

ON SAXO'S USE OF ARCHIVAL SOURCES TO DESCRIBE THE MURDER OF BISHOP RIKE

Considering Saxo's use of the archepiscopal archive in Lund c.1085-c.1158
as seen through the lens of an episcopal murder

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ABSTRACT: Research by Michael H. Gelting showed that Saxo must have made extensive use of contemporary archival sources when he wrote the parts of *Gesta Danorum* from c.1158 onwards. This study discusses Saxo's description of the murder of bishop Rike on 18.Oct. 1139 and considers what source material Saxo used here. It concludes that this part of his chronicle is most likely to be based on his use of two known, but lost papal documents, both of whom concerned the murder and were located within contemporary archives. Finally, it is discussed what this means considering Gelting's conclusions.

NØGLEORD: Saxo Grammaticus, medieval archives, medieval Denmark, murders, papal documents, violence against bishops.



Saxo and the Medieval Archives

Saxo's description of the murder of bishop Rike of Roskilde is uniquely detailed amongst preserved sources for the event.¹ The research history centered on the famous chronicle by Saxo Grammaticus is very long and whatever position one may take in such a debate, it remains an unavoidable source to countless aspects of Danish and Scandinavian history up until its time of writing in the decades around c.1200. Despite the long research history, the present article will attempt to make strides within a field which has only begun to become more than dimly lit by research in the most recent decades as it is a rather new approach to the study of his chronicle.² This being the case, the research history within this field is also very short. Saxo using archival documents as source material for his chronicle is not something which has traditionally been considered much within Saxo research. Nonetheless, acknowledging this is crucial for understanding not only Saxo as an author but also for understanding his chronicle in itself as well as the contemporary society in which it was written. Truly evaluating the actual trustworthiness of his chronicle is also quite hard without taking Saxo's widespread use of contemporary archival sources closely into account. Discussing Saxo's use of archival sources is thus of the utmost importance as acknowledging this should have a decisive impact on how exactly Saxo's chronicle is being considered and evaluated in future research.

The first to shed light upon Saxo's use of archival sources was Michael H. Gelting in an article from 1980, although it was not his center of attention then. He just suggested briefly that Saxo must have had access to the Danish royal and/or archepiscopal archives when he wrote about the period between 1159 and 1162:³

¹ The present article is a re-edited version of an article published previously as part of an anthology celebrating the jubilee of Middelaldercirklen at the University of Copenhagen 25 years after its founding by Michael H. Gelting during his tenure as lecturer in medieval history at the University of Copenhagen cf. Clausen 2025, (Festskrift), cf. Gelting 2001 regarding the founding of Middelaldercirklen. The origin of the article thus explains why this article is conceived and structured specifically as a follow-up article to some of Gelting's research. In between now and the publication of the original article, a shorter and less scientifically oriented version of the article has also been made available in Danish, cf. Clausen 2025 (Prøven). In some places the present version thus also reflects a certain degree of influence from the Danish version.

² Cf. also e.g. Riis 2006, pp. 79-80.

³ Cf. Gelting 1980, p. 336, and Gelting 2012, note 3.

Saxo's account of the events of 1159-62 betrays an exact knowledge of the facts of the matter, and considering that he wrote at least twenty-five years after these events, he could hardly have derived such a precise knowledge other than through written sources".⁴

Only a quarter of a century after Gelting's brief suggestion was this phenomenon studied somewhat more systematically by Thomas Riis. He made a weighty contribution in this debate as he identified a list of 130 points in the chronicle where he suggested that Saxo would be likely to have used now lost archival sources ranging from the first half of the 9th C. to 1184/1185.⁵ As late as 2012, however, Gelting's article on the topic was still the first entire study ever devoted to the discussion of Saxo's use of archival source material when he wrote his chronicle.⁶ As nothing new on the topic has arrived since then, Gelting's article from 2012 still is the primary research proving this point about Saxo's working methods.⁷

Gelting proving this point must be seen in contrast with the traditions stemming from older research on Saxo. Research into Saxo's chronicle had long been shaped much by Curt Weibull's influential book from 1915 when Gelting published his article: by showing Saxo's dependency upon earlier source material, Weibull "fundamentally questioned Saxo's reliability" thus beginning an era of deeply rooted scepticism towards using Saxo's chronicle as trustworthy source material.⁸ Weibull's analysis covered the whole period between 1076 and 1185, but Gelting showed that the weight and coherence of Weibull's arguments gradually fizzled out after 1134, disappearing entirely after 1157:

For the section of the *Gesta Danorum* that describes the times after 1134, however, Curt Weibull's arguments become increasingly hypothetical and questionable, and finally they peter out without providing any systematic analysis of Saxo's account of events after the end of the Danish civil wars in 1157 [Gelting 2012: 323].

⁴ As quoted from Gelting's 2012 article, p. 326.

⁵ Riis 2006, list on pp. 173-194, discussion on pp. 79-93, cf. Gelting 2012, p. 326.

⁶ Gelting 2012.

⁷ Gelting's article from 2012 has since been re-published in Heebøll-Holm et al (ed.) 2024, pp. 496-523.

⁸ Gelting 2012, p. 322-323, Weibull 1915, cf. Gelting 2012, pp. 322-325 for a more detailed account of Weibull's approach and the research tradition in its aftermath.

A key point for Gelting in proving Saxo's use of archival source material is the fact that his chronicle undergoes a radical change stylistically from the end of the Danish civil wars in Oct. 1157 onwards:⁹

Saxo's account of the civil wars from 1134 to 1157 has the same character as the preceding books in his chronicle: a string of episodes whose chronology is unclear and sometimes patently erroneous [Gelting 2012: 324].

[compare with]:

[Saxo's] writing on the history of Denmark from 1158 to 1185 is in fact closely bound up with a precise chronology – a kind of extremely copious annal that nonetheless does not mention a single exact date [Gelting 2012: 324].

[compare with]:

This raises the question of why Saxo shifts to a quasi-annalistic structure in his writing of the events from 1158 onwards [Gelting 2012: 326].

[compare with]:

The most likely explanation for Saxo's "annalistic" mode of writing from 1158 onwards is that from that point he had access to a continuous supply of documentary evidence – in other words, to well-kept archives. The question is which archives he was perusing. [Gelting 2012: 327]

This led to Gelting showing that Saxo must have been using the Danish royal archives from c.1158 onwards.¹⁰ His article demonstrated that the stylistic shift in Saxo's chronicle from c.1158 onwards reflects that Saxo, from then on, was able to make systematic use of the royal archives in order to supplement his already existing knowledge from the archepiscopal archives in Lund. The overall chronological precision of his chronicle thus seems to have intensified dramatically due to his combined knowledge from the content of these two different archives; for Gelting had been showing

⁹ Gelting 2012, p. 324, 326, cf. Larsen 1925, p. 171-173.

¹⁰ Gelting 2012, pp. 324-331. As this article will be concerned with Saxo's use of the archepiscopal archives, further details regarding Saxo's use of the royal archives must be found within Gelting's article. However, as Saxo must have been a personal acquaintance of archbishop Absalon and as his selected chronicler, even presumably as one of his important and trusted employees, it would hardly be surprising at all if this status had given him access also to the royal archives even though these archives were kept somewhere else than Lund and connected to a different institution.

that Saxo also must have been using the archiepiscopal archives in Lund extensively when describing the period between 1085 and 1185:

There is no doubt that Saxo knew and used the archives of the archiepiscopal see of Lund to which he was attached. The great 1085 charter of King Knud “IV” (Saint Canute King) to Saint Laurence’s cathedral in Lund – the earliest Danish charter whose text has survived – is reflected in Saxo’s account of the King’s liberality towards the church. Much of what he writes about the relationship between Danish kings and the see of Lund during the following century [i.e. between 1085 and 1185] must be derived from archiepiscopal archives, even if most of the documents are now lost. [Gelting 2012: 327-328].

