



**QUE PERCURSO ATÉ AO EPISCOPADO?
ORIGENS E CARREIRAS DOS BISPOS POLACOS DO SÉCULO XIII**

JACEK MACIEJEWSKI

O estudo sobre o episcopado polaco do século XIII pretende fornecer uma breve caracterização do modelo de carreira que habitualmente conduzia ao ofício de bispo ordinário na provincial eclesiástica de Gniezno, de 1180 a 1320. Centrando-se nos factores sociais, territoriais e institucionais que definiam a promoção ao episcopado, considera igualmente a importância do peso da influência da autoridade secular nesse percurso.

**WHICH WAY TO BISHOPRIC?
ORIGIN AND CAREERS OF POLISH BISHOPS IN THE 13TH CENTURY**

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The paper on the Polish episcopacy of the 13th century aims at giving a brief characterisation of the career pattern, which readily lead to the office of ordinary bishop in the ecclesiastical province of Gniezno, between 1180 and 1320. Focusing on the specific social, territorial and institutional factors supporting Episcopal promotion, it also considers the issue of the importance of secular authority influence.

WHICH WAY TO BISHOPRIC? ORIGIN AND CAREERS OF POLISH BISHOPS IN THE 13TH CENTURY

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This paper is concerned with the 13th century (broadly understood from around 1180 to 1320), a very special period in the history of both the Polish state and church. A unified monarchy, Polish realm disintegrated into a number of duchies in the late 12th century and was reunited at the beginning of the 14th century. That is why the time is known as the period of the feudal disintegration. The unification movement ended in 1320, when Ladislaus the Short was crowned the king of independent Poland, but many territories ruled by members of the Piasts dynasty, as well as three diocesan sees, did not become part of his new kingdom.

From an ecclesiastical point of view the 13th century was the period of the final implementation of the Gregorian Reform, Canon Law and the time of creating strong bonds between the local church and Rome. It was also the era of successful struggles for church independence from secular authorities and the fight for the other *libertates ecclesiae* such as *privilegium fori* and judicial and economical immunity for ecclesiastic estates. And finally it was a period of a dynamic development of an internal diocesan administrative structure.

In medieval communities ordinary bishops¹, though not numerous, were a social group of great significance². During the period discussed, a bishop's

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¹ Entering into episcopal office involved being anointed bishop and having jurisdiction over a diocese (*episcopus ordinarius seu residentialis*). Bishops *in partibus infidelium* cannot be regarded as members of this group. Encountered in Poland from the 13th cent. they were usually friars who replaced ordinary bishops *in pontificalibus*, and lived at their mercy. In this connection it is quite obvious they did not share the group standards with ordinary bishops, i.e.: social origin, education and ecclesiastical and political experience.

² BENSON, R. L. – *The Bishop-Elect: a study in Medieval Ecclesiastical Office*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1968, p. 3; PENNINGTON, Keneth – *Pope and Bishops: the Papal Monarchy in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries*. [Philadelphia]: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1984, *passim*; MORRIS, Colin – *The Papal Monarchy: the Western Church from 1050 to 1250*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989, esp. p. 527-541. On Polish medieval episcopacy see WIESIOŁOWSKI, Jacek – Episkopat polski jako grupa społeczna. In *SPOŁECZEŃSTWO Polski średniowiecznej*. Ed. S. K. Kuczyński. Vol. 4. Warszawa: PWN, 1990, p. 236-295; RADZIMŃSKI, Andrzej – Wyższe duchowieństwo w Polsce średniowiecznej: stan i perspektywy

promotion to the office depended on many legal and non-legal factors. The most important legal considerations included the obligation to have major orders, to be born in a valid marriage, to be aged at least 30, to have appropriate intellectual formation and to be elected by a cathedral chapter. We can say with confidence that Polish bishops mostly met these formal requirements formulated more or less specifically by canon law³.

In such a case non-legal factors conditioning promotion to the office can be regarded as more important and even decisive. They can be divided into three groups: 1) social factors (origin and family connections); 2) territorial factors (the issue of importance of territorial proximity); 3) institutional factors (previous career in state and church institutions).

Roughly as many as 90% of the members of episcopacy in the 13th century Poland descended from Polish noble families. During the feudal disintegration era, unlike earlier times, it was not unlikely for members of families which did not have high status and political prestige to be promoted to the office of ordinary bishop, which means that the honour was not monopolized by the higher nobility⁴.

