

**De Daniae regno aliqua non indigna cognitu: A picture  
of Denmark as seen by an Italian renaissance humanist,  
Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini (Pius II)**

Michael Cotta-Schønberg

► **To cite this version:**

Michael Cotta-Schønberg. De Daniae regno aliqua non indigna cognitu: A picture of Denmark as seen by an Italian renaissance humanist, Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini (Pius II). The present text is a translation into English of a slightly revised version of an article publis.. 2010. <hprints-00492242>

**HAL Id: hprints-00492242**

**<https://hal-hprints.archives-ouvertes.fr/hprints-00492242>**

Submitted on 15 Jun 2010

**HAL** is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

# **De Daniae regno aliqua non indigna cognitu : A picture of Denmark as seen by an Italian renaissance humanist, Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini (Pius II)<sup>1</sup>**

by

**Michael v. Cotta-Schönberg<sup>2</sup>**

## **Abstract**

---

1

The present text is a translation into English of a slightly revised version of an article published in a peer-reviewed anthology, Michael v. Cotta-Schönberg, *De Daniae regno aliqua non indigna cognitu : Danmarksbilledet hos en italiensk renæssancehumanist Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini (Pius II)*. In: *Renæssancen i svøb : dansk renæssance i europæisk belysning 1450-1550*. Edited by Lars Bisgaard, Jacob Isager and Janus Møller Jensen. Odense, Syddansk Universitetsforlag, 2008, pp. 83-110.

The two most important texts by Piccolomini on Danmark are discussed separately in another peer-reviewed anthology: Michael v. Cotta-Schönberg, *To tekster af Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini om Danmark*. In: *Umisteligt – Festskrift til Erland Kolding Nielsen*. Red. af John T. Lauridsen og Olaf Olsen. Copenhagen, The Royal Library, 2007, pp. 55-74. It has been published in the h-prints repository in a slightly revised English edition as: *Two Texts by Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini on Denmark*, cf. [http://www.hprints.org/docs/00/45/77/36/PDF/Cotta-Schonberg\\_2010a\\_Two\\_texts\\_by\\_Eneas\\_Sivius\\_Picvolomini\\_on\\_Denmark\\_A.pdf](http://www.hprints.org/docs/00/45/77/36/PDF/Cotta-Schonberg_2010a_Two_texts_by_Eneas_Sivius_Picvolomini_on_Denmark_A.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Johan Michael von Cotta-Schönberg, Magister artium (Univ. of Copenhagen) and Bachelier en Philosophie (Univ. of Louvain). Deputy Director General (The Royal Library, Copenhagen) and University Librarian (The University of Copenhagen). E-Mail address: [mcs@kb.dk](mailto:mcs@kb.dk)

A number of texts on Denmark written by Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini/Pius II (1405-1464) are presented. An account is given of what Piccolomini will have known about Denmark and of his perception of Denmark as a peripheral state in the north of Europe and as a player in the European power game, as well as the relationship between Denmark and the Holy Roman Empire, and between Denmark and the Holy See. In particular, the position of King Christian I vis-à-vis the Crusade plans of the renaissance Popes -1464 is discussed.

*Subject headings:* Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini. Eneas Silvius Piccolomini. Eneas Silvius Piccolomini. Æneas Sylvius Piccolomini. Pope Pius II. King Christian I. Crusades. Denmark. Holy Roman Empire. Holy See. Albert Achilles of Brandenburg. 1400-1464.

## Introduction

On his way to Rome in 1474, Christian I entered Mantua; the courtier Filippo Nuvoloni welcomed him with a fulsome speech of humanist oratory. He said, ‘Do we not hear the Pope himself and all the Cardinals and the entire Roman Curia call you Father of the Fatherland and Emperor and Eternal Dictator? .... which other foreign king has ever come to Italy winning the hearts of the entire people?’<sup>3</sup> Considering this speech one might be forgiven for thinking that Denmark had a high profile in Renaissance Italy. However, this was far from being the case. Italian humanists took virtually no interest in Denmark and the Nordic region. The only Italian renaissance humanist who genuinely knew anything about Denmark had died a decade earlier. He was Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini, who, following an outstanding career acceded to the papacy as Pius II and reigned from 1458 to 1464.<sup>4</sup> In a number of texts he discusses Danish affairs, and although his knowledge of Denmark was neither profound nor extensive, together these texts provide his readers with a picture of Denmark as perceived by an internationally oriented European personality in the mid-15<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> Nuvoloni, Filippo: *Oratio ad Serenissimum Dominum Christiernum Datiae, Norvegiae, Suetiae, Gothorum Slavorumque Regem*. 1474. This speech is the oldest printed text on Denmark. Here quoted from the translation in Richard Mott, *Filippo Nuvolonis tale til Christian den Første 1474*. Copenhagen, 2006, pp. 23, 25

<sup>4</sup> An English summary of his career can be found at [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pope\\_Pius\\_II](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pope_Pius_II) on the Internet.

<sup>5</sup> The two longest texts on Eric of Pomerania and Denmark in *De Viris Illustribus* and *De Europa*, respectively have been translated and analyzed in TT (see the list of abbreviations at the end of the text)

## 1. How did Pius II acquire his knowledge of Denmark?

Pius II acquired his knowledge about the Northern region and Denmark in the following ways:

In general he had studied the classics, and consequently he was familiar with the scattered references to conditions in the Nordic region found in the works of the writers of antiquity.

As an official of the Council of Basle (1430-1439) he, over the years, strengthened his position in the boards and committees running the negotiations and decision making process of the Council. In this way, young Piccolomini had some contact with the Nordic members of the Council just as, to some extent, he was familiar with the affairs submitted to the Council by the Nordic ecclesiastical provinces. Among them was a complaint lodged by the Swedish bishops against the Union monarch, Eric of Pomerania, whom Piccolomini was later to include in his *De Viris Illustribus*. In 1435 Piccolomini, who was secretary to Cardinal Niccolò Albergati, Pope Eugene IV's legate, was present at a peace conference between England, France, and Burgundy held at Arras. Another participant was the Swedish Bishop Nicolaus Ragvaldi of Växjö, subsequently Archbishop of Uppsala, who was a member of the legation sent by the Council of Basle to the conference under the Cardinal of Cyprus. In his description of the conference Piccolomini stresses the antagonism between the two legations, but one of the historians who have treated the congress, J. G. Dickinson, thinks that he was exaggerating.<sup>6</sup> It is likely that some kind of contact existed between the Swedish bishop and the young secretary. After the end of the conference, Cardinal Albergati sent Piccolomini as his confidential messenger to King James I of Scotland. In the course of this voyage the ship on which he travelled ran into a storm blowing it close to Norway's coast, an experience that left him with an indelible, personal impression of northernmost Europe.