Gelting had shown Saxo’s use of the archiepiscopal archives by making it clear that Saxo knew the content of the earliest, textually preserved Danish document, a charter from 1085 transmitted through source material from Lund and undoubtedly stemming from the archiepiscopal archives.¹¹ Gelting’s article, however, had to leave open the obvious follow-up question: i.e., considering Saxo’s use of the archiepiscopal archives, while remembering especially Saxo’s knowledge of the 1085 charter; what is then the situation before c.1158 and particularly regarding Saxo’s descriptions of the period between 1134/1157 where Weibull’s arguments were not found convincing either? Importantly, 1085 is no random year in the history of Lund, as the 1085 document reflects that the holy chapter at Lund archbishopric probably was founded at c.1085, and these holy chapters are known to have been extremely important in the process of ecclesiastical professionalization which included establishing a written administration and subsequently also in preserving all of this history attached to the dioceses in the form of written archives etc. now being kept.¹²

The present article will discuss the follow-up question as mentioned above by studying Saxo’s use of archival sources stemming from the archiepiscopal archive in the period before c.1158 with particular focus on the Danish civil war era, i.e. within that very period where Gelting also discarded

¹¹ Gelting 2012, pp. 327-328, cf. Riis 2006, p. 83, source editions: *Diplomatarium Danicum/Danmarks Riges Breve*, 1. Series, 2. Vol. (1053-1169), no. 21 [this series henceforth: DD/DRB], most recently: Sten Skansjö og Hans Sundström, eds., 1988: *Gåvobrevet 1085. Föredrag och diskussioner vid Symposium kring Knut den heliges gåvobrev 1085 och den tidiga medeltidens nordiska sambälle*, Lund University Press, Lund, pp. 12-17.

¹² As regards the importance of the dioceses in this respect: Gelting 2017 pp. 71-74, as for the founding of the holy chapter in Lund at 1085: Gelting 2004 p. 170, Gelting 2014 p. 133, Ciardi 2016, pp. 30-31, cf. Weibull 1914-1923 p. 123-125, Helveg 11-12.

Weibull's arguments as unconvincing. Lacking space for a full analysis, the present case study will therefore examine Saxo's description of the murder of bishop Rike of Roskilde; an event which took place in 1139 during the era of the Danish civil wars, i.e. within the period between 1134/1157 as defined by Gelting's article. It will discuss what source material Saxo used to describe that murder and also how the conclusions deduced from this fit into the bigger picture as presented by Gelting's article.

An important aspect in evaluating the overall answer will be remembering the fact that based on Gelting's research there is still reason to believe that Saxo's access to preserved archival sources would likely have been lesser and less extensive on the earlier period. This is the case despite knowing that the archepiscopal archive in Lund as regards preserved content during Saxo's era is actually likely to have been in just as good shape before c.1158 as it were after:

However, from what has survived of [the archepiscopal archives], there is no reason to suppose any radical change to their structure after 1157 [Gelting 2012: 328]

The reason that Saxo is likely to have had lesser access to preserved archival sources before c.1158 thus has to do with something other than his use of the archepiscopal archive. Instead, it seems to be caused by the fact that Saxo apparently depended partially upon the Danish royal archives from c.1158 onwards. Contrary to the archepiscopal archives, there are good reasons to assume that the general state of preservation of the royal archives would likely have been much poorer before c.1158 compared with after:

[the civil wars and especially the years between 1146 and 1157] can hardly have been conducive to the orderly keeping or preservation of such royal archives as might have existed [Gelting 2012: 328]

[compare with]:

[regarding the administration of Erik III the Lamb, 1137-1146]: one may doubt how much of this orderly administration and its archival production could have survived the chaos of the eleven subsequent years of fighting. [Gelting 2012: 328]

Between 1131 and 1157 Denmark was tormented by massive political turmoil caused by a constant state of on-off civil wars and any presumed royal archives from before c.1158 are likely to have

suffered badly during such longstanding wars. It is even likely that they were perhaps also less than well-kept during this mess. While these wars did not necessarily affect the state of the archepiscopal archives to any noteworthy extent, it is very likely they on the other hand could have affected the state of the royal archives a great deal.

In discussing all of this, the article will conclude that Saxo must have found at least two papal documents from c.1140 in the archepiscopal archives in Lund both of whom concerned the murder. Saxo seems to have read these papal documents thoroughly, subsequently using its murder description to base his own story of the murder on as well as using them to describe also the papal reaction. Combined with the preservation of the 1085 charter, this speaks collectively in favor that some kind of archepiscopal archives would likely have existed at Saxo's own time and contained documents also relevant for the period between 1085 and 1157/1158. Furthermore, Janus Møller Jensen has shown that Saxo seems to have used written statutes from c.1151/52.¹³ Lauritz Weibull has even shown how Saxo must have used papal documents as sources for his detailed knowledge of certain events in 1154, and these documents seem most likely to have stemmed from the archepiscopal archives.¹⁴ All such documents would most likely have been found by Saxo in some kind of archive, which seems to additionally support the idea that Saxo using archival sources is very likely to be a valid conclusion, at least to some extent, also as for the period between 1134/1157.

Sources for the murder of bishop Rike

Bishop Rike of Roskilde was murdered as part of a civil war raging between the elected King Erik III the Lamb and the competitor Oluf II who had been elected as king in the Danish region of Scania.¹⁵ Apart from Saxo's chronicle, two surviving medieval source traditions describe the murder. The first tradition is the Danish medieval annals:

¹³ This regards Saxo's description of the so-called Vedemans Lag, cf. Møller Jensen 2000, p. 314-315.

¹⁴ Although, according to Weibull, in this case it would most likely have been papal documents from a somewhat later date, cf. Weibull 1914-1923, pp. 231-241 (esp. pp. 236-237).

¹⁵ As the topic here is Saxo's sources for describing it, discussing the broader political context of the murder will not be done within this article. As for Rike's career before 1139; cf. e.g. Gelting 2004B, DD/DRB 1,2 no. 65, Weibull 1941 60-61, Olrik

The quotation comes from an edition in medieval Danish from the 1400s edition of the description of the murder in the annals from a Danish Cistercian abbey, Ryd Monastery. The older annals from this monastery were written in Latin, but this later edited version is in medieval Danish. As the name of the village is not included in the preserved Latin edition of the older Ryd annals, the name must have been either edited into the Danish translation edition or the translation edition must have been made from some, now lost, and slightly different version of the Latin Ryd annals which contained some variations when compared to the preserved version. Whichever option is correct is not decisive in the present context.

It is a very short and simple description of just the basic circumstances regarding the murder and without any additional details whatsoever. This to-the-point description is extremely representative as for as how the murder is generally described in Danish annalistic sources. The only real additional detail is the fact that it varies whether the name of the village where the murder took place, i.e. Ramløse, is actually included or not: some Danish annals include the name while others leave it out.¹⁷ Most annals also include the year to date the murder while the source quoted above represents the one exception leaving out the year. Remarkably, all annals providing any year collectively date the murder wrongly for 1143.¹⁸

1895 pp. 23-26, Hørby 1982, Skyum-Nielsen 1971 pp. 85, 87, Roskildekrøniken p. 31 (Roskildekrøniken: transl. by Michael H Gelting, 2002, 2.edt., Wormanium, Højbjerg, henceforth: Roskildekrøniken).

¹⁶ In English it simply means: “Oluf killed bishop Rike of Roskilde in Ramløse” (translated from medieval Danish into English by the author), as quoted from Erik Kroman, ed. 1980: *Danmarks Middelalderlige Annaler*, Selskabet for Udgivelse af Kilder til Dansk Historie, København, p. 250.