Bishops originating from non-noble families had appeared in Poland since the second half of the 13th cent. They represented a rich, higher class of burghers and were somewhat exceptional. The increasing role of towns in the social, political and economical life of Poland of the later 13th and early 14th centuries was also reflected here, so that we can observe two burghers among seven ordinary bishops of the province of Gniezno at the beginning of the 14th century. Nevertheless the number of plebeians among the Polish episcopacy was still insignificant in the late Middle Ages. If during the age of feudal disintegration their promotions followed long, successful, ecclesiastical careers, then in the course of the 15th cent. the most important factor was royal protection and previous high position in the royal chancellery⁵.

At the turn of the 12th cent. we can find the last, and sometimes only conjectured, foreigners among ordinary bishops in Poland, although there were not many of them left by this time. Even if until the end of the 13th cent. we could point to some prelates whose family relations stretched to nearby countries

badań nad episkopatem i środowiskami kapitulnymi. In *STAN i perspektywy badań nad społeczeństwem Polski średniowiecznej na tle porównawczym*. Toruń, 2003, p. 157-180; MACIEJEWSKI, Jacek – *Episkopat polski doby dzielnicowej 1180-1320*. Kraków-Bydgoszcz: Societas Vistulana, 2003; KOCZERSKA, Maria – *Biskup w Polsce późnego średniowiecza*. In *KOLORY i struktury średniowiecza*. Ed. W. Fałkowski. Warszawa "DiG", 2004, p. 105-124.

³ MACIEJEWSKI – *Episkopat*, p. 15-70.

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 70-78. For earlier times see: DOBOSZ, Józef – *Monarcha i możni w Polsce do początku XIII wieku*. Poznań: Wydaw. Poznańskie, 2002, p. 406-421.

⁵ WIESIOŁOWSKI – *Episkopat*, p. 243; MACIEJEWSKI – *Episkopat*, p. 71, annex II/9, III/11, VI/7.

situated outside the Polish realm and the ecclesiastical province of Gniezno, it was quite likely that they were not newcomers and came from families who had settled in Poland much earlier. Generally saying the lack of foreigners among Polish episcopacy was a significant feature of this group⁶.

Territorial proximity can be first of all discussed in terms of a bishop's personal relations with a diocese and with duchies or regions constituting its territory. This factor was also important during recruitment of the episcopacy in the 13th cent. However, it refers mainly to suffragans of Gniezno, especially to bishops of Wrocław, Cracow, Płock and Włocławek (slightly less to Poznań) but not to Lebus and Gniezno itself. The first small bishopric was governed by clergy coming from nearby Silesia, whereas the office of Metropolitan of Gniezno retained countrywide importance throughout the period of feudal disintegration, which was also visible in the recruitment system⁷.

The last set of factors here (institutional ones) represents a matter of special interest to our debate. Which path led most readily to the office of the ordinary bishop, serving dukes or serving the Church? It is also in a sense a question about the degree of real independence of free canonical election and the qualifications of persons who ruled over dioceses.

The conclusions presented here result from the research on the careers of 80 prelates who in the period described were promoted to the ordinary bishop's office on the territory of the Church Province of Poland, which consisted of 7 bishoprics in the 13th century⁸.

As many as about 25% of the group of Polish bishops held earlier the office of duke's chancellor and some others were members of the ducal chancellery or at least *capella*. We know also that three more bishops at the beginning of their public activity had very close relations with various ducal courts and personally with dukes, but we did not find anything that could confirm their work in the chancellery.

There is no doubt that the holding of the chancellor's office could be an important step on the path leading to a cathedral during the feudal disintegration era. Nevertheless it would be difficult to regard it as a decisive one. Only in Masovia and Little Poland did institutional relations with the duke's court play a much greater role, so they can be included among factors of special importance to promotion. That is why we could hardly accept the quite popular claim that most of the Polish bishops in the 13th century got their offices as a reward for their loyal and faithful court service.

⁶ SZYMAŃSKI, Józef – Biskupstwa polskie w wiekach średnich: organizacja i funkcje. In *KOŚCIÓ? w Polsce*. t. 1: *Średniowiecze*. Kraków: daw ZNAK, 1968, p. 187-188; MACIEJEWSKI – *Episkopat*, p. 78-79.

