

The Pope's Power in Norway: Between Ambitions and Their Realizations (1152–1378)

Domination of the Pope is often emphasized as one of the characteristic features of the medieval Western World, especially during the High Middle Ages. This world, however, was not spatially homogeneous; relations connecting the "Centre", with the Pope at the head, with the other parts, one of which was Norway, were not equally strong. Geographical periphery gave more opportunities to maintain autonomy from the central power: thus, in the case of Norway a significantly larger number of "local" relations are to be observed, when in analogous cases in other countries Rome (and later Avignon) would be also involved. Additionally, considering the northernmost location of Norway, a relative small territory whose population had to be converted to Christianity and subjected to the Catholic Church (which was, on the contrary, typical for other "peripheral" regions, like Poland), absence of borders with the Holy Roman Empire (unlike Denmark), and finally relative lack of economic prosperity, it is possible to assume that the Roman Curia's interest to Norway was not as big as to the other European countries, including the "peripheral" ones.

However, the "periphery", in its desire to join a sort of universal community with the Pope as its leader, sought stronger ties with the "Centre" in certain periods of its development. In the mid-12th century the Pope's endeavours to expand his power as far as possible coincided with the willingness of the Norwegian bishopric to establish a closer contact with the "Centre". But relations between Rome (later, Avignon) and the "peripheral parts", such as the Norwegian community, were not stable: both the papacy and Norway were changing fast in time. It was these changes that determined the strength and nature of the relationships between Rome (later, Avignon) and different members of the Norwegian community (above all, the kings, the church elite, the secular elite, the clergy). Relationships among these players varied in strength and in nature depending on the changes inside each of them. My thesis focuses, among other issues, on the dynamic of the changes of these relationships. I am investigating both the *stable*, temporally invariant elements in the relationships among these parties and the *dynamic*, non-stable elements of these relationships.

The time span of my research was determined with regard to the historical processes that were taking place in Norway and in Rome (and Avignon), however, the designated time limits do not embrace a homogeneous whole. Still, the selected period can be generally characterized as a time of the most tenacious claims and persistent ambitions of the papacy and attempts to realize them – in relation to the Norwegian community, in particular; at the same time, the nature of those claims was changing over such a long time. The beginning of the period (1152–53) is marked by establishing of the archbishopric in Trondheim. This is the time when the Church of Norway started to embark gradually on the phase of its stable functioning, which was contemporaneous with its attempts to protect its own autonomy from the royal power; it is exactly when the church in Norway could rely on support of the papacy. The end of the period (1350 to 1378) is marked, primarily, by the Great Plague after which half of the dioceses formally subject to Trondheim's archbishop were drawn under the papal power. Then, in 1378, the Schism began, when, after the two centuries of progressing centralization of the papal power, a period of decline started. The end of the period also almost coincides with Norway's entry into the union with Denmark (1380), when the country's role in the Scandinavian region began to change, which could not occur without producing an impact on the Popes' attitude to Norway, either.

Making *power* a subject of inquiry and recognizing the necessity to define the term that, according to a researcher, «seems so conceptually vast, so inscrutably inflated, that one instinctively seeks to pluralize the word»¹, I rely in my work on the definition suggested by M. Mann: «power is the ability to pursue and attain goals through mastery of one's environment»². However, the fields of action where given structures of power act and where they attain their goals, as well as the way they function, may be very different. One finds justification of this in numerous pieces of research dedicated to the papal power in other European countries. But I came across only very little mention in the historiography of the foundations of the papal power in Norway. At the same time, in the Norwegian scholarship investigating the Church, the Popes are frequently mentioned among others involved in events. However, the Norwegian historiography (given the fact that the country was restricted for many centuries only to a subordinate position in the union with Denmark) has been peculiarly affected by the fact that all inquiries documenting its dependence on other political forces have not been eagerly welcomed. No research has yet been conducted in Norway, to explore the Pope's vision of and ambitions in relation to the Scandinavian region and individual countries within it, as well as the measure of how successful the realization of those ambitions was in the indicated period. Investigation of these problems is *the main goal* of my research project.