¹⁷ Ramløse is a village in Northern Zealand where Rike was present at that point in time because the Roskilde bishops during that era owned some estates there including some kind of farm or manor, as for a discussion of why Ramløse was a place well-situated for an episcopal manor of this kind during that era: cf. Clausen 2025 (*Proven*), p. 40, as for annals including the name: Kroman 1980, pp. 113, 164, 250, cf. Jørgensen 1920 p. 163 (Ellen Jørgensen, ed., 1920. *Annales Danici Medii Ævi*, Selskabet for Udgivelse af Kilder til Dansk Historie, København), as for annals leaving out the name: Kroman 1980, pp. 146, 196, 227, 276, 301, cf. Jørgensen 1920 p. 77, 138, 145, 150, 163.

¹⁸ Kroman 1980, p. 113, 146, 164, 196, 227, 276, 301, cf. Jørgensen 1920, p. 77, 138, 145, 150, 163. As such mistakes are very common in medieval annals and could easily come into existence in the age of handwritten manuscripts, the actual mistake is much less remarkable than the fact that all the annals collectively repeat the same mistake. This repeated mistake is most likely to reflect that the preserved annalistic description of the murder may take root in some now lost annalistic work, possibly from Lund archbishopric, cf. Clausen 2021, 60-61, 65-66, as for annals from Lund in general: Kristensen 1969.

The second tradition is the description in the memorial book from the archepiscopal cathedral, i.e. the so-called *Necrologium Lundense*. Its interest in remembering Rike is explained by the fact that it describes him as our brother (“frater noster”). This tradition provides a different year than the annals by saying that the murder took place in 1139, and as *Necrologium Lundense* is pretty much contemporary, dating the event for 1139 is easily preferable to the year provided by the annals as these are in general more likely to have been written somewhat later than the *Necrologium*.¹⁹ However, the description in *Necrologium Lundense* is not more detailed than the extremely short annalistic description: the *Necrologium* leaves out not only the name of the village, but also the mentioning of King Oluf II as the man who had Rike killed. Instead of these two missing details, the *Necrologium* provides two other details of supplementary importance instead: it mentions that the murder took place on 18. October, and it also mentions that not only Rike was killed that fateful day, but that he was murdered “cum suis”; i.e. that he was murdered together with his men.²⁰ This detail has certain relevance for understanding the nature of the source that Saxo used for describing the murder.

Saxo’s description of the murder

Compared with the annals and the *Necrologium*, Saxo’s prolonged description is a monumental contrast by providing a stunning and meticulous wealth of details:

Once more he [i.e. Oluf] made his way from there to Zealand, where he learnt from peasants that Bishop Rike was lingering in the village of Ramløse; Oluf secretly passed the night in the same neighbourhood. As soon as he had discovered the position of Rike’s bedroom from hearing the sound of his morning office, Oluf ordered his soldiers to charge the doorway. To protect their master the grooms of the chamber ran to the entrance but were slaughtered at the threshold. The bishop

¹⁹ Arhning 1937, p. 316-317, note 62. Based on Arild Huitfeldt’s description of the murder, Arhning suggests that the murder may have been mentioned also in *Liber Daticus Roskildensis* where it would have been dated for 18. Oct. 1139 just as in *Necrologium Lundense*. Some kind of mention of the event in this source seems likely, of course, but no such mention is found amongst the preserved fragments of *Liber Daticus Roskildensis* (cf. Alfred Otto S.J., ed., 1933. *Liber Daticus Roskildensis. Roskilde Gavebog og Domkapitlets Anniversarieliste*, Levin og Munksgard, København).

²⁰ As quoted from Weibull 1923, p. 99, the full quotation is as follows: ”[18.okt.] (...) Rycco Rosceldensis episcopus frater noster cum suis occisus est. Anno domini. M. C. XXXIX” (Lauritz Weibull, ed., 1923. *Necrologium Lundense. Lunds Domkyrkas Nekrologium*, Lund Domkyrka, Lund, henceforth: *Necrologium Lundense*)

himself, seeing that he was hard pressed and hemmed in by the utmost peril, subordinated religion to his safety and, slipping a shield over his neck, fought superbly to prevent his foes gaining access; in the meantime the priests who acted as his secretary and ring-bearer shored up the doors, which had almost been wrenched off their hinges, by heaping a pile of pillows against them. Because Oluf could not take the building by force of arms, he accordingly assaulted it with fire. But Rike, reckoning, he would meet a finer death from the sword than by being burnt alive, craved a respite so that he might have a talk with Oluf; in confirmation of this he was given a friendly promise and, the moment he stuck his head out of doors, he was cut to pieces [Saxo, XIV.2.10, pp. 990-991]²¹

Whether Saxo's description is more trustworthy or not must be a discussion reserved for a later stage of this debate, at this point it is enough to simply conclude that the difference between Saxo and the other sources is immense. While the other sources provide an extremely short and superficial mention only, Saxo on the other hand gives an in-depth description full of detail, knowing even the time of day, how exactly Rike's clerics acted to try and protect him as well as also specific details of how Rike himself acted. While the other sources are characterized by a great lack of detail and limit themselves to the basic circumstances, Saxo's chronicle tells the whole story of the murder vividly with a very high level of detail with a main focus on events as experienced from inside Rike's house.

Such a huge difference is hardly just a matter of style due to the different genres of the sources. Of course, mentioning events more briefly would usually be expected in sources such as annals and a *Necrologium*, but exceptions do occur.

In comparison to his Rike description, Saxo does not even mention the fact that bishop Eskil of Viborg was murdered a few years earlier in the midst of church service, something which happened in Asmild monastery church also during the civil wars of the 1130s.²² Not every Danish episcopal murder is thus described by Saxo in this way despite there being very little doubt that Saxo actually knew about the Eskil murder too. This can be deduced as this murder is mentioned by the *Roskilde*

²¹ Karsten Friis-Jensen, ed., Peter Fisher, trans. 2015. *Saxo Grammaticus: Gesta Danorum. The History of the Danes*, vol. I and II, Oxford Medieval Texts, Oxford, vol. II, henceforth: *Saxo*.

²² Olrik 1894 p. 156 (Hans Olrik: *Danske Helgeners Levned*, 1894, fotografisk genoptrykt *Rosenkilde og Bagger*, København 1968, vol. I), Høirup og Stjernfeldt 1961 17, 59-60, 80 note 8 Henning Høirup (ed.) and O.F. Stjernfeldt (transl.), 1961, *Sankt Kjeld. Levned og Undergerninger samt teksterne til Kjelds fest med en historisk redegørelse*, Viborg, Gertz 1908-12 (M. Cl. Gertz: *Vitae Sanctorum Danorum*, København 1908-1912), p. 263 [henceforth: VSD]

Chronicle which we know that Saxo used as source material for his book.²³

The most likely difference between these two episcopal murders in connection with Saxo's chronicle probably comes down to the source material, at least partially: the *Roskilde chronicle* not only omits mentioning Eskil's diocese, but it also gives much less detail than Saxo does with Rike. Saxo, thus perhaps did not deem his source material for the Eskil murder good enough, whilst, apparently, he did have some very good source material for the Rike murder. One further reason behind this difference of priorities in relation to Saxo and these two episcopal murders, of course, would seem to be that Rike was also directly connected with Saxo's own archdiocese of Lund, something Eskil of Viborg probably was not.²⁴ As no other preserved source even comes close to his intense level of detail in describing this murder, Saxo's description is unique amidst existing source material.

Which type of source was Saxo using?