⁷ MACIEJEWSKI – *Episkopat*, p. 79-82.

⁸ *Ibidem*, esp. chapter 1, see also a list of the prelates and short description of their lives and careers in a biographical annex, p. 221-271.

However, a pattern of alternative career structure is clearly visible in the historical sources. Using these sources, we are able to follow ecclesiastic careers of 2/3, but hypothetically as much as 80% of the mentioned episcopal group. Until the beginning of the 13th century bishops in Poland were chosen by Polish kings or dukes on the strength of the privilege granted to Bolesław the Brave by the emperor Otton III and the pope Silvester II in 1000. When bishops' elections in Poland were brought under the control of cathedral canons a very large proportion (around 90%) of those elected came from their rank⁹. Moreover, in the course of the century, the bulk of them had membership of the cathedral chapter of the diocese which they were to direct. That is to say a solely Church-related career created at least the same, if not even greater opportunities for acquiring the office of an ordinary bishop, as belonging to a ducal chancellery. We know many examples of careers which in all likelihood had no connection with the ducal court and in which promotion to the office was a reward for long lasting activity in the cathedral milieu of the former bishop¹⁰. Of course there was also a group of people who were promoted not only because of their abilities and merits but also thanks to their family relations with the head of a diocese¹¹.

The unification of the Polish lands at the beginning of the 14th century, built up the king's influence again, so that 4/5 of members of the Polish episcopate in the 15th cent. were long-time probation workers of the royal chancellery¹².

Taking control over the episcopal election by cathedral canons influenced prelates' qualifications in a very significant manner. In the course of the 13th century a pattern of a career developed conducive to the acquisition of the office of ordinary bishop in the Province of Gniezno. From mid-century, promotion was largely facilitated by experience in diocese management and awareness of the

⁹ The first Polish canonical election took place in Cracow in 1207 and was well described in a contemporary papal document, *KODEKS dyplomatyczny katedry krakowskiej św. Wacława*. Ed. F. Piekosiński. Pars 1. Krakow: Akad. Umiejętności, 1876, n° 7. We can also be sure that this ecclesiastical liberty was implemented in every diocese of ecclesiastical Province of Gniezno in the course of the next 25 years.

¹⁰ MACIEJEWSKI – *Episkopat*, p. 22-23, 84-86. See in the annex especially careers of: William of Nysa (III/8), Albierz (VI/7), Jan Romka (VII/7), Wit (VII/9). Cf. Also MACIEJEWSKI – Pochodzenie i kariera Wilhelma I z Nysy, biskupa lubuskiego w latach 1252-1275. *Roczniki Historyczne*. 68 (2002) 85-95; MACIEJEWSKI, Maciej – Droga Jana Romki do biskupstwa wrocławskiego. In *Mieszczanie, wasale, zakonnicy. Studia z dziejów średniowiecza*; 10. Malbork: Muzeum Malbork 2004, p. 97-125.

¹¹ See the very well documented example of nepotism in the bishopric of Włocławek in the 14th cent.: KŁOCZOWSKI, Jerzy – Biskupi i kapituły w dziele Janka z Czarnkowa. In *MENTE et litteris: o kulturze i społeczeństwie wieków średnich*. Poznań: Wydaw. Naukowe UAM, 1984, p. 208; MACIEJEWSKI – *Działalność kościelna Gerwarda z Ostrowa, biskupa włocławskiego w latach 1300-1323*. Bydgoszcz: Wydaw. WSP, 1996, p. 76-77, 80.