The work on the project can involve an extensive array of sources. However, one special factor has to be noted: a great deal of information is contained in the sources outside Norway; this could be one of the particular reasons why the problem did not receive much attention in the 20th-century historiography: the researchers in Norway for a long time preferred to concentrate on the "national" sources. The primary object of my interest will be the letters and messages sent by the Pope's Office to Norway and also the messages where mention of the country or of at least one of its representatives is made. I also plan to focus on the replies of the Pope's Norwegian correspondents. Many of these documents are collected in *Diplomatarium Norvegicum*. In order to understand how and to what extent the ambitions of the Popes' were realized in Norway, a broader range of sources will also be involved, including sagas (*Saga Sverris konungs; Sögur Hakonar Sverrissonar, Guttorms Sigurðarsonar, Inga Barðarsonar; Hakonar Saga Gamla; Arna saga biskups*) and legal sources collected in *Norges gamle Love indtil 1387* (NGL); and *Konungs Skuggsiã*.

The main directions of analysis of the posited issues are the following:

1. Throughout the period of analysis, the Popes played at least three key roles in Europe: they were at the head of the Church as an organization; they were at the top of the political structure that had worked out one of the best administrative machineries in Europe; they often acted as private individuals. The Popes' attitude to Norway could vary depending on which of these positions they chose as their primary vantage point – Norway was a territory subject to the Church, or a political structure. Again, depending on this position, the Popes' ambitions concerning Norway could be similar to or different from those concerning the other players in Europe; the role the papacy would attribute to Norway could change, too. Particularly, I am interested how the Curia's attention to the Scandinavian "periphery" differed between the relatively stable and the non-stable periods of the Curia's functioning.

¹ Bisson T., *Introduction*, in : *Cultures of Power: Lordship, Status, and Process in Twelfth-Century Europe*, University of Pennsylvania Press, p. 1-7.

² Mann M., *The Sources of Social Power: A history of power from the beginning to A.D. 1760*, Cambridge University Press, 1986, p. 6. This definition, in opinion of some medievalists, is more pertinent to the understanding of power in the Middle Ages than to the modern and contemporary theories of power (by M. Weber, T. Parsons, M. Foucault, J. Habermas, P. Bourdieu).

One of the research **objectives** is to track the changes of the Pope's vision of Norway's role over the two centuries – on the one hand, considering Norway as a country with a church structure and part of Christendom, with a consequent obligation to take part in decision-making relevant for the whole Catholic Church (in particular, to participate in Oecumenical Councils), in the Christian World's common activities (for instance, the Crusades); on the other hand, considering Norway as a particular political structure whose representatives (both secular and ecclesiastic) might or might not support the Pope in his political affairs.

Eliciting the dynamics of the Popes' attitude to Norway's role(s) enables me to explain why the Popes, at a particular moment of history, had different attitudes to different representatives of the Norwegian community or forged different "images" of themselves in relations with them. Examination of how the Popes "portrayed" themselves is the **second objective**. It is necessary to explore these "images" in detail because the Popes could not even partially realize their ambitions without them.

The **third objective** is to determine the scope of these ambitions and to understand which of them were realized. Thus, it is essential to explore on what reasons the success or the failure was predicated. These reasons have been identified with regard to the specificity of the development of the Norwegian community (and especially its elitist circles) and with regard to the specificity of the history and development of the papacy. It is particularly important to identify in what cases the goals and objectives of the Norwegian elites – they were going through a period of formation at the time – were contrary to those of the Popes, and in what cases their goals and objectives strengthened each other and facilitated a more successful realization of the Popes' plans.