Interestingly, whenever it is possible to actually test Saxo's statements by comparing them to the few identifiable details in the annals and the *Necrologium*, both sources correspond quite well to what Saxo says. As the annals say, the murder took place in Ramløse and Oluf was behind it, while Saxo writes the same. Saxo also tells that some of Rike's grooms were cut down as they tried to defend the entrance, while the contemporary *Necrologium Lundense* says that Rike was killed "cum suis" (i.e. with [some of] his [men]).²⁵ In other words, there is no contradiction between Saxo's description and the other sources. This means that Saxo's story of the murder is in harmony with the few details in the other descriptions and that it is not actually different from the other sources, but simply much more detailed. The fact that the *Necrologium* and the annals give away dates and/or years for the event, while Saxo never does that, is irrelevant, as this is a conscious choice of style on Saxo's behalf since he generally never mentions exact dates or years at all.²⁶

²³ *Roskildekroniken* p. 29, *Scriptores Minores* (M. Cl. Gertz, ed. 1917. *Scriptores Minores Medii Aevi*, vol. I, Copenhagen: Selskabet for Udgivelse af Kilder til Dansk Historie, reprinted Copenhagen 1970, henceforth: *Scriptores Minores*) p. 29, as for Saxo's use of this chronicle: Weibull 1915, *Roskildekroniken* p. 91 (translator's comments).

²⁴ Cf. e.g. Gelting 2004B, *Necrologium Lundense*, and *Roskildekroniken*.

²⁵ *Necrologium Lundense*, p. 99.

²⁶ Saxo's deliberate omission of dates and years is discussed by Gelting 2012, p. 324.

Comparing two sources both containing very short and superficial mentions only with a uniquely detailed and highly knowledgeable description such as Saxo's, the conclusion thus must be that Saxo seems highly unlikely to have based his description on either of these two other source traditions. Apparently, Saxo simply pours from a very rich well of additional details never present in the other preserved sources. This means that he appears to be using some other source which was either unbeknownst to or unexploited by the annals and the *Necrologium*. Whatever source Saxo used, it thus must have been extremely well-informed to a degree much higher than any preserved source apart from Saxo himself. Considering the source material behind Saxo's description of the Rike murder, therefore, forces us to look beyond the preserved sources.

Saxo thus could have used either oral sources or written sources now lost. Remembering Gelting's argument, as quoted above, regarding Saxo's account of the events of 1159-1162, Saxo's description of the episcopal murder of 1139 also betrays an exact knowledge of the facts in a surprisingly similar way. Considering that at least around fifty years had passed before Saxo actually wrote down this event description in his chronicle, he could hardly have attained such a detailed knowledge, one even corresponding precisely to the other two source traditions, other than through written sources. This is not to say that Saxo never used oral sources in general, but as of now it concerns what type of source he seems most likely to have used in this specific case, and Gelting's research into Saxo's use of archival sources does point towards that Saxo actually did use written sources whenever he knew something relevant.

Oral sources seem unrealistic here considering the extremely high level of precise knowledge, unless we are talking about an actual eyewitness account stemming from a survivor of the event. While an oral eyewitness account from an aging survivor may not be impossible, it is not overtly likely either due to the combination of very few potential survivors and Saxo writing at least around half a century after the events. If Saxo was to have used oral sources, we have to remember the fact that the number of potential survivors was most likely quite limited from the outset, which means that it would most likely be a prerequisite behind oral sources that the stories had also been retold for one or two generations even after the actual eyewitness had died. Saxo knowing stories retold for generations may not be impossible either, but one may question whether such retold stories would necessarily have maintained such a precise knowledge still corresponding to the other two known source

traditions. This may not be impossible, however, in comparison to oral sources, another option potentially seems far more obvious as it has far fewer question marks attached to it: namely, the option that an eyewitness account of the murder had been transmitted through some unknown written source and was still preserved in writing at Saxo's own time and also available to him so that he could read it. Saxo having used a written source thus must be the preferred explanation, although only if one can think of any such type of written source which seems most likely to have existed and which would also likely have contained such an eyewitness account.

The question thus becomes whether such a type of written source can be identified? A written source used by Saxo must have been a type of written source explaining naturally why Saxo had access to such a precisely knowledgeable eyewitness account of the murder. Such an exact type of written source can actually be identified quite clearly, but before doing so there is an additional reason for preferring a written source in this case instead of an oral one. Discussing Saxo's general use of place names, Gustav Albeck acknowledged an argument also important here in recognizing that Saxo should be expected to have had some actual source material that he used when describing Rike's murder.²⁷ Albeck's center of attention was whether Saxo generally disliked and thus avoided the use of exact names of persons and places. While Albeck concluded that this was clearly not the case, he also concluded that the uneven distribution of exact names in Saxo's chronicle must reflect Saxo's own use of source material: i.e. that the lack of exact names at some points in his chronicle must reflect Saxo's own lack of any such source material which could have made it possible to expand on those details. While, on the other hand, Saxo's use of rare and unusual place names in other cases must reflect the exact opposite: using Saxo's mention of Ramløse in connection with Rike's murder as one of the examples, Albeck concluded that Saxo seems to be generous and communicative with detailed place names in those cases where his sources themselves were detailed and communicative too. Reflecting on this argument, while studying Saxo's description of the murder of bishop Rike in Ramløse, makes it apparent that Saxo must have had some very detailed source material that he used intensely when describing this murder.

There is even one more argument in favor of identifying the source used by Saxo as an eyewitness account specifically. This has to do with the fact that the source not only must have contained a

²⁷ Albeck 1946, p. 231-232, note 171.

much more detailed description of the event, as reflected in Saxo's high level of details, it has to do especially with the exact type of details that Saxo provides: The whole main focus in Saxo's description looks at the event as experienced from inside Rike's house, while describing a remarkably high number of apparent insider details which must have taken place behind closed doors inside Rike's house while the door to the outside was actually still shut and Oluf's men kept outside.²⁸ Furthermore, it has been called remarkable that Saxo's description of the murder even knows the time of day and what Rike was doing inside his house immediately before events began (i.e. during Rike's morning prayers).²⁹ Where would all such exact insider details actually come from if not from a survivor of the event who had been an insider of Rike's own household? No person not actually present inside Rike's house on 18.Oct. 1139 could have had such exact knowledge. Nothing within his description points at Saxo himself having witnessed any of it, though, which would also have been extremely unlikely from the beginning as Saxo must have been too young since he wrote his chronicle only fifty years later or more.

Most likely, Saxo thus must have had access to an eyewitness account stemming from a survivor who was probably a cleric very closely connected to Rike himself. Albeit, it must have been an eyewitness account handed over in writing and as no such source is preserved now, Saxo must have had access to some lost, written source on which he based his description of the murder. As things were usually written down for a reason, though, it appears unlikely that a written eyewitness account would simply have been lying around randomly 50 years later. Any source containing such an eyewitness account thus also must have been written down for a reason and most likely as part of some greater context. Discussing the likelihood of such a written source existing at all is thus closely connected to the discussion of what exact type of older or contemporary source that would have had

²⁸ Details e.g. such as those *that Rike covered his head behind a shield and fought to keep the enemies out, while the priests who were otherwise only supposed to take care of his documents and seal, piled up pillows to keep the door shut, as it was near its breaking point*, cf. also Danish source edition: Peter Zeeberg, trans., 2000. *Saxo's Danmarks Historie*, Det Danske Sprog- og Litteraturselskab/Gads Forlag, København.

²⁹ Cf. Hansen and Ziegler 2013, p. 18. If seen in connection with speculations of potential sanctity, it could have been considered whether the truer point here really was *what* Rike was doing (i.e. his morning prayers) and not actually the time of day, but as Saxo completely ignores the Eskil murder even though Eskil was murdered in a church during church service, it is clearly not that simple here. As topics of sanctity generally don't seem to hold much interest in Saxo's chronicle either, I have deemed this possibility irrelevant here. In this case, therefore, the fact that Saxo describes it as morning rather contributes to the general impression of his remarkably high level of details instead.

enough interest in writing down such an eyewitness account and for what purpose.