As a secretary in the Imperial Roman Chancery and later as a highly respected imperial diplomat (1442-1455) Piccolomini acquired a general insight into the international relations of the empire. In particular he came into direct contact with Denmark and the Nordic region in a series of Diets on crusades against the Turks held after the fall of Constantinople in 1453, at which Piccolomini – now Bishop of Siena – played a leading role in planning and follow-up including the wording of letters of invitations going to, among others, the Danish king.

---

<sup>6</sup> Joyceline Gledhill Dickinson, *The Congress of Arras 1435: a Study in Medieval Diplomacy*. Oxford, 1955, p. 102

As a cardinal (1456-1458) under Pope Calixtus III, Piccolomini was directly involved in the crusade-portfolio and must have seen the correspondence between the Curia and the Danish king.

In his book on the relationship between the popes and Denmark under the kings Christian I and Hans, Johannes Lindbæk stated that as a cardinal Piccolomini did not show any particular interest in Nordic affairs, and that no example was known of him having been involved in the the Danish affairs submitted to Rome. Consequently Lindbæk thought that it must be a matter of mere courtesy when, in a letter dated November 1457 addressed to the cardinal, King Christian expresses his gratitude for Cardinal Piccolomini having offered to promote the Danish affairs at the Curia<sup>7</sup>. It is by no means certain that Christian I was pleased to see a friend of the Roman Emperor having an interest in the Danish affairs at the Curia, but considering that Piccolomini was only a cardinal for little more than 18 months and that he was elected pope only ten months after the date of Christian I's letter mentioned above, it would be precipitate to conclude that Piccolomini himself did not take an active interest in Danish affairs.

Be that as it may, Cardinal Piccolomini was frequently involved in the German affairs at the Curia. His memoirs, written during the time of his papacy, clearly show that he was very influential in these matters. '*... in regard to German affairs, Calixtus listened to him more than to any other cardinal*'<sup>8</sup>. For instance he describes a conflict with Cardinal Castiglione of Pavia who had also been a papal legate to Germany and who, like Piccolomini, was eager to be seen as a friend and protector of this realm in Rome. '*Around this time Giovanni, the cardinal of Pavia, suffered a similar embarrassment while trying to get the better of Aeneas and cast aspersions on his loyalty. ... the cardinal of Pavia defended f the man chosen by the canons - not so much for that man's sake as to be seen as overruling Aeneas in a matter concerning German*'<sup>9</sup>.

Thus, Cardinal Piccolomini cultivated his image as a pro-German cardinal and endeavoured to consolidate his special position as an expert on German affairs, as the pope's most important advisor in this field, and as the protector of the German nation<sup>10</sup>. During this time the function of Cardinal Protector of a

---

<sup>7</sup> Bartholin B. 156. Det Kgl. Bibliotek, Håndskriftafdelingen, E don. Var. Jf. Johannes Lindbæk, *Pavernes forhold til Danmark under Kongerne Kristiern I og Hans*. Copenhagen, 1907, pp. 45-46. Hereafter quoted as Lindbæk

<sup>8</sup> '*... Calixtus eum prae ceteris cardinalibus in rebus germanicis audivit.*' COM, p. 92. Quoted after the English translation of Meserve and Simonetta, cf. Pius II: *Commentaries*. Ed. by M. Meserve and M. Simonetta. (The I Tatti Renaissance Library). Cambridge, Mass., 2003, Vol. 1, p. 165. Hereafter quoted as Meserve

<sup>9</sup> '*Nec minor circa idem tempus ignominia irrogata est Iohanni cardinali papiensi dum Æneam superare vult ejusque studium impugnare ... Papiensis electum tuebatur, non tam ejus causa quam ut in rebus germanicis Æneam superare videretur.*' COM, p. 94. Meserve, p. 169

<sup>10</sup> Walther Schürmeyer, *Das Kardinalskollegium unter Pius II*. Berlin, 1914. (Historische Studien; 122), pp. 96-105

country was still evolving and not yet recognized by the popes who feared that their cardinals might become overly dependent on secular rulers. Josef Wodka wrote about Cardinal Piccolomini as the protector of the German nation, ‘Man könnte sich hier nun fragen, ob nicht vielleicht Pius II selbst in seiner eigenen Kardinalszeit (1456-1458) ein Protektorat über Deutschland ausgeübt habe.’<sup>11</sup> Pius himself wrote in his *Commentarii* that he ‘*was always known as the champion and defender of the Germans*’<sup>12</sup>. Cardinal Piccolomini wanted not merely to consolidate his own position at the Curia but also in material terms to provide himself – and his protégés – with ecclesiastical benefices within his sphere of interest, and consequently to expand it as much as possible. Thus it is only natural that he should have tried to take over the Danish affairs at the Curia as a part of the German affairs: to be sure, the Danish king himself had, in another context, stated that Denmark was part of the German nation<sup>13</sup>, and in general Piccolomini perceived Denmark as part of Germany. In *De Europa* he states directly that ‘*Denmark ... is part of Germany*’<sup>14</sup>. The above comment in Christian I’s letter may therefore very well be perceived as indirect proof of the claim that Cardinal Piccolomini actively sought to expand his sphere of influence and his de facto German cardinal protectorate so as to include Denmark and the Nordic region.

As pope (1458-1464) Pius made the high-level decisions concerning ecclesiastical matters in Denmark including appointments to the most important offices, bestowal of benefices on a certain cardinal, the conflict between King Christian and the Archbishop of Uppsala, and the Danish participation in the crusade, for instance in connection with the Congress of Mantua.

The fact that he considered himself to have a reasonably good grasp of Danish affairs is confirmed by an episode taking place during a conference in Rome in October 1458. The pope had summoned a number of notables, among them the envoys of the European powers, present in Rome to advise him on questions relating to the forthcoming papal congress on the war against Turkey. Taking part in the meeting was Bishop Paulus Justinianus, who in this connection was treated as King Christian’s envoy and seated among the other ambassadors. The rather inflated description given by the bishop of the region ruled by the Danish king was received with scepticism by the assembly, but the Pope endorsed his description by conciliatorily confirming the Danish king’s extensive realms which he personally knew of<sup>15</sup>.

