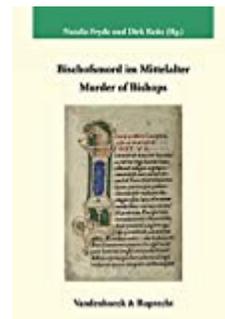




**Natalie Fryde, Dirk Reitz.** *Bischofsmord im Mittelalter - Murder of Bishops.* Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2003. 392 S. + 10 Abb. EUR 56.00 (gebunden), ISBN 978-3-525-35189-5.



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While a great number of books have focused on the murders of particular bishops during the Middle Ages, the idea of bishop murder as a topic in itself has received little scholarly attention. The essays collected in this volume attempt to fill this gap, offering the reader various interpretations of the murder of bishops from the sixth century through the later Middle Ages. Readers with only passing familiarity with the subject, who might assume that the intentional killing of a bishop in western Christendom was a rare and highly publicized event, might be surprised by the actual prevalence of such murders. In Merovingian Francia alone eighteen bishops were killed between the years 580 and 754, and while the Merovingians have a reputation, perhaps deservedly, for socially sanctioned violence, a number of these murders were committed during later, more “civilized” periods as well. The murder of a bishop, it seems, was until the death of Thomas Becket at least, not an unusual avenue of conflict resolution.

The fourteen articles presented in this volume are arranged chronologically, beginning with the early Middle Ages, but can be roughly broken down into two main thematic groups: examinations of the historical circumstances of bishop murder, and examinations of the effect such murders had on their contemporary observers.

Under the first heading, Paul Fouracre’s “Why were

so many bishops killed in Merovingian Francia?” concludes that the temporal power that accompanied a bishop’s spiritual leadership garnered him a variety of enemies, making murder an effective political tool. “Femmes royales et violences anti-episcopales a l’epoque merovingienne: Fredegonde et le meurtre de l’evique Pretextat,” by Nira Gradowicz-Pancer, examines Gregory of Tours’s account of how a Merovingian noblewoman arranged for the murder of a bishop, and argues that her gender played less a part in Gregory’s disdain than her lay status, which was seen as the greater divide in society. Thomas Gergen’s article, “Gottesfrieden und Gewalt gegen Bischöfe—Überlegungen zu den Rechtsgrundlagen” looks at law during the Peace of God movement in the context of the murder of four bishops from the tenth to the thirteenth centuries. The idea that frequent violence against bishops was confined to the early centuries of the Middle Ages is disproven by Myriam Soria (“Les eveques assassines dans le royaume de France (XIe- XIIIe siecles)”), who examines the murders of eleven bishops in France during the eleventh and twelfth centuries, and explores the motives for these killings. Two of the articles deal with the murder of Becket, the most famous of the bishop-martyrs. Both are concerned with the historical circumstances of his death. In “Le Meurtre de Thomas Becket: Les Gestes d’un Martyre” Martin Aurell chooses three critical moments during the crisis and examines the

symbolic language of the principle actors, arguing that tension rose as a result of symbolic miscommunication. Nicholas Vincent's article, "The Murderers of Thomas Becket," is the longest in the volume at sixty-two pages. It gives an exhaustive history of the murderers themselves: who they were, their relationships to Henry's court, and what happened to them after they had hacked Becket to pieces. Another angle on the circumstances of bishop murder, this time in the late twelfth-century Empire, is given by Jan Keupp in his article, "Reichsministerialen und Bischofsmord in staufischer Zeit." Keupp traces an increasing danger for bishops in the growth of the imperial ministry. Bodo Hechelhammer looks at the specific case of a bishop who was killed in Italy in 1248, ("Zwischen Märtermord und Todesstrafe: die Hinrichtung des Bischofs Marcellino von Arezzo im Jahre 1248") and explores the boundary between murder and execution in a case where a bishop's secular policies differed from those of his secular overlord.

The other articles in the volume look at the effect of Episcopal murders on their observers and chroniclers. Georg Scheibelreiter ("Der Tod Lamberts von Maastricht") explores the difficulty faced by an eighth-century writer to develop for a murdered bishop a vita that would be acceptable to the competing ideals of his society and his Church. Rheinhold Kaiser's chapter, "Guibert of Nogent und der Bischofsmord in Laon: Augenzeuge, Akteur, Dramaturg," draws interesting comparisons between Guibert's account of the murder of Gaudri of Laon and literary forms of tragedy. Jean-Louis Kupper examines the case of a martyred bishop, Frederick of Namur, whose cult disappeared over time as it was eclipsed by the waxing cult of his predecessor in martyrdom, St. Lambert. Lambert is also the focus of Phillippe George's illustrated article ("L'iconographie du meurtre de saint Lambert de Liege"), which examines representations of Lambert and his murder in various media through the Middle Ages. Andreas Bihrer's article, "Die Ermordung des Konstanzer Bischofs Johan Windlock (1351-1356) in der Wahrnehmung der Zeitgenossen und der Nachwelt," rounds out the book with a discussion

of more than 100 sources on the murder of bishop John Windlock, demonstrating that the writers of various accounts were able to ascribe a great variety of motives for the killing, depending on each writer's personal interests.

The languages in which the articles are presented (six German, two English, five French, one Italian) should provide little difficulty for its target audience of medievalists. However, minor problems in the uniformity of style are present due to the difficulty of such a polyglot presentation—the words of some chapter titles are capitalized, for example, while others in the same language are not. Careful readers will also notice the occasional typo in their native language. Nonetheless, the articles assembled here are thought provoking and well written, and each represents the product of impressive scholarship.

On the whole, the book suffers from only two flaws. It has no index, and it has no conclusion or overriding theme. The first of these is minor but annoying in an era when computers can help make the task of indexing less onerous than it once was. The lack of a conclusion and a central theme are more serious concerns. While the editors provide a decent introduction that makes clear the frequency of *Bischofsmord*, there is no conclusion that ties the articles together in any way. We are presented with a variety of takes from a variety of perspectives on a variety of murders, but aside from the status of the victims, there seems little to connect them. A conclusion would have helped here, even if it simply articulated a reason for why such a theme is impossible to find. Why did societies so blithely tolerate the murder of religious leaders? What does this say, if anything, about the attitude toward either the Church or its theology? While the introduction touches on these and other questions, it does not follow up on them. The monograph that gives any comprehensive theory for medieval bishop murder is still waiting to be written. Nonetheless, *Bischofsmord im Mittelalter* is a good book and an interesting read, well worth the attention of anyone interested in violence against clerics during the Middle Ages.

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