A lost narrative source such as e.g. a lost chronicle is hardly the answer. As regards actual historical writings in medieval Denmark, 1139 was still fairly early. Written sources such as the *Roskilde Chronicle*, Ailnoth's book about Canute the Holy and similar did exist,³⁰ but there does not seem to have been any truly, great wealth of such written, narrative sources existing in Denmark that early on. Moreover, there is no actual evidence in the murder description within Saxo's chronicle necessarily pointing at such a lost chronicle. An episcopal chronicle from Roskilde diocese would probably have been the most obvious answer as for a type of chronicle likely interested in writing down an eyewitness account of the murder, but such a chronicle is actually still preserved; this is the *Roskilde Chronicle*, and it was written before Rike's murder even took place.³¹ A lost chronicle is thus an unlikely explanation.

Saxo's use of lost papal documents

However, one other type of written source material would also have been highly interested in writing down such an eyewitness account: documents regarding the murder case stemming from the papacy in Rome, writing about it as legal documentation in relation to the legal consequences in the aftermath of the murder.

There is a reason for identifying the person behind the eyewitness account that Saxo apparently used as a cleric very closely connected to Rike, and this reason is also connected to the identification of the exact of type written source that Saxo used. Remembering that *Necrologium Lundense* mentioned Rike having been murdered "cum suis", it actually described Rike's men as having been present there when it happened. As the purpose of *Necrologium Lundense* was to memorialize persons which were of importance to the archepiscopal church in Lund, such as clergymen and kings etc., the *Necrologium* would hardly *have* cared mentioning Rike's men at all if they had been merely random

³⁰ The Roskilde Chronicle has been published in *Scriptores Minores*, pp. 1-33. Ailnoth's work has been published also in VSD, pp. 29-170, and it has been dated for probably c. 1111/1112 (i.e. no earlier than 1110 and no later than March 1113, Gelting 2011, pp. 38-39).

³¹ The Roskilde Chronicle has been dated for probably c. 1138 (i.e. no earlier than after 9./31.8.1138, but before Rike was murdered on 18.10.1139), cf. Gelting 2016, pp. 106-107 incl. note 8.

peasants. As the *Necrologium* really does mention them, the most likely reason is that these men were clerics. Clerics would have been a natural part of the retinue of people surrounding any medieval bishop, it would thus be naturally expected that any survivors of such an event within Rike's house very likely also would have been clerics.

The blatant murder of a bishop was no small thing in the Middle Ages. It was an important political event and such a murder would often come to involve the pope so that the church could react and punish the murderers in the legally correct way. This means that during this era such a murder would usually leave traces all the way across Europe in the written correspondence between the papacy and the authorities in the local church. Immediately after his description of the murder, Saxo devotes most of the following paragraph to a surprisingly thorough retelling of how the pope formally reacted in the aftermath of the murder. It is a remarkably high level of attention that Saxo devotes to the papal reaction:

Having executed his revenge by murder, Oluf eagerly raced to the coast; here he boarded ship with as much excitement as he had disembarked quietly and made his escape over the water before the king, who was at that time staying in the area, heard news of the deed. Once the news spread, the pope of Rome pronounced the harshest anathema against Oluf and conferred the power on all other prelates in Europe to deliver similar excommunication upon the man. Moreover, he gave the injunction to every bishop in Jutland that he should make sure to unleash a like sentence as due punishment for his unholy sacrilege, believing that anyone who put an end to a distinguished celebrant of holy rites deserved to be excluded from them" [Saxo, XIV.2.11: 992-993, the first paragraph immediately after the murder description]

This main content within this section of Saxo's chronicle is clearly defined by Saxo knowing these two papal letters which he used as sources. The paragraph confirms that the papacy became involved in the murder of Rike. It also confirms the existence of lost papal documents regarding this murder and that these documents were sent from Rome to Denmark. Indirectly, it even confirms that Saxo must have looked in the archepiscopal archive and that he actually found these papal documents there and read them. As quoted above, Saxo writes a whole paragraph with a main focus on how the pope formally reacted after the murder. Of course, Saxo could not have known anything about all that had it not been for the fact that he must have searched the archive and actually read these papal

documents that he described. The paragraph quoted above even confirms that Saxo actually used these documents as source material when he wrote about the murder in his chronicle as this is exactly what he does when he describes the papal reaction. These are the facts as Saxo presents them.

While Saxo would most likely have had only a somewhat limited number of existing Danish chronicles that he could use from bygone days, he did on the other hand live in an era where the Danish royal court and clerical institutions had begun a process of professionalization. This process involved the need to establish a written administration. This need had become necessitated especially by the fact that Denmark had now become a Christian kingdom as this meant that it became very necessary to have a functioning correspondence with the papacy in Rome. Having a functioning correspondence with Rome all the way across Europe simply necessitated written administration. Maintaining any kind of functional written administration in the long run rested upon the establishment of archives where all the previous documents could be kept as documentation for future use. In the dioceses and also in an archdiocese such as Lund, as stated above, it was the establishment of holy chapters that became especially important as one of the key stepping stones in this process. In the era before and after c.1200 when Saxo wrote his chronicle there were countless reasons as to why a written administration had now become imperative for the functionality of the Danish realm in the secular as well as in the clerical sphere. All of this meant that Saxo lived and worked on his chronicle in a contemporary society where administrative archives with older and contemporary documents were increasingly available at the Danish institutions of power. This would have been the case especially at the highest institutions such as the Crown and also the archbishopric in Lund where many different administrative threads were brought together. The need to maintain a written administration in Lund thus meant that keeping the older administrative correspondence, including also all the former papal documents, would have been a necessary archival priority. Of course, documents could sometimes get lost along the way for different reasons, but unless there's good reason to assume that this had happened in Lund to a considerable extent, there's every reason to expect that Saxo during his era would have had access to an extensive archive in Lund where he would have been able to read also the older correspondence between the archbishopric and the papacy. This whole process of professionalization would not necessarily have been finished all across Denmark during the era when Saxo worked on his chronicle, but

remembering their duties and responsibilities as the highest Danish institutions of power, there are good reasons to assume that the Crown and the archbishopric would have been among the most developed institutions in that respect during Saxo's era.

When Thomas Riis made his abovementioned list of lost papal documents used by Saxo, Riis also acknowledged that Saxo must have had access to two such suspected papal documents concerning the murder of Rike. He thus included these two documents in his list of lost documents used by Saxo corresponding to what Saxo says in the paragraph above about the papal reaction.³² The suggested dating of these papal documents is also extremely important. Thomas Riis dated these two suspected papal documents for probably sometime in the early part of 1140.³³ This suggestion appears to be correct as the papacy would have had to react while the murder was still a recent event of current interest. It would make no sense to write a papal reply on the matter three decades later. Furthermore, King Oluf II, the man behind the murder, was killed in battle probably around 1141 and a papal response by excommunication of him would thus be meaningless any later than that.³⁴ The Pope behind these papal documents regarding the murder thus must be Innocens II (1130-1143).³⁵

Whether or not archbishop Eskil had been involved directly, the archbishop was head of the Danish church and the papacy would thus naturally have contacted the archbishop of Lund when writing a papal reply concerning the murder of a Danish bishop. Yet another reason for the pope to contact the archbishop about this would be that Lund is placed in Scania where the perpetrator, Oluf II, had been elected king.³⁶ These things naturally explain why copies of these papal documents were sent from Rome to Lund. As keeping such documents would have been an archival priority, it should be expected that these exact papal documents would have been available still in the archive in Lund for Saxo to read some decades later unless they had been lost somehow in the meantime. However, the fact that Saxo actually refers to them and clearly had read them, confirms that they were still

³² These two documents are no. 34 and 35 on the Riis list, Riis 2006, p. 178 (cf. p. 86), cf. *Saxo* pp. 992-993.

³³ It is included on the Riis list of documents as no. 35, cf. Riis 2006, p. 178.

³⁴ As for the dating of his death for 1141; Skyum-Nielsen 1971 p. 84 based on *Necrologium Lundense* p. 47, cf. Weibull 1914-1923 p. 196-198, as for the Danish annalistic tradition dating his death for 1143, cf. Kroman 1980, Jørgensen 1920.