<sup>11</sup> ‘Here you might ask yourself whether Pius II himself as a cardinal (1456-1458) held a protectorate over Germany.’ Josef Wodka, *Zur Geschichte der nationalen Protektorate der Kardinäle an der römischen Kurie*. Innsbruck, 1938. (Publikationen des ehemaligen Österreichischen Historischen Instituts zu Rom; IV, 1), p. 26

<sup>12</sup> ‘Æneas Germanorum semper et laudator et defensor extitit’. COM, p. 94. Meserve, p. 165

<sup>13</sup> I.e. in the king’s recognition of the Concordat of Vienna between the Holy See and the Holy Roman Empire (1448) and his assertion that the Curia did not respect this concordat in its Danish transactions, see below.

<sup>14</sup> ‘Dania ... Germaniae portio est.’ From *De Europa*. EUROPA, pp. 133-136

<sup>15</sup> ‘Pius vera esse, quae ab illo dicerentur affirmavit: permaximas namque esse ipsius regis vires, quod quidem ipse exploratum haberet’. Leodrisius Cribellus, *De expeditione Pii Papae II adversus Turcos*. A cura di Giulio

## 2. Denmark as a North European peripheral state

### 2.1. Kingdom

Piccolomini's era was characterized by the gradual dissolution of feudalism, while the modern concept of statehood was only just emerging. Piccolomini himself used the concept 'forma regiminis' (form of government). He was extremely well versed in the Holy Roman Empire with its mix of semi-autonomous duchies, margraviates, city-states (in Italy) and cities directly under the emperor (Germany), and the Swiss Confederation. However, for Piccolomini the 'regnum', i.e. the kingdom, was the primary political unit, the one he used as the fundamental structuring principle in his work *De Europa*. Finally we have the Papal States, an elective monarchy whose 'monarch' was the Pope. For the sake of completeness mention should be made of the Duchy of Burgundy which achieved such a high degree of effective sovereignty that her elevation to an actual kingdom became a European concern with which also King Christian I was involved after his journey to Rome mentioned above.

In *De Europa*, Cardinal Piccolomini describes Denmark as a kingdom (Daniae regnum), and in a letter to Pope Nicholas V concerning the fall of Constantinople he mentions, '*...those who are now called the "Daci" ... whose king possesses a large ... realm by the German Sea ...*'<sup>16</sup>

Finally, in his account of the Diet on the Turkish question at Regensburg in 1454, he placed the king of Denmark on an equal footing with a number of other European monarchs, '*The kings of our nearest neighbour countries, i.e. Charles of France, Ladislaus of Hungary and Bohemia, Henry of Britain, Casimir of Poland, James of Scotland and Johannes of Denmark were asked to send legates.*'<sup>17</sup>

Thus, for Piccolomini Denmark is clearly a 'regnum', i.e. a kingdom like the other kingdoms in Europe. In one place he goes as far as to describe it as an 'archiregnum', an archkingdom: '*Noblemen, churchmen and cities wrote to*

---

Zimolo. (Rerum Italicarum Scriptores; tom. 23, pt. 5). Nuova ed., Bologna, 1950, p. 90.

<sup>16</sup> '... qui nunc daci vocantur, quorum rex ad oceanum germanicum ... latissimo regno ... potitur, ... hi Dani melius appellantur ...' From a letter to Pope Nicholas of 19 June and 12 July, 1453. WOLKAN, Abt. III, p. 190-191

<sup>17</sup> 'Ex regibus rogati sunt oratores mittere, qui viciniore videbantur: Carolus Franciae, Ladislaus Hungariae ac Bohemiae, Henricus Angliae, Casimirus Poloniae, Jacobus Scotiae et Johannes Daciae.' From *Historia de ratisponensi dieta*, 1454." WOLKAN, Abt. III, p. 494. Johannes is a slip of the pen for Christian.

*Emperor Sigismund: ... the Danish realm was large enough to be considered an 'archiregnum', an archkingdom (as it encompassed four extensive parts)...*<sup>18</sup>.

What exactly Piccolomini had in mind when using the term 'archkingdom' in connection with Denmark is uncertain. At the time the 'arch'-concept was, among other things, used in connection with the duchy of Austria which in the forged Privilegium Majus of 1359 was designated an Archduchy. This was only approved by the emperor – the Hapsburgian Frederick III, who himself was an Austrian archduke – in 1453, at a time when Piccolomini was a high ranking diplomat at the imperial court. None of Piccolomini's texts bears witness of any precise concept of the union between the Nordic countries, but he had clearly understood that it was a matter of a personal union under the Danish monarch. About Margaret I and Christian I he writes, *'Margaret, this illustrious woman, ruled three kingdoms... When Christopher died, Christian received the crown of Denmark and Norway ... in our time he has once more unified the three realms into one.'*<sup>19</sup>

In any case, Piccolomini was quite familiar with monarchic personal unions in Central Europe where, for instance, his young friend Duke Ladislaus the Posthumous of Austria was also king of Bohemia and Hungary.

## 2.2. Geography

In 1434 Piccolomini, who had recently been joined the Council of Basle, in a letter to Archbishop Coëtquis of Tours gave a description of Basle city. The text says, *'In my opinion Basle is either the centre of Christendom or very close to being so. For the outermost Christians are, to the east, the Pannonians, to the south, the Sicilians (I disregard the Cypriots who belong rather to the Greek than to the Roman cultural sphere<sup>20</sup>). The western part is inhabited by the Spaniards bordering on Cadiz, and the northern parts are inhabited by the Danes and the Goths. Beyond these peoples, Christ is not worshipped in the appropriate manner, and the true religion is encompassed by these borders.'*<sup>21</sup>

---

<sup>18</sup> '... scribuntque principes et praelati atque communitates Sigismundo Caesari. Regnum Daciae quamvis ex sui magnitudine archiregnum dici possit (nam quattuor in se continet amplissima)'. From the passage on Eric of Pomerania in *De Viris Illustribus*. VIRIS, pp. 96-97

<sup>19</sup> 'Margaretha clarissima mulier, tribus imperans regnis ... Christophoro autem ex humanis abeunte Daciae ac Norvegiae coronam Christigernus accepit. ... iterum tria regna nostro tempore in unum redegit'. From the passage on Denmark in *De Europa*. EUROPA, pp. 133-136

<sup>20</sup> 'magis graece quam romane sapientes'

<sup>21</sup> 'Basilea sicut mihi videtur aut Christianitatis centrum aut ei proxima est. Extremos namque Christianorum Pannonios ad orientem habet, ad meridiem Siculos, taceo Ciprios magis Graece quam Romane sapientes. Occiduam partem vicini gradibus [read: Gadibus] Hispani colunt, septentriones Daci et Gethae. Nec ultra hos populos recte colitur Christus veraque his finibus clauditur religio.' WOLKAN, Abt. I, Vol. I, p. 86



Piccolomini's perception of Basle as the geographical centre of Latin-Christian Europe shows that he has a fairly accurate understanding of European geography. Clearly for Piccolomini Denmark occupies the northern periphery of Christendom. His perception of the relationship between Swedes and Goths is still hazy in 1434, and Norwegians are not mentioned at all.

