

***“Between Thistles and Thorns”: The Priests at the Hanseatic Kontor in Bergen in the Tension between the Hanseatic League and the Crown (c. 1550–1600)***

Since the late Middle Ages, the Hanseatic Kontor in Bergen had constituted a self-organized sphere of trade and life with extensive privileges. These privileges included not only economic advantages but also ecclesiastical rights. Following the introduction of the Reformation in the Danish-Norwegian realm in 1536, German-speaking priests were appointed to the two Kontor churches. Their appointment was largely determined by the council of Lübeck and by the Lübeck *Bergenfahrer* to Bergen. This arrangement created a structural tension, as the churches and their priests were simultaneously integrated into the territorial church structure and thus under the control of the Danish-Norwegian authorities. The Kontor priests therefore operated within a framework of multiple and overlapping loyalties, in which competing claims could not be clearly separated.

This dissertation examines the priests at the Hanseatic Kontor in Bergen as actors operating within a field of competing systems of rule, law, and order in the sixteenth century after the Reformation. In the absence of a systematic study of the Kontor priests and of any comprehensive analysis of the relevant source materials, this dissertation asks how and why the Kontor priests became a central interface in conflict-laden negotiations between the Hanseatic Kontor and the Wendish cities, on the one hand, and the Danish-Norwegian authorities, on the other. At the same time, the study addresses broader processes of transformation in the Early Modern Period.

The study analyzes these constellations through two interconnected fields of dispute. First, the conflicts of the 1580s over the power to appoint and dismiss priests, as well as authority over them, are examined. These conflicts show that defending the Kontor privileges—seen as the basis of its autonomy—was essential to resisting territorial encroachment and to the Kontor’s continued existence. Second, the study considers the so-called perjury sermons (1570 and 1596), in which accusations of oath-breaking were publicly voiced from the pulpit against merchants who had left the Kontor. These sermons reflect changing social and economic ties, as parts of the merchant community disengaged from the Kontor and increasingly integrated into urban and territorial structures. While the two conflict fields follow different internal logics, they are closely intertwined and point to broader processes of transformation.

Methodologically, the study is based on the analysis of an extensive corpus of sources, comprising around 1,300 manuscript pages that have so far only been partially explored. These materials derive primarily from the *Bergenfahrer* archive in Lübeck and are complemented by edited sources and secondary literature. Particular emphasis is placed on written correspondence, reports, and negotiation records, as well as sermons, in which the disputes over the Kontor priests are documented, discussed and negotiated.

A key aspect of the analysis is to consider these statements and actions not in isolation but within the wider context of Early Modern structures of communication and conflict. Against this background, the Kontor priests do not appear as isolated agents of conflict, but rather as embedded in complex constellations in which competing claims to authority, belonging, and order intersect and become operative in concrete processes of negotiation.

The findings show that the conflicts surrounding the Kontor priests are best understood as expressions of a broader renegotiation of authority, belonging, and order in the context of confessionalization, Early Modern state formation, and the transformation of the Hanseatic League. The priests thus emerge neither primarily as autonomous actors nor merely as executors of external interests, but as mediating, projecting, and condensing instances in which structural tensions become tangible.

All in all, the study not only contributes to research on the Hanseatic Kontor in Bergen, but also offers insights into Early Modern processes of negotiation between differing political, economic, and religious systems of order. At the same time, it replaces the common portrayal of the Kontor priests as quarrelsome individuals with a contextualized interpretation that understands their actions as expressions of structural conflicts.