I would single out the following factors – specific for Norway and partially for the whole Scandinavian region – that could influence the country's relationships with the Roman Curia. The **first** can be described in the words of W. Ullmann: "in the Scandinavian countries the ascending theory of government enjoyed a longevity which stood in contrast to the prevailing theocratic-descending thesis observable throughout Southern and Western Europe".³ It will be useful to explore in this respect how the attitude to the extrinsic, i.e. proffered by Rome, doctrines of power changed under the newly established in Norway principle of legitimacy, and also how the members of the Norwegian community attempted to realize their vision of structures of power (both ecclesiastic and secular), in forging their relations with the Popes. **Second**, it was more typical for the Scandinavian countries, including Norway, than for other Western European countries, to emphasize "horizontal" relations (inside the elitist groups as well); therefore, the hierarchy of power supported by the papacy could hardly be acceptable for the Norwegian community. Consequently, I believe it is important to investigate, on the one hand, how the extrinsically imposed ideas were transformed in the theoretical thinking of Norwegian authors, and on the other, in what way the actual relations between Rome and different members of the Norwegian community diverged from these ideas. For instance, to what extent was the principle of "mutual help" typical for the relationships between the Popes and the Norwegians? **Third**, the Norwegian "ecclesiastic periphery" was a larger territory than the land subject to the King of Norway; the Archbishop of Norway had power over the territories of several states, quite different from one another in both their political organization and the inner organization of the church structures. Such a structural specificity of the Trondheim church region predetermined the fact that the connections between the archbishop and the bishops of the outer territories were relatively loose, which gave the papacy an opportunity to control the different church structures of the region in different ways.

³ Ullmann W., *Medieval political thought*, Pelican, 1965, p. 53.

2. Stressing that it is possible to promote any power and influence only thanks to availability of stable communication, I engage to explore how the communication between the Papacy and Norway was deployed, who exactly was involved in it. It is important to note, that such communication was mainly an exchange of letters rather than a series of personal meetings. Here we have to face the general issue, in what way different means of communication influence the choice of means of deploying relations of power.

It is possible to single out, among the Popes' messages, an array of directives (creation and circulation of which were the papacy's initiative), an array of messages that informed different members of the Norwegian community of something, and an array of confirmations, consents and prohibitions which were the Popes' responses to the in-coming messages from Norway. In this respect, the following questions are to be addressed: how the ratio of the papal directives and replies to requests from Norway changed throughout the time, i.e. in what measure the Pope was ready to consider Norway's appeals for him; in what measure the Pope expected not a response from below but only execution.

In order to carry out successful governance, the Popes had to have those who would execute their will locally, on the one hand, and those who would make sure that their will had been executed, on the other. These two categories of people were the main addressees of the Popes' directives and "informing" messages. Since the Popes needed to have informed opinions about the changes taking place in Norway, in order to perform their controlling function effectively, it would be curious to find out what players were their sources of information (how diverse the composition of this group was and how much it changed over the time). My goal is to understand how regularly the Pope received information concerning events in Norway and what kind of information it was. At least two groups of such individuals can be singled out for the period in question. The first group is composed of the massive 'apparatus' of the Pope's delegates (legates, nuncii, collectors). How often did these delegates visit Norway (the answer to this question enables understanding of the degree of control on the Popes' behalf, how much trust they gave to the local elites and how autonomous the local elites were)? How were these delegates received in Norway and how did the reception of the delegates differ from the analogies in other countries? Whom did the Popes commission as their delegates? What countries did these delegates visit apart from Norway? The second group is composed of individuals of eminence in Norway, who established personal contacts with the Popes. We were able to find out who visited Rome and Avignon to meet the Pope or his delegates and how frequently this occurred.

It is of special importance to examine how flexible the Popes' actions could be in accordance with the information about the structure of the country's society that they received, especially in those areas where variations were still expected. (Here, also the personality factor is necessarily considered, for different Popes maintained more or less rigorous policies or were more or less ready to compromise.) In what measure did the papal directives take into account the level of the development of the country, of its church structures and the rate of occurring changes? What considerations were the Popes motivated by and in what measure were they heedful of the inner specificity of the country, when making decisions that involved Norway (especially when they acted as arbiters, when individual Popes assumed such a role)?

Answering these questions has allowed me to assess in what way Norway was incorporated in the structure of the Roman Catholic Church in the heyday of its power and stability, and also whether the gap between the Popes' claims and possibilities in relation to Norway was growing, as was the case with other countries.

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