Eleven years later, in December 1445 when Piccolomini had been an officer of the Imperial Chancery for a couple of years, he wrote to a friend, *'If you want to know something about Denmark and Norway and about the island Scantica, mother of Barbarian tribes and the place whence the Goths set out and attacked the whole world, and want to know what is going on in these lands, just ask Guido. It will be as easy for him to answer as for you to ask, and he will have an answer for everything.'*<sup>22</sup>

Now he has included Norway in his remarks about the Nordic realms. However, he is still hazy about Sweden. The island Scantica is designated as the country of origin of the Goths. Elsewhere Piccolomini calls this place Gothia, and it is probably Gotland that he has in mind. Piccolomini's confusion concerning these matters is probably rooted in his difficulty in bringing the actual geographical facts in line with his classical authorities, in particular with Strabo and Jordanes' work on the Goths<sup>23</sup> on which Piccolomini based his own history of the Goths<sup>24</sup>.

Later in his career he had gained a clearer picture of things. In a letter to his friend, Leonardo Benvoglianti, some months before the Diet on the Turkish question in Frankfurt, October 1454, he wrote, *'The Scots, Danes, Swedes and Norwegians live at the end of the earth ...'*<sup>25</sup> Thus, it is now clear to him that – in addition to Scotland – there are three Nordic peoples – Danes, Swedes, and Norwegians. After that we hear no more of the Goths. His perception of the three Nordic countries as adjoining appears from the text of *De Europa* from 1458, *'There are three Northern realms bordering on each other: that of the Danes ... the Swedes and the Norwegians.'*<sup>26</sup>

---

<sup>22</sup> 'Si Daciam Norvegiamque et ipsam barbararum gentium matrem, Scanticam insulam, ex qua Gothi digressi universam terram invasere, volueris noscere et, quid illic agatur, scire, Guidonem percontare. Non major illi respondendi quam tibi quaerendi labor erit.' WOLKAN, Abt. I, Vol. I, p. 590. Guido was a 'tabellarius', i.e. a messenger or courier who had apparently gained good, direct knowledge of Northern Europe from his travels. It is interesting that Piccolomini also took advantage of this type of informant in expanding his knowledge about the geography and politics of Europe.

<sup>23</sup> Jordanes, *De origine actibusque getarum*. Ca. 551 A.D.

<sup>24</sup> *Historia Gothorum*. 1453. In: R. Duellii, *Biga librorum rariorum*. Frankfurt, 1730

<sup>25</sup> 'Scoti, dani, sveti, norvegii in ultimis orbis oris siti.' Des Römischen Reichs Tags Theatrum unter Keiser Friedrich V., von Anno 1440 bis 1493. Aufgestellt und illustrirert von J.J. Müller. Jena, 1713. Bd. I, p. 485. Mistakenly indicated by Niitema as part of Piccolomini's great speech to the Diet: Vilh. Niitema: *Der Kaiser und die Nordische Union bis zu den Burgunderkriegen*. (Annales Academiae Scientiarum Fennicae; B, 116). Helsinki, 1960, p. 228. Hereafter quoted as Niitema

<sup>26</sup> 'Tria sunt in septentrionem vergentia regna sibi invicem cohaerentia: Danorum... Sveciorum ac Norvegiarum.' From *De Europa*. EUROPA, p. 133

Linking Denmark and Scotland as northern peripheral areas is of special significance as Piccolomini had personal knowledge of this country; he wrote about it, *'There [in the Midlands] for the first time he seemed to see a familiar world again and habitable country; for Scotland and the parts of England nearest to it are utterly unlike the land we inhabit, being rude, uncultivated and untouched by the winter sun'*<sup>27</sup>.

Placing Danes and Swedes (the Goths) on the periphery of Europe and linking these countries to Norway, England and Scotland was not something new. At the Council of Constance (1414-1418) for reasons of voting procedures there had been a heated debate about European geography. The English stated that, *'The northern part or church in Europe as a whole is England, Wales, Scotland, and Ireland (including their islands), Denmark, Sweden, and Norway.'*<sup>28</sup>

Piccolomini would hardly have known why the days in winter are short in the Nordic region, but he grasped that this was a characteristic phenomenon in northern climes, and in particular also in Denmark according to a passage in his erotic novel *Historia de duobus Amantibus* from 1444, *'But how times fly. Envious night, why do you flee? Stay, Apollo, stay in the nether regions for a long time. Why are you so swift in harnessing your horses to the carriage? Let them eat some more of their fodder. Grant me a night like the one you granted Alcmena. And you, Aurora, why are you so quick to leave the chamber of your Titonus? If he loved you as much as I love Lucretia he would hardly allow you to rise so early. Never has a night seemed shorter to me than this one, even though I have spent time with both the Britons and the Danes. Thus spoke Euryalus, and Lucretia spoke just as passionately.'*<sup>29</sup>

On the other hand Piccolomini's concept of the external and internal geography of the Nordic countries is rather hazy. He manages to place Denmark more or less correctly between Saxony and Sweden. In *De Europa* he describes Denmark as a country bordering on Saxony and in his letter to Pope Nicholas mentioned above, he states that Denmark is *'a large marshy realm at the German Sea, between Sweden and Saxony'*<sup>30</sup>. Later, when he had become pope,— but was still

<sup>27</sup> *'Ibi primum figuram orbis et habitabilem terrae faciem visus est revisere; nam terra Scotia et Angliae pars vicina Scotis nihil simile nostrae habitationis habet, horrida, inculta atque hiemali sole inaccessa.'* COM, p.48. Meserve, p. 27

<sup>28</sup> *'Aquilonaris sive septentrionalis pars sive Ecclesia totius Europae est Anglia, Wallia, Scotia et Hybernia cum earum insulis, Dacia, Svecia, Norvegia.* Quoted in, Denys Hay: *Europe - the Emergence of an Idea*. Edinburgh, 1957, p. 79