³⁵ Cf. the note of the editors in *Saxo*, p. 992, note 32.

³⁶ Thanks to Ib Knudsen for reminding me of that in a conversation.

preserved in the contemporary archive in Lund when Saxo worked on his chronicle and that they were lost only later on somehow.

As we now know, research by Gelting and Riis have already shown that Saxo used archival sources from the royal archive as well as from the archepiscopal archive in Lund and, as above, Saxo himself even indirectly confirms his use of the archepiscopal archive by referring to these papal documents about the murder case. As made evident by previous research as well as by Saxo's use of papal documents regarding Rike's murder, his use of archival sources seems to be far too extensive for it to be described as merely exceptions or random occurrences to go a bit deeper at specific places when composing his chronicle. It appears to be systematic, thus more likely this was Saxo's way of doing things.

This means that Saxo probably should be expected in general to have used archival sources at least whenever something was available to him that he deemed relevant either for background knowledge or as actual sources. Such a suspicion is backed up also by studying the list made by Thomas Riis. It makes perfect sense given that Saxo was most likely a canon at Lund archbishopric,³⁷ and that his presumed daily duties as cleric there thus must have taken place with the archepiscopal archive placed somewhere in his immediate surroundings. In other words, using the source material within the archepiscopal archives in Lund would have been both an easily accessible and standard procedure for him.

Knowing that Saxo must have used these papal documents to write the paragraph about the papal reaction, question is whether it was just this section of his chronicle that Saxo wrote based upon these papal documents or whether this goes also for Saxo's remarkably detailed description of the actual murder event? To answer whether or not Saxo likely would have been able to base also his murder description on the content of these papal documents mentioned, we must first remember how the papacy received their information on such matters and understand also the main picture regarding the standard procedures of how exactly the papal administration functioned. As for information, the pope could not have emissaries permanently posted at the episcopal estates in Northern Zealand waiting around in Ramløse in fear that a murder might happen. However, if

³⁷ Friis-Jensen 1989. The article has since been re-published in Heebøll-Holm et al (ed.) 2024, pp. 26-54.

the pope and the church was to uphold its jurisdiction in the legally correct way, the pope would have had to attain information on matters as important as an episcopal murder. Thus, how did the papacy actually receive its information on such matters? The answer to this question necessitates describing the overall procedures of how the papal administration functioned.

The distance between Denmark and Rome and the lack of permanently stationed papal emissaries in Denmark would seem to make it rather unrealistic that the pope could even get involved in a murder case such as Rike's. It remains unrealistic unless it is taken into account that papal documents such as the ones that Saxo read were usually written as reply to someone in Denmark who had notified the pope. The papacy normally received its information on local matters from bishops and clergymen of the local church who wrote an application to the pope. Such applications generally contained all the information necessary for the pope and his lawyers in the papal administration to decide on whatever matter the application concerned. The purpose of all such applications, of course, was to receive a positive reply from the papal administration. Whenever a Danish application was received in Rome, its content was thus dealt with by the papacy, and the pope reacted accordingly with a written reply based upon the information that he had received from his Danish informants or applicants. This was all standard procedure of how the papal jurisdiction functioned.

Looking at Rike's murder, specifically, this means that the papal documents mentioned and read by Saxo are most likely to have been sent to Denmark in response to an original Danish application of this kind. Since the pope clearly got involved, someone from the Danish church must have written an application to the pope concerning Rike's murder while including in this application also all the necessary information for the pope to make a decision on the matter. As the murder of a clergyman was one of the worst crimes that could be committed in the eyes of the medieval church, any such application to the pope concerning Rike's murder would have had the purpose of contacting the pope to notify him about the murder, asking him to act on it. Writing such an exact type of application makes no sense unless it involves actually explaining to the pope what had happened. This very need to explain it means that such an application must have included at least a mention of the murder in order to serve its purpose at all and even perhaps more likely some kind of description of the event from local informants in Denmark. The very involvement of the papacy

thus comes close to proving that some kind of Danish description of the murder must have been sent to Rome.

As such Danish applications which were sent to the Papacy are practically never preserved, it is no surprise that the application has been lost also regarding this murder. It could be suspected that such applications were most often simply discarded after their content had been dealt with. After all, the papacy received applications from all over Christian Europe and the pile of archival documents to keep would have been massive otherwise. Whomever sent the apparent application regarding Rike's murder is thus unknown as also the papal reply has since been lost. Hans Olrik points to archbishop Eskil of Lund as the man most likely to be involved in this application somehow and thus making the murder of bishop Rike the first time in Danish history with evidence that a Danish king was excommunicated by the pope.³⁸ Another possibility is the fact that as of Oct. 1139 there may actually have been a papal legate present in Denmark.³⁹ We know this because the content of a document issued by Eskil of Lund in early August 1139 is still preserved.⁴⁰ This document was signed by Theodignus, a papal legate who was present in Denmark at what must have been a synod. It is possible that Theodignus could have been present in Denmark even in October. In any case, though, it would not change much regarding the basic circumstances: regardless of the name of the person officially notifying the pope about the murder, the very involvement of the papacy would be dependent upon someone writing to the Pope from Denmark with information on the murder in order to notify him about it.

Although, as the application was sent away to Rome, this does not explain that Saxo knew its description of the murder unless it is assumed that such content from the application would have been either reflected or somewhat reproduced within those papal reply documents that Saxo clearly knew. However, judging from the standard procedures of the papacy, this is also most likely what happened.

The papacy was the single largest issuer of documents in medieval Europe, and all such papal documents were usually constructed according to a fixed scheme, thus all the different textual parts

³⁸ Olrik 1895, p. 27-28 w. 27 note 2.

³⁹ Thanks to Mia Münster-Swendsen for reminding me of this.

⁴⁰ DD/DRB, 1.,2., no. 77.

of such papal documents has individual names attached to them: in this case, we probably have to focus on the so-called “Narratio” part of papal documents where the statement of claim of the applicant was usually contained in order to establish what exactly it was that the papal document in question responded to.⁴¹ From around the mid-13th C. at least, it seems that papal documents about excommunication of persons as important as a king would typically have been sent in the form of a papal bull, although around the time of Innocens II, perhaps it seems more likely to have been sent in a so-called *litterae apostolicae* which seems to have been the most widespread form of medieval papal documents.⁴²

Whichever exact form the papal documents about the murder of Rike would have had, though, they would have been subject to the basic logic of communication. This means that responding to an application usually involves expressing at least the basic content of whatever exactly the original application concerned. This was the case also with medieval responses sent back from the papacy. Usually, content from the original Danish letter of application is reflected or sometimes even more or less repeated in the papal reply sent from Rome. This is caused not only by the basic logic of communication, but describing what matters were all about would be of great legal importance in any such legal reply document sent from the papacy. It simply formed the legal basis of whatever papal decisions were transmitted within that very document. Describing it meant that the papal scribes needed to use whatever information on the case that they had at hand and, usually, what they had most readily at hand was the original application to which they responded. These are the main reasons that reply documents from the papacy very often ended up at least partially repeating, reflecting, or even reproducing the content.⁴³ Discussing a papal

⁴¹ Frenz 1986, p. 9-10.

⁴² Frenz 1986, p. 20-24.

⁴³ As no relevant source material has been preserved, comparing with other roughly contemporary papal correspondence with Denmark about similar topics from the 12th C. has been impossible. However, these mechanisms and structures described are clearly visible within the later papal correspondence with Denmark from the 13th C, cf. e.g. the documents from pope Gregor IX to archbishop Uffe of Lund on 4.7.1233 about a priest killing a robber in self-defense, from pope Innocens IV to the provincial prior of the Franciscans in Denmark on 7.3.1251 about excommunicating the city of Lübeck, and also the papal reply from 18.5.1250 about excommunicating king Eric IV Ploughpenny of Denmark (DD/DRB, 1. Series, 6. Vol. (1224-1237), no. 165, DD/DRB, 2. Series, 1. Vol. (1250-1265), no. 34, no. 8). Looking e.g. at the first two of these documents, the pope first mentions having received a written application from Denmark on this matter. Afterwards both papal documents then continue by giving a long and thorough description of the actual event and this description is clearly based directly on a written eyewitness account which in both cases therefore must have been included in the now lost Danish letter of application.

letter from 1198 regarding the rights of a Danish monastery, Brian Patrick McGuire also recently recognized this phenomenon.⁴⁴ Furthermore, writing a papal excommunication order directed at Oluf II would by legal necessity have had to include also some kind of explanation as for why exactly he was now being excommunicated. Collectively, it all means that such a papal reply document would have had to include at least a mention of the Rike murder in order to serve its purpose at all and that it would probably be quite likely to have contained also something more than merely a very concise mention of it. Is there anything suggesting that these papal documents are likely to have contained some kind of more thorough description of the murder which would have been sufficiently detailed for Saxo to be able to base his own description of the murder on it?

One key argument is the logic of the application process. The more reliable and gruesome the details described by the applicants and sent to the pope, the more likely the pope would be to act on it on their behalf. As the purpose of such an application from Denmark would be to serve as legal documentation in order for the pope to decide on the matter and thus get a favorable response from the papacy, it means that it would likely have been a priority for the Danish applicants to base their explanation to the pope on the best information at hand; i.e. by basing it e.g. on eyewitness accounts if possible. Is there anything suggesting that such a Danish application would likely have contained

Only after giving this thorough description, both papal documents then give the actual papal reply and decision on the matter. Overall, this described structure within these papal documents is very similar to the structure of description within Saxo's chronicle: i.e. first a thorough, apparent eyewitness description of the event which has taken place and only afterwards a description of the actual papal reply. As for comparing with 12th C. papal correspondence with Denmark, this has been possible only as regards very different topics. Such papal correspondence does, however, confirm that such reply documents from the papacy regarding certain topics usually did contain paragraphs, and often substantial ones, referencing content from the original Danish letter which had been received by the papacy about the topic at which the papal reply was directed. Looking at 12th C. papal correspondence with Denmark regarding the rights of Danish monasteries, these papal documents clearly often contain paragraphs, and sometimes even large ones, with detailed specifications regarding a great many extremely local Danish place names of which any kind of papal knowledge is absolutely unrealistic unless it is understood that the papacy referenced this information directly from the original Danish letter that the papacy had received on the matter; cf. e.g. DD/DRB, 1. series, 3. vol., (1170-1199), no. 76 (1178), no. 79 (1178), no. 95 (1180-1181), no. 100 (1182), 101 (1182), 138 (1186), as well as also e.g. no. 137 (1186) regarding a slightly different topic. Although in a shorter paragraph, the same mechanism is visible in the papal reply to Esrum monastery in 1151 (cf. DD/DRB 1,2 no. 106).

⁴⁴ "Pavebreve af denne art gentager som regel de formuleringer, der indgår i en institutions ansøgning (...)", McGuire 2022, s. 184. While lacking relevant contemporary papal documents to compare with, regarding Denmark, researcher Sally Vaughn has graciously made me aware of Eadmer's chronicle in which very illustrative examples of both applications written to the pope and of papal reply documents to previous applications are to be found, cf. Geoffrey Bosanquet, tr., R.W. Southern, foreword, 1964. *Eadmer's History of Recent Events in England*, The Cresset Press, London. These letters, regarding England, all predate 1139 and the papal letters, especially, show examples of such event descriptions being included similarly also in papal documents from that day and age.

an eyewitness account from a survivor in order to explain the event to the pope?

Besides the logic of the application process, there are factors which should be weighed in also. Remembering Riis' dating of these two suspected papal documents for probably early 1140, their supposed dating becomes an argument in itself. Since the murder happened in October 1139, those papal documents thus would have been written only very few months afterwards. It should be noted that Riis is most likely to be right in his dating of them. What this most likely means is that the Danish application to the pope concerning the murder would have been composed already very early after the murder, roughly in its immediate aftermath, as such an application by necessity would have had to pre-date the papal reply documents. Even if the process was very slow, neither application nor papal reply could have been written any later than c.1141 as Oluf II was killed that year and the correspondence on the matter thus must have been written before that. In case any cleric from Rike's household actually survived Oluf's attack, such an early dating of the application becomes highly interesting. In terms of chronology, it is very likely that anyone writing such an application that early on would have been able to base a necessary explanation of the murder event, such as the one which would have been contained within the application, upon one or more contemporary eyewitness accounts by someone who saw it happen.⁴⁵ Also, we have to remember the basic logic here. In case Oluf II truly managed to wipe out everyone in Rike's household that day, who would actually have told anyone about it? Even if one of Oluf's men potentially witnessed everything happening inside Rike's house from the outside, it seems highly unlikely that he would have notified the pope as he would incriminate himself by letting the pope know about it.⁴⁶ Theoretically speaking, of course, it could have been local peasants. However, neither Saxo's actual description nor the contemporary statement in *Necrologium Lundense* point in that direction.

⁴⁵ As for chronology and Saxo regarding the murder of Rike, cf. Weibull 1914-1923, p. 196-198.

⁴⁶ Brengaard interpreted the place of the murder as if it happened in Ramløse church, which would make it possible that the event could have happened during church service with the entire parish community as eyewitnesses, cf. Brengaard 1982, p. 242. Although, however, members of the parish community may have witnessed Oluf's attack, the murder clearly did not happen in the church. Saxo states that the murder happened in the morning at the place where Rike had his chambers and apparent bedroom, and he thus must have been sleeping all night. As Rike was hardly sleeping in the church, he probably had some kind small private place for prayers at his own farm or manor in Ramløse, which would also make great sense given his position as a bishop. Interpreting the place of the murder as Rike's own farm or manor in Ramløse also is the widely accepted solution, cf. e.g. Olrik 1895, p. 27, Moltke et al. 1967 p. 1341, Hørby 1982 (although cf. Weibull 1914-1923, p. 195).

In their own way, Saxo and *Necrologium Lundense* thus also become arguments in favor of this interpretation. *Necrologium Lundense* confirms that Rike was not alone when it happened, but that he was together with his men and as we have seen, it most likely means clerics when it says that.⁴⁷ Even though the *Necrologium* says that Rike was killed together with them, it does not necessarily mean that everyone in Rike's household that day was wiped out.⁴⁸ It just means that Rike was not the only one killed that day, but that also some others (and probably clerics) were killed in addition to him. Furthermore, the details within Saxo's description of events seem to reflect an eyewitness account. Focus in that description mostly look at events as witnessed from amongst Rike's men. Saxo describes actual details taking place behind closed doors inside Rike's house. The overall textual perspective in Saxo's description is thus more or less the perspective of a cleric who was present in Rike's house in Ramløse that day but managed to survive the event. Theoretically, of course, a highly skilled writer such as Saxo could potentially have invented all of that. However, this does not seem to be the most likely explanation given that Saxo most likely had archival sources on the murder in the form of papal documents which we know that he actually used and which probably also contained some kind of event description and possibly even a reproduced or reflected eyewitness account. Even if beginning a study of all of this from the assumption that Saxo may have invented the whole description himself from scratch, such a thought would ultimately end up with the problem that this would not explain the fact that the very involvement of the papacy means that Danish information on the murder must have been sent to Rome and that Saxo undoubtedly knew the papal reply. In light of this, the interpretation that Saxo appears to have had some actual source material for his description of the murder becomes far more likely. When we consider how Saxo's chronicle seems to echo the eyewitness account of a surviving cleric, it probably also becomes the most likely explanation that he actually had such an eyewitness account available as transmitted in some repeated or reflected form through the papal documents that he knew. Given that we already know how Saxo apparently used archival sources whenever he had relevant ones available, he probably did the same thing here.

⁴⁷ *Necrologium Lundense* p. 99.

⁴⁸ Even though it has been sometimes interpreted like this, cf. Breengaard 1982 p. 242 ("med hele sit følge"). Skyum-Nielsen 1971, p. 85, sticks more closely to Saxo's description ("hugget ned sammen med skrivere og seglbevarere").

Conclusion

All in all, something akin to this seems most likely to have happened: a cleric from Roskilde diocese who was close to Rike and present in his house in Ramløse on the fateful day could easily have either escaped or survived Oluf's attack, thus afterwards telling his fellow clerics within the Danish church about it and a formal complaint describing the murder through his eyewitness account was then sent to Rome from Denmark to gain papal support in the matter. Even though its exact contents are lost, an application of complaint must have been sent from Denmark regarding this murder as this is the only realistic explanation why the papacy became involved in the matter. Basing it upon the event description that the papacy had received from Denmark, the ecclesiastical lawyers in the papal administration made their decision regarding the murder, and the pope then responded with his decisions as expressed in the papal documents which were sent back to Denmark. As Saxo clearly knew these lost papal documents from the archepiscopal archives, it leaves no good reason for doubting him on their existence. Either these exact papal documents or copies of them were also sent to the Danish archbishopric in Lund where they were kept in the archive afterwards. We know from Saxo's use of these papal documents that they were still preserved in the archepiscopal archive in Lund when Saxo worked on his chronicle some decades later and thus went through the archive to find relevant source material.

More specifically, Saxo must have found at least two papal documents expectedly from c. early 1140 in the archepiscopal archives in Lund. Both documents concerned the murder and collectively they seem to have formed the main part of the source material that Saxo used as construction ground for most of his description of the murder and its aftermath. One was a document where the pope wrote to the archbishop of Lund in order to get an excommunication sentence issued on Oluf II and where the pope probably also authorized all other European bishops to do the same. The other document was an archepiscopal copy of another papal document where the pope wrote to the Danish bishops in Jutland, specifically, ordering them to execute this sentence severely.⁴⁹ One of these two papal

⁴⁹ Compare Riis 2006, p. 178, and *Saxo* pp. 992-993. As for why the pope must have found it necessary to issue such an order directed at the Jutlandic bishops, specifically, is a puzzling question. The explanation may have been contained within

documents seems very likely to have contained at least a partial repetition or retelling of the detailed eyewitness description of the murder which had presumably been sent from Denmark originally. Most likely it was the excommunication document which needed to show the legal basis for this papal decision.

Obviously, Saxo must have used these papal documents to describe the papal reaction. However, it seems most likely to suggest that Saxo must have read these archival documents very thoroughly, and that he probably gained even more from them: thus, basing also his own description of the murder on the event description most likely to have appeared within these papal documents. As these papal documents are now preserved only through Saxo mentioning them in his chronicle, proving anything definitively remains difficult, but this seems to be the most likely and cohesive explanation.

The present case study thus shows that even as for the civil war period, Saxo was able to sometimes find relevant source material in the archepiscopal archives, thereby shedding light on events and at least to some extent also compensating his suspected lack of access to well-kept royal archives from this period. Even though also the archepiscopal archives to some extent may have been more substantial for the most recent period and perhaps somewhat poorer for the earlier period, there is good reason to assume that the older parts of the archepiscopal archives in Lund were likely not affected by the civil war period to the same extent as the royal archives: certainly, by 1140, Scania was heavily affected by these Danish civil wars as Oluf II, elected king of Scania, was intensely involved in them at that exact point in time. The two papal documents from c. early 1140 that Saxo apparently found in the archive in Lund thus must have been preserved despite that. This goes also for the abovementioned 1085 charter from the Lund archive that Saxo clearly used too. The mere preservation of a document as old as 1085 in Lund may be further argument that the older archive of the archbishopric during Saxo's era is likely to have been preserved much better than the older

the document that must have been sent from Denmark originally and to which the pope responded. Answering this question satisfactory is thus difficult as all of these documents are now lost. However, the answer appears likely to have been connected somehow to the contemporary political standings of the Jutlandic bishops in connection with the ongoing civil war in Denmark at that point in time. This is the case since such a papal order would seem to make sense only if the pope somehow expected or feared that the Jutlandic bishops could perhaps be more likely to either resist or ignore this sentence more so than other Danish bishops. Such a papal expectation would seem most likely to have been based upon his knowledge from the lost Danish application that he received.

parts of the Danish royal archives comparatively. Civil war era papal documents from 1140 such as these are highly unlikely to have been the only documents from before 1157/1158 which were preserved within the archiepiscopal archives at Saxo's day and age, but which would have been lost later on sometime in between Saxo's time and present day. Knowing how this was Saxo's way of doing things, he would have known all such archival material in Lund and he would also have used it as source material for his chronicle whenever he found that relevant. We even have to remember that while the royal administration likely could have been less than properly kept during such civil wars and while much of the content in the royal archives from before c.1158 also could have been lost, this does not mean that everything was necessarily lost or non-existent when Saxo worked on his chronicle.

While Gelting's study centered on Saxo's use of archival sources from c.1158 onwards, future studies on Saxo's use of archival sources should thus not focus only on the most recent part of his chronicle but acknowledge that Saxo probably used archival sources also for his description of the preceding period. The main difference between his archival sources before and after c.1158, respectively, may rather be that Saxo was perhaps a lot more single-handedly dependent upon the archiepiscopal archives for the earlier period, while he was able to gain much also from the royal archives for the more recent period. Naturally, such a difference would have affected the standard of his writings before and after c.1157/1158, respectively. As this means that Saxo would have been able to use archival sources to a much lesser extent before c.1158, no matter how poorly or how well stocked the older archiepiscopal archives were, it would also unavoidably have diminished how much he was able to gain from archival sources before c.1158 compared with the period after. It means that his knowledge of events may not always have been quite as good, thorough, and precise before c.1158 compared with after. However, the present study shows that even as for the preceding civil war period between 1131/1134 and 1157/1158, and probably even before that, Saxo's use of archival sources seems much too systematic and extensive for it to be ignored if striving to gain any suitable impression of his chronicle.

While this study leaves it unclear exactly far back this goes, Saxo's suspected use of documents from 1085 and c.1140 suggests that it would probably be wise at least to be aware of whether or not Saxo may have had access to archival sources from Lund on different issues between c.1085 and

c.1157/1158. While this would probably not always be the case, it may actually be most likely on specific topics such as the episcopal murder of 1139 as the archepiscopal archives apparently contained relevant source material for parts of Saxo's description of Danish history during this period.

A pattern is thus forming to suggest that Saxo was going through the archepiscopal archives systematically using whatever archival sources there that he deemed relevant, covering as much of his chronicle as possible, including the civil war era. While Saxo's story of the murder and what followed is uniquely detailed, the most likely main reason is that Saxo based it on contemporary archival sources never exploited by any other preserved source. Even though these papal documents were since lost, it says something important about Saxo's access to source material and ultimately about his chronicle. His use of archival sources holds important perspectives for the general understanding of his chronicle as well as for discussing its actual trustworthiness. The latter is the case, especially, since such archival sources by their very nature often must have been rather contemporary. Regarding the murder of bishop Rike in Ramløse, at least, Saxo was certainly not telling tall tales, it appears that he was well-informed from contemporary archival sources.⁵⁰ This is worth remembering whenever Saxo's chronicle is being considered at least from c.1085 onwards during the period in which the professionalization process of the Danish power institutions took place and the holy chapter at the archbishopric in Lund had been founded.

⁵⁰ As for Saxo telling tall tales, cf. Gelting 2012, p. 322 (the discussion of Weibull 1915), thoughts on the reliability of Saxo's chronicle in the light of his use of archival sources can be found also in Gelting 2012, pp. 325, 330-331, cf. e.g. Larsen 1925, p. 173.



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