¹² WIESIOŁOWSKI – *Episkopat*, s. 245-246; KUŹMA, Artur – Kancelaria królewska Andegawenów i Jagiellonów jako środowisko awansu na drodze do arcybiskupstwa gnieźnieńskiego. *Roczniki Humanistyczne*. 2 (2000) 5-28.

issues related to the bishop's jurisdiction, which was acquired by holding the function of archdeacon (or, possibly, the function of an official)¹³. It assumes that the candidates must be well educated in canon law. This presumption is in harmony with the recent studies of the education of Polish bishops in the Middle Ages. They bear out that during the age of feudal disintegration the episcopacy was undoubtedly part of the Polish intellectual elite. However, our sources concerning the issue of the education of bishops at the time leave much to be desired, so the evidence is very meagre and ambiguous. The relatively low standards in local cathedral schools, where law was not taught¹⁴, forced candidates for the office to study abroad. It seems that more than half of Polish prelates had personal connections with the western academic centres. Only in 20% of known cases, however, was any academic degree obtained. Polish bishops in the 13th cent., except for a few instances (especially the chronicler Vincent)¹⁵, did not show any academic interest or artistic skill nor seem to have been remarkable for their intellectual attainments. Their intellectual formation was in this case similar to the formation of many of their German colleagues, the vast majority of whom (other than in France or England) was satisfied with studies at their local cathedral schools which were admittedly somewhat superior to their Polish equivalent¹⁶. And there was one more significant feature. The majority of the members of the Polish episcopate had been given sacred orders long before they were appointed bishops but, while their European colleagues, they lacked any pastoral experience at the time of promotion. Thus Colin Morris's opinion that *not a single bishop in Germany, France, or England was elected because he had been a successful parish priest* is equally true of Poland¹⁷.

These conclusions concerning the education of bishops during the feudal disintegration era are confirmed by much better historical sources for the next two centuries. For instance, during the 15th cent. 80% of Polish prelates studied at universities, and of these half studied only in the arts faculty without taking an academic degree. Canon law was still the most popular among the higher faculties and was studied above all in Italy. The distinctive feature for the whole medieval period was the very scant interest in theology or medicine¹⁸.

¹³ MACIEJEWSKI – *Episkopat*, p. 39-40.

¹⁴ STOPKA, Krzysztof – *Szkoly katedralne metropolii gnieźnieńskiej w średniowieczu: studia nad kształceniem kleru polskiego w wiekach średnich*. Kraków: PAU, 1994, p. 132-133.

¹⁵ MAGISTRI Vincentii dicti Kadhubek *Chronica Polonorum*. Ed. M. Plezia. *MONUMENTA Poloniae Historica series nova*. Vol. 11. Kraków: "Secesja" : nakł. PAU, 1994.

¹⁶ Cf. PIXTON, Paul B. – *The German episcopacy and the implementation of the decrees of the fourth Lateran Council, 1216-1245*. Leiden: Brill, 1995, p. 203-204.

¹⁷ Cf. MORRIS – *The Papal Monarchy*, p. 225.

¹⁸ WIESIOŁOWSKI – *Episkopat*, p. 244-245; cf. OŹÓG, Krzysztof – *Formacja intelektualna biskupów krakowskich w średniowieczu*. In *Cracovia – Polonia – Europa: studia z dziejów średniowiecza ofiarowane Jerzemu Wyrozumskiemu w sześćdziesiątą piątą rocznicę urodzin i czterdziestolecie pracy naukowej*. Kraków:

Let us return to the question concerning secular influence on canonical election. Scholars are, of course, quite correct in asserting that election was conditional on a complicated combination of personal, institutional and family relations. One can hardly imagine that a cathedral chapter consisting of over 20 members could be always absolutely unanimous and impervious to considerations of social background and royal or ducal influence. More surprising in fact is the existence of the necessary courage to resist external pressure, exerted primarily by the ducal court. But in comparison to earlier or later times the Polish dukes of the feudal disintegration era were rather weak rulers and dioceses were usually situated on the territory of more than one duchy, so ecclesiastic liberty could be more easily gained and preserved. For instance, during the first free canonical election in Poznań in 1211 “dominus terre – in civitate tunc temporis esset presens”¹⁹, but canons did not take his opinion into account, although he had a reputation of being a dangerous “persecutor ecclesie” and sent his wishes to the chapter.

In 1265 the chapter of the same see made a choice against the duke’s will. But the election was not confirmed by a metropolitan, who was a faithful servant of a duke, for the very good reason that the elected Peter “simplicis litterature erat et iura ignorabat”. However, when the chapter chose a well educated individual, deacon John, who was “iurisperitus et magister”, the archbishop did not want to confirm his appointment again and finally anointed another clerk. “Et hoc totum faciebat dominus archiepiscopus pro voluntate domini ducis Boleslai, qui tunc teram regebat et pro uxore dicti ducis”. But the cathedral chapter did not give up and appealed to Rome where the pope cancelled that illegal consecration²⁰.