<sup>29</sup> *'Sed heu, quam veloces horae! Invida nox, cur fugis? Mane, Apollo, mane apud inferos diu. Cur equos tam cito in jugis trahis, sine plus graminis edant. Da mihi noctem ut Alcmena dedisti. Cur tu tam repente Titoni tui cubile relinquis Aurora? Si tam grata illi esses quam mihi Lucretia, haud tam mane surgere te permetteret. Numquam mihi nox visa est hac brevior, quamvis apud Britanos Dacosque fuerim. Sic Euryalus, nec minora dicebat Lucretia.'* From *Historia de Duobus Amantibus*. WOLKAN, Abt. I, Vol. I, p. 152

<sup>30</sup> *'... ad oceanum germanicum inter Sueciam et Saxoniam latissimo regno sed palustris?'* WOLKAN, Abt. III, p. 190-191. The fact that Germany, including Denmark, is marshy (palustris) is a locus communis dating back to Antiquity. Thus, in *Germania* chapter 5, Tacitus writes, *Terra etsi aliquanto specie differt, in universum tamen aut silvis horrida aut paludibus foeda ....* In the annotated edition of *Germania, Die Germania des Tacitus*,

the humanist and poet – he wrote a long wishful poem, *Carmen pro ingenii exercitatione*, concerning the mobilization of Europe in a joint Crusade against the Turks, ‘Here the Saxons come running forth with painted weapons, and the host of Cimbri and the Danes with courageous hearts.’<sup>31</sup> Being related to the Cimbri – or whatever he imagined them to be – the Danes had of course to be courageous and ready to fight. The poet Piccolomini/Pius could let his imagination run free even if the practical politician had long ago rid himself of all illusions.

The humanist Piccolomini was, possibly, the first writer to establish that Dacia, the Latin name traditionally given to the Danish kingdom, was based on a misunderstanding, and that the name of the country should be Dania (Denmark) and its inhabitants the Dani (the Danes): ‘...the people to whom we now refer as the “daci” ought rather to be called the “dani” ...’<sup>32</sup>.

### 2.3. History

Piccolomini discussed Danish history in two texts: the text on Eric of Pomerania in *De Viris Illustribus* from 1450 and the text on Denmark in *De Europa* from 1458. Between them the two texts provide us with a general outline of the political history of Denmark over a couple of generations. As these texts have been discussed elsewhere<sup>33</sup> they will not be analysed here.

The account in these texts of Denmark’s and Scandinavia’s political and dynastic history over a period of 100 years is so extensive and relatively accurate that it is hard to imagine that it is based on oral sources exclusively. During his time at the Imperial Court Piccolomini had had access to the archives of the Imperial Chancery and he may have made notes from these files to be used as a basis for his treatise on Europe. He completed the text for *De Europa* during his time as a Cardinal in Rome 1456-58, and it seems likely that he also had written material available to him at the Curia. The Curia was quite capable of keeping abreast of governmental events in European countries and regularly received reports of any accessions to thrones and any conflicts on which both parties hastened to put their case before the papal authorities in Rome. The information presented in the two texts about the political situation in the Nordic

---

Erläutert von R. Much (with subsequent additions, etc.), Heidelberg 1967, reference is made to Mela 3,29 and Pliny 16,5 on the same matter

<sup>31</sup> ‘Huc pictis concurrunt Saxones armis Cimbrorumque manus et forti pectore Dacus’. Enee Silvii Piccolominei postea Pii PPM II *Carmina*. Ed. A. van Heck. Città del Vaticano, 1994, p. 165

<sup>32</sup> ‘... qui nunc daci vocantur, ... hi Dani melius appellantur ...’ From the letter to Pope Nicholas V dated 19 June and 12 July 1453. WOLKAN, Abt. III, p. 190-191. In his *Decades*, Flavio Biondo several times uses ‘Dani’ (rex danorum), but the kingdom he calls ‘Dacia’ (‘regnum Daciae’), at least in the printed edition of 1559, Blondi Flavii ... *Historiarum ab inclinatione Romanorum*, libri XXXI. Basel, 1559, pp. 164, 167, 169, 170, cf. note 46

<sup>33</sup> TT

region is certainly up to date until 1458: at this time Piccolomini demonstrates his awareness of the fact that Christian I has taken over the Swedish throne and re-established the Nordic Union. Information continues in his *Commentarii* from the time of his papacy to 1464 with comments about the conflict between King Christian and the Archbishop of Uppsala.

The overall picture is characterized by Eric of Pomerania's conflicts with the nobility towards the end of his reign, but is somewhat distorted. As already mentioned, Piccolomini did not really understand the nature of the Union between the Nordic realms, and he does not with one single word mention the crucial conflict over the Duchies in South Denmark/North Germany, something which is in itself interesting when it comes to drawing our conclusions about his perception of Denmark. This conflict must have been well-known at the Imperial Court, but at the time of Piccolomini's career at the court it was simply one of many local conflicts which beset the Empire and no special importance was attributed to it by a Court that was chiefly concerned with Central European affairs. And even to the previous Emperor, Sigismund, first cousin to Eric of Pomerania, the Schleswig issue must have seemed a border conflict of rather secondary importance, as Niitemaa has put it.

Piccolomini saw Denmark as a peripheral state, but all the same as a fully integrated state in Europe, and the Danish king was a European prince on an equal footing with the kings of France, England, Scotland, and Poland. His status was even sufficient for Piccolomini to make use of him to legitimize a long-distance miracle – in Bohemia! At least he has the following tale to tell: *'It is told that on the same day as Wenceslas was killed, our Lord Christ himself bore witness of him by appearing in a vision before Denmark's King whom he bade build a church to His martyr<sup>34</sup>.*'

The specific inaccuracies and errors in the texts should be judged in accordance with the general conditions under which historians had to work at the time. It must be kept in mind that they worked under very difficult conditions as far as archival material and reference works were concerned. Often they had to rely on their memory which might have been more reliable than ours because it was more highly trained, but all the same certainly not flawless. Even Philippe de Commines, who wrote his memoirs a little less than a generation later, commits factual errors – even about affairs in which he himself has taken part – yet this does not cause anyone to disparage his general credibility.<sup>35</sup>

---

<sup>34</sup> 'Venceslai sanctitati, qua die caesus est, Christum Deum testimonium praestitisse memoriae prodiderunt, qui regi Daciae per visum apparens suo martyri aedem construi mandavit.' From *Historia bohemica*, 1458. Aeneae Silvii *Historia bohemica*. Praha, 1998, p. 696

<sup>35</sup> Philippe de Commines: *Mémoires*. Présentation et traduction par Joël Blanchard. Paris: 2004, (Agora), pp. 30 ff.

