16) nr. 150.

²⁷ Thietmar, Chronicon VII, 54, in: MGH SS 3 (1839), p. 860.

²⁸ HEIDINGSFELDER, Regesten (like note 16) nr. 151.

Bishop Megingaud was an interesting character. He was peculiar and critical of the Emperor. He made no secret of his noble descent and had a correspondingly noble lifestyle even during his time as Bishop. He went hunting, loved big feasts, and was addicted to splendour. He paid closer attention to the secular forms of governance than to his tasks as pastor. The festive transition and canonization of Colomann in far away Austria remains a side note. Instead, in January of 1002, Megingaud obtained the territorial rights of a forest that was important for the church of Eichstaett and thereby strengthened the seigniorial rights of his church.²⁹ Megingaud was integrated in the constant prayer of the Church of Salzburg and the Tegernsee monastery.³⁰ Therefore, it cannot be said that Megingaud was unchristian. He knew the established forms of the common prayers at that time and made use of them. It can only be speculated as to whether Megingaud was a non-standard Bishop due to his noble descent or whether this was the standard. In order to shed more light on this issue further comparable studies would be necessary. Until that time, the *vita* (biography) of Megingaud shall remain unique. It is certain that he did not conform to the ideal image of a holy bishop.

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²⁹ MGH D Otto III (1893) nr. 424 (1002 January 11); HEIDINGSFELDER, Regesten (like note 16) nr. 146.

³⁰ HEIDINGSFELDER, Regesten (like note 16) nr. 152.