Likewise the Cracovian canons were able to oppose the local oligarchy in 1229 and for the next two years firmly supported the elected candidate until his consecration as bishop. His rival was to have papal commission but the evidence in this case is very unreliable²¹.

These examples demonstrate that the best way to protect an elected candidate against an attempt to overturn legal election was conducting matters according to the rules of canon law because there was authority in Poland so powerful that it could defend an illegal action before the papal court. A trial at

"Secesja", 1995, p. 159-177; ZYGNER, Leszek – Wykształcenie uniwersyteckie biskupów płockich w wiekach XIV-XV. *Roczniki Historyczne*. 65 (1999) 73-90; KUŹMA, Artur – Die Ausbildung der Erzbischöfe von Gnesen im Vergleich mit der politischen Elite Polens im Spätmittelalter (14. und 15. Jh.). In *CHRISTIANITY in East Central Europe Late Middle Ages*. Ed. J. Kłoczowski. Lublin: Instytut Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej, 1999, p. 117-127.

¹⁹ *CODEX diplomaticus Poloniae Maioris*. Ed. I. Zakrzewski. Vol. 1. Poznań: Nakł. Bibl. Kórnickiej 1877, n° 74.

²⁰ *CHRONICA Poloniae Maioris*. Ed. B. Kurbis. *MONUMENTA Poloniae Historica series nova*. Vol. 8. Warszawa: Państw. Wydaw. Naukowe, 1970, p. 118-120.

²¹ MACIEJEWSKI – *Episkopat*, p. 60-61.

the curia was also very expensive. That is why an elected candidate in Lebus (1316), Stephen was advised to come to an agreement with another elected candidate Nicholas for “discordia dicte vestre Lub. ecclesie prompta erit desolacio et ruina”²².

Only once, in Cracow in 1294, do we witness the successful assertion of royal power, when armed troops were standing at the cathedral door during the electoral meeting²³. The organizer of this action was a mighty Czech king, to whom the bishopric of Cracow represented a great political interest. But even he (because of poor relations with the Pope) did not decide to impose his brother John on the chapter, as he was too young to be legally promoted to the office of bishop²⁴. The demonstration of power was not necessary anyway, since the majority of Cracovian canons belonged to political king’s adherents²⁵. Far more complicated was the situation of the Piast dukes who had considerably more limited opportunities to exert pressure. Only two years earlier, on the territory of the politically disintegrated Silesia, a conflict in the cathedral of Wrocław was lost by one of many local dukes, Konrad²⁶.

Though dukes strove to achieve a profitable result from elections, even if they were successful it did not mean automatic, subsequent good relations between their court and cathedral, because prelates seem to have been very independent in terms of their public actions. We must also emphasize that the bishops of the period of feudal disintegration were first of all churchmen and they did not perform any secular office while performing their ecclesiastical duty. We cannot observe their return to temporal rule until the time when crowned monarchs appeared again on the Polish political stage. The Cracovian bishop John Muskata took part personally in a Czech military expedition to Hungary and made great endeavours to obtain the dignity of chancellor of the Kingdom of Hungary in the beginning of the 14th century²⁷. Both he and his colleague from Wrocław, Henry of Wierzbna, performed on behalf of the king of Bohemia and Poland at the office of the royal governor (*capitaneus*) in the southern part

²² *CODEX diplomaticus Silesiae*. Vol. 5: *Das Formelbuch des Domherrn Arnold von Protzan*. Breslau: J. Max, 1862, 19, p. 226.

²³ Lately: MACIEJEWSKI – Czas i okoliczności objęcia rządów przez biskupa krakowskiego Jana Muskatę. *Studia Historyczne*. 43: 2 (2000) 315-326.

²⁴ Cf. HLEDIKOVÁ, Zdeňka – *Biskup Jan IV z Dražic*. Praha, 1991, p. 19.

²⁵ NOWAKOWSKI, Tomasz – Krakowska kapituła katedralna wobec panowania Przemyślidów w Małopolsce w latach 1292-1306. *Przegląd Historyczny*. 82: 1(1991) 19-20; IDEM – Małopolska elita władzy wobec rywalizacji o tron krakowski w latach 1288-1306, Bydgoszcz: Wydaw. Uczelniane WSP 1992, p. 87-92.