## 2.4. Economy

Seen from Piccolomini's point of view, Scotland and the Scandinavian countries constituted a group of northern peripheral states enjoying very modest economic development. As an imperial diplomat he wrote in the above-mentioned letter to Leonardo Benvoglianti in the summer of 1454: 'The Scots, the Danes, the Swedes, and the Norwegians live at the end of the earth and can do nothing outside their own lands.'<sup>36</sup>

In the opinion of the former imperial diplomat, the economies of the Scandinavian countries were so highly dependant on fisheries and – for this reason – so restricted that it would be impossible for them to contribute financially to the war against the Turks. During his papacy he wrote in his report on the Congress of Mantua, 'Denmark, Sweden, and Norway are also too remote to send soldiers, and they have no money to contribute, for they live on fish alone'<sup>37</sup>. The fact that Pius did not think much of fisheries as an industry appears from what he has to say about Venice in the same report; here he mentions the 'boorishness of a race of fishermen' of the Venetians.<sup>38</sup>

As regards Denmark it seems that Piccolomini had no knowledge of the country's production of horses, cattle, and grain, but he did know that the Nordic church provinces did not yield much to the Apostolic Chamber.

Piccolomini never went to Denmark, but the fact that he repeatedly links the Scandinavian realms with Scotland invites the supposition that his impression of Scotland as a backward nation in economic terms also coloured his impression of Scandinavia.

## 3. Denmark in the European power sphere

### 3.1. Denmark and Northern Germany

Piccolomini is well informed of the Hanseatic League and of Northern German influence on Scandinavian and Danish affairs. In his work *Germania* written during his cardinalate (1457), he writes, 'In close proximity to the Ocean'<sup>39</sup> there

---

<sup>36</sup> 'Scoti, dani, sveti, norvegii in ultimis orbis oris siti, nihil est quod extra domum queant.' Cf. Note 25

<sup>37</sup> 'Dania quoque Svecia ac Norvegia remotiores provinciae sunt quam milites possint mittere nec, solis contentatae piscibus, pecuniam ministrare possunt.' COM, p. 238. Meserve, p. 197

<sup>38</sup> '... pro piscatoria illa ruditate, quam de suis traxere majoribus'. COM, p. 224. Meserve, p. 155

<sup>39</sup> The German Sea, i.e. the Baltic Sea

are several large and remarkable cities. Lübeck surpasses them all with her tall buildings and magnificent churches. This city is so powerful and rich that three great kingdoms, Denmark, Sweden, and Norway normally install and depose their monarchs on her say-so. Lüneburg – because of her saltworks – used to be a rich and outstanding city. Today she has become impoverished. For while she desires and purloins the wealth of the clergy she loses her own. Rostock and Mecklenburg are not to be sneezed at, nor, in the interior, the cities of Hildesheim and Verden as well as the famous city of Brunswick, home to the Saxons and in former times the seat of the Ottonian Emperors. Bremen, the ancient metropolis, and the Mother of the Danish people in Christ, bears her name in fame.<sup>40</sup> The contention that the Scandinavian countries appoint and dismiss their monarchs at Lübeck's behest is, of course, exaggerated, but it is true that for a time, Lübeck and the Hanseatic League influenced politics, including dynastic matters, in Scandinavia. In particular, in connection with the Peace of Stralsund in 1370 between Denmark and the Hanseatic League, it was agreed that the League should be entitled to approve the winner of the forthcoming election to the Danish Throne, i.e. the election of the successor of Valdemar IV (Valdemar Atterdag)<sup>41</sup>. Piccolomini's comments reflect the fact that he perceived the Scandinavian countries as being of limited international political importance in real terms. He was, furthermore, aware of the significance of Bremen for the evangelization of Denmark. In his text on Eric of Pomerania, Piccolomini describes negotiations between Eric and the Teutonic Order and claims that Eric went as far as offering his realms to this Order!<sup>42</sup>

Because of his friendship with the Margrave Albert Achilles of Brandenburg and his niece Barbara of Brandenburg, Margravine of Mantua, we must assume that he was aware of the dynastic and political relationship between Brandenburg and Denmark. Finally, in *De Europa* he touches upon the expansionary policy of the House of Mecklenburg vis-à-vis Scandinavia.

### 3.2. Denmark and the Holy Roman Empire

---

<sup>40</sup> 'Prope oceani ripam haud parvas civitates memoratu dignas invenias. Sed omnibus praestat Lubicum, altissimis aedibus templisque munitum ornatissimis. Cujus urbis ea auctoritas est, hae opes, ut ad ejus nutum tria maxima regna Daciae, Sveciae atque Norvegiae vel admittere vel excludere consueverint reges. Lunemburga, salinis quondam dives et ornatum oppidum, nunc ad egestatem readactum. Nam dum cleri divitias affectat et diripuit, suas amittit. Est Rostavia et Magnipolis, in mediterraneis civitas Hildesemensis haud comtemnenda. Verdia quoque et Bronsvicum nobile Saxonum sedes atque Ottonum quondam caesarum patria. Bremis, vetus metropolis et Danorum gentis in Christo mater, non sine laude nomen habet.' From *Germania*. Piccolomini, E.S. (1962), *Germania*. Hrsg. A. Schmidt. Cologne, 1962, p. 54

<sup>41</sup> Niitemaa, p. 84

<sup>42</sup> TT, p. 58

A discussion of Piccolomini's concept of Denmark's relationship with the Holy Roman Empire can be found elsewhere<sup>43</sup>, and here only a summary is given supplemented by other texts.

As regards the relationship between Denmark and the Holy Roman Empire, Piccolomini's texts reflect the duality which, over centuries, characterized the relationship and which meant that during those times when the Empire was strong and Denmark was weak, the Emperor's suzerainty over Denmark was acknowledged, while at other times Denmark maintained her independence vis-à-vis the Holy Roman Emperor<sup>44</sup>.

On the one hand, Piccolomini claimed that in a letter addressed to the Emperor Sigismund, the Danish representatives acknowledged '*that they were subjects of the Holy Roman Empire, and they asked Sigismund in his capacity of Roman Emperor to give them another King.*'<sup>45</sup> A precedent for this Piccolomini could find in a text by the Italian historian, Flavio Biondo, whose work *Historiarum ab inclinatione Romanorum imperii decades* (written from 1439 to 1453) he had rewritten and paraphrased, '*He himself [the Emperor Louis the Pious] together with King Bernard [of Italy] decided to lead his army against the Danes. It was his intention to reinstate the Kings Harald and Reginfred who obeyed the Empire and who had been banished by the sons of Gotfred. However, a terrible winter during which the seas froze over prevented his venture. He therefore spent the winter at the Saxon town of Parbruinum ... The Vascones deserted the Empire as did Salanius, Prince of the Abodrits, who inhabited some islands in the German Sea, and who were allies of Gotfred's sons against Harald, King of the Danes, who was loyal to the Empire. The Vascones were easily defeated. But the Danes were not such an easy proposition as the Saxons fought furiously alongside of them. However, later they seized a favourable opportunity and fought a battle against Salanius and Gotfred's sons. They defeated them and reinstated Harald in his ancestral realm*'.<sup>46</sup> The Danish kings, Harald and

---

<sup>43</sup> TT

<sup>44</sup> Niitemaa, p. 22, ff., 55. The doctrine of the Danish King owing fealty to the German Emperor '... wurde auch nur in dem Fall verwirklicht, dass die Stellung des Kaisers stark, Dänemark aber innerlich schwach war.' ['... was only realized whenever the Emperor was strong and Denmark was internally weak.']

<sup>45</sup> '... fateri se tamen romano imperio subjectos inquit petuntque uti Sigismundus regem eis tradat auctoritate romana'. From *De Viris Illustribus*. VIRIS, p. 96-97

<sup>46</sup> 'Ipse [Ludovicus Pius, imperator] vero comitante Bernardo rege [Italiae] in Danos ducere statuit, eo quod Eroldum et Ranfredum reges imperio parentes, a filiis Gothofredi regno pulsos reducere intenderet. Sed horrida hiems impedimento fuit, pelago glacie concreto. Himeavit igitur ad Parbruinum, quae est Saxoniae civitas ... Vascones ab imperio defecerunt, et partier Salanius Abderitorum regulus Germanici oceani insulas colens, Gothofredi filiis adversus Eroldum regem Danorum imperiode fidelem adhærens. Vascones facile domiti sunt. Majus negotium cum Danis fuit, Saxonibus aegre cum illis pugnantibus. Qui tamen postea occasione capta cum Salanio et Gothofredi filiis conflixerunt: illisque praelio fuis, Eroldum in paternum Daniae regnum reducerunt.' From, *Supra decades Blondi epitome* (1463). See: Aeneae Sylvii Piccolominei postea Pii II. Pont. Maximi *Epitome Decadum Blondi Ab inclinatione Imperii ad Joh. XXIII. Papae tempora*. Helmstadii: Impensis Joh. Melchioris Sustermanni, 1700, p. 97. The Danish King Harald mentioned here is Harald Klak who, together with his brother Reginfred was installed as king in 812. They were nephews of the Danish King Gotfred and fought his sons for the Throne. The campaign of Louis the Pious took place in 815, cf. *Politikens Danmarks Historie*. Vol. 2, 1976, p. 98

Gotfred, are described as princes who obeyed the Empire (*parentes imperio*) and Harald as loyal to the Empire (*imperio fidelis*). The significance of these events for the relationship between the Holy Roman Empire and Denmark is confirmed by Niitemaa; ‘So entstand in den Stürmen von Dänemarks inneren Thronstreitigkeiten schon im Jahr 814 eine Auffassung, dass der dänische König in dem universalen abendländischen Lehnssystem abhängig vom Keiser sei.’<sup>47</sup>

On the other hand, as an imperial official and later as Pope, Piccolomini wrote letters convening international Diets on the Crusade against the Turks, in which the Danish King is invited as a sovereign prince on an equal footing with the Kings of France, Hungary, Scotland, etc.

As a practical politician and a close observer of the decline of power of the Holy Roman Empire under Frederick III and as Pope, Piccolomini will have realized that despite the fact that as far as he was concerned she was a part of Germania, Denmark was sovereign vis-à-vis the Empire in the same way as France, Poland, and other neighbouring realms.

In certain cases the Emperor was entitled to intervene in Danish government matters. Certainly, Sigismund chose not to do so in connection with the dethronement of Eric of Pomerania despite the fact that, according to Piccolomini, he was called upon to do so by the Danish Council of the Realm (Rigsråd). This, in return, was what Sigismund’s successor, Albert II, did: ‘*But when he died [1437] and the old hatred was still running hot, and Eric’s vices had not abated, the leaders of the realm again sent a message to the Emperor, Albert, and asked to be given a new king. The Emperor saw to it that Duke Christopher of Bavaria was made King of Denmark*<sup>48</sup> [1439]. *He was, of course, a close relative of Eric, but neither family considerations nor any other ties restrict imperial rights.*<sup>49</sup> The important point in this connection is the fact that the Emperor intervenes at the direct request of the Council of the Realm and does so, less as a feudal overlord but rather as the secular head of Christendom.

When Pius himself had been made Pope, he dictated the following remarkable passage for his *Commentarii*, ‘*Among the northern princes, Emperor Frederick was especially pleased, since it was from his service that Aeneas had been called to the cardinalate and then ascended the throne of Peter. All the princes of Spain (the Christian ones, that is) showed their satisfaction, but Scotland, Denmark, Poland, France, Hungary and Cyprus were not happy to hear that a*

<sup>47</sup> [Thus, in the storms provoked by internal Danish conflicts over who was to sit on the throne, the perception arose as early as in 814 that the Danish King was dependent upon the Emperor within the general occidental feudal system.] Niitemaa, pp. 24-25

<sup>48</sup> Christopher of Bavaria, of the Bavarian Princely House, Albert’s friend and ally.

<sup>49</sup> ‘Sicque vivo Sigismundo Ericus regnavit. At eo mortuo, cum vetusta vigerent odia et Erci vitia non essent minora, rursus primates regni ad Albertum Caesarem mittunt novumque regem petunt, cujus opera Christoforus dux Bavariae in regem Daciae assumptus est, Erico proximus sanguine. Sed nec sanguis nec ullum vinculum jura imperii tenet.’ From, *De viris illustribus*. VIRIS, p. 96-97



*friend of the emperor was now Vicar of Christ. The King of Bohemia was particularly aggravated, for he knew the pope knew him for a heretic. Both Philip of Burgundy and Lodovico of Savoy were delighted at the elevation of their old friend, Aeneas'.<sup>50</sup>*

This text bears witness to two interesting points. Firstly, here the Pope formulates a balancing principle for European politics – with the Holy Roman Empire and her legitimate power in one pan of the scales, and the sovereign European neighbours in the other. The latter would not be pleased to see a Pope who was allied to the former. Secondly, Rome had understood that the close ties of family and friendship between the Danish King and the Emperor had vanished when Christian I ascended to the Danish throne. The Danish King was now perceived as belonging to the group of European princes who constituted the political counterweight to the imperial power.

### **3.3. Denmark and the Holy See**

Although Pius assigns King Christian with a place among the princes who must be concerned about the fact that a friend and ally of the Emperor had become Pope, he is unlikely to have seen him as an adversary. His relationship with the King was determined by concrete issues, especially the Crusade against the Turks.

Another factor will have disposed him positively towards the King: the dynastic connection between the Royal House of Denmark and the House of Brandenburg. One thing is that Christian I was the brother-in-law of the Margrave of Mantua and his wife, Ludovico I and Barbara of Brandenburg. In 1459 they hosted Pius' Congress on the Crusade against the Turks, for which reason he was indebted to them, a debt that he settled by making their son Francesco, Christian's nephew, a cardinal and by awarding him prebends in the archdiocese of Lund<sup>51</sup>. However, what is even more significant is the fact that one of the few political and military leaders in Europe whom Pius admired was the Margrave Albert Achilles of Brandenburg, uncle to Barbara in Mantua and to her sister, Dorothea of Brandenburg, Christian I's Queen. The Pope himself had given Albert the cognomen Achilles, and he was probably Pius' preferred choice as military commander of a joint European Crusade against the Turks<sup>52</sup>. He was, therefore, a man whom the Pope treated with the greatest courtesy and

---

<sup>50</sup> Ex ultramontanis principibus admodum laetatus est imperator Federicus, ex cujus famulatu Aeneas ad cardinalatum vocatus tandem beati Petri solium ascendisset. Cuncti quoque Hispaniae reges, qui Christum colunt, gaudium ostendere, et Scotus et Danus, Polonus, Francus et Hungarus et Cyprius imperatoris amicum non libenter audire Christi vicariatam obtinuisse. Bohemus vero apprimè indoluit, ut qui nosset haeticum sese pontifici notum esse. Philippo Burgundiae et Ludovico Sabaudiae ducibus Aeneae pontificatus amici veteris acceptissimus fuit." COM, p. 108. Meserve, p. 207

<sup>51</sup> More specifically, the deanery of Lund and the priory of Dalby, cf. APD 2288-2290, Vol. III, p. 348-349.

respect. So despite the fact that even close kinship did not always matter a great deal in this elevated princely sphere, the Danish relative of these two margraves, Christian I, must obviously be handled with kid gloves.

During the early days of Christian I's reign, Piccolomini was not involved in Danish ecclesiastical affairs. Nor was he active in dealing with the problems which the King's church policy – inspired or instigated by the King's advisor, Bishop Marcellus – raised in Danish-Roman relations in the 1450ies.

As a Cardinal in Rome from 1456 to 1458, and as Pope from 1458 to 1464 Piccolomini, later Pius, had three contact surfaces with Denmark: firstly, the routine administration of Church appointments; secondly, the Upsalian archiepiscopal conflict; and, thirdly, the Crusades.

As regards the administration of church appointments it was the habitual practice of the Curia to try to neutralize the effects of the Concordat of Vienna (1448), which King Christian recognized fairly late in the day<sup>53</sup>. It is unlikely that Pius personally intervened in the numerous minor cases passing through the Curia, but he did himself award the archdiocese of Lund to the young Cardinal of the Mantua-family who was also the nephew of the Danish royal couple<sup>54</sup>.

During Pius' papacy there was only one serious problem between Denmark and the Holy See. As so often before there was disagreement between the Danish King and an Archbishop, viz. the Archbishop of Uppsala, Jöns Bengtsson Oxenstierna. In his text on Denmark in *De Europa*, Cardinal Piccolomini had written as follows: *The Swedish King 'Charles' misdeeds did not go unpunished. He persecuted the Church of Christ, despised religion, robbed the clergy, banned the celebration of church feasts and trampled God's and man's law underfoot. In the end [1457], Jöns Bengtsson<sup>55</sup>, the wise and vigorous Archbishop of Uppsala, stirred up the nobility of the kingdom against him and he was vanquished in a huge battle. He was ousted from the kingdom and now lives in exile on a small island not far from the mouth of the river Vistula. Christian was installed in his place. He is a better king, both in terms of piety and justice, and in our own time he has reunited the three kingdoms. Gotland, too, obeys him; this is the island which used to be the home and country of the Goths.*<sup>56</sup> As Pope, Pius also mentions this event in his *Commentarii*: *'At the*

<sup>52</sup> Zander, Siegfried: *Die Beziehung Albrecht Achilles Achilles von Brandenburg (1460-86) zu den Päpsten seiner Zeit*. Inaugural-Dissertation. Halle, 1921, pp. 16, 32, 36-37. "The "award" of the cognomen Achilles took place at the Conference on the Turkish question at Wiener Neustadt 1455: "Albertum ego Marchionem Brandenburgensem, Germaniae nationis singulare numen, Achillis nomine designo." Pii II *Orationes Politicae et Ecclesiasticae*. Ed. G.D. Mansi., vol. II, p. 290

<sup>53</sup> APD 2151, Vol. III, p. 272; 2161, III, p. 279. Also see Lindbæk, pp. 23, 52

<sup>54</sup> However cf. Lindbæk, p. 54-55

<sup>55</sup> Jöns Bengtsson Oxenstierna, Archbishop of Uppsala 1448-1467

<sup>56</sup> "Sed neque Carolo scelera sua impunita fuere qui, dum Christi ecclesias persequitur, religionem contemnit, sacerdotes dispoliat, festos dies observari prohibet, jura divina et humana confundit, a Joanne Benedicti filio, Upsaliensium praesule, viro cordato et impigro, a quo nobilitas regni excitata est, magno proelio superatus ac

same time, King Charles of Sweden was dethroned, largely through the efforts of the archbishop of Uppsala, who led an army against him. Charles had treated the priests of his kingdom with great cruelty and was a slave to avarice and lust