²⁶ The winner was a faithful servant of former bishops of Wrocław, John called Romka, MACIEJEWSKI – *Episkopat*, p. 63; MACIEJEWSKI – *Droga*, p. 119-123.

²⁷ SROKA, Stanisław – *Z dziejów stosunków polsko-węgierskich w późnym średniowieczu*: szkice. Kraków: [Towarzystwo Autorów i Wydawców Prac Naukowych] "Universitas", 1995, p. 20-28.

of Poland at a similar time²⁸. This activity was, as a matter of fact, condemned by their political opponents, who included among others the archbishop of Gniezno, Jacob Świnka and the Pope Boniface VIII. However, already the successor of Jacob Świnka, the archbishop Janisław during his episcopate was a *capitaneus terrae Brestensis et Radziejoviensis* and even a general governor of Great Poland serving the king of the revived Polish state, Ladislaus the Short, and nobody considered his political activity wrong in any way²⁹.

The Polish bishops, at this time, did not exert strong political pressure. The archbishop who was alone in the travelling the length and breadth of the territory of the contemporary Polish state on a quite regular basis was with brief exceptions unable to make the episcopate act uniformly on political issues. The strong relations of bishops with their local social power groups were decisive, which is why the dominant conduct among the episcopate was individual. It is well exemplified by the process of integration of the Polish state. The bishops were supporters of integration, but six of them represented three different integration schemes, and one, due to the localization of his small diocese, did not get involved in this matter at all³⁰.

Recent studies confirm that Polish bishops in the age of feudal disintegration performed their ecclesiastical duties well, managed their dioceses in person, and their activities were dominated by care for the interests of the Church and their bishoprics. The matrimonial metaphor defining the relationship between a bishop and his diocese since Apostolic times can be also used to describe the situation within the Polish Church in the period between the 10th and 14th centuries. During that time the office of ordinary bishop was the ultimate in ecclesiastical careers and transfers of prelates were very seldom. After a free canonical election was established no one was transferred to another see for more than 100 years. The situation changed slowly after the unification of the Polish realm, but the trend that bishop's translations were part of an episcopal *cursus honorum*, clearly visible in western Church since the pontificate of Innocent III, was not known in Poland until the latter half of the 14th century³¹.

²⁸ MACIEJEWSKI – *Episkopat*, p. 106.

²⁹ BIENIAK, Janusz – Wielkopolska, Kujawy, ziemia łęczycka i sieradzka wobec problemu zjednoczenia państwowego w latach 1300-1306. *Roczniki Towarzystwa Naukowego w Toruniu*. 74: 2 (1969), see by the index of names.

³⁰ Cf. BIENIAK – Wielkopolska, p. 73-75, 161-162, 182-185; GAWLAS, Sławomir – O kształt zjednoczonego Królestwa: niemieckie władztwo terytorialne a geneza społecznoustrojowej odrębności Polski. Warszawa: "DiG", 1996, p. 92-93; MACIEJEWSKI – *Episkopat*, p. 157-158.

³¹ SZYMAŃSKI – Biskupstwa polskie, p. 186-187; WIESIOŁOWSKI – *Episkopat*, p. 239-240; GRAFF, Tomasz – Precedencja biskupów metropolii gnieźnieńskiej i lwowskiej w I połowie XV wieku. *Nasza Przeszłość*. 102 (2004) 105-150.

Our remarks concerning origins and careers Polish bishops in the feudal desintegration era can be summarised in the following terms:

1. candidates for the office of ordinary bishop met the formal requirements of canon law, so non-legal factors (origin and family connections, territorial proximity, experience) were decisive for promotion;
2. their education focused on satisfying practical needs relating to the performance of church offices and they did not have any pastoral experience on the acquisition of their office;
3. bishops usually originated from Polish noble families (but only in part from the aristocracy);
4. they originated also from (mainly local) cathedral clergy and had connections with the chapter of the bishopric they managed;
5. solely ecclesiastical career afforded at least the same, if not greater opportunities for acquiring episcopal office, as connections with a ducal chancellery;
6. the dignity of bishop represented the zenith of an ecclesiastical career and prelates did not perform any secular office or function during their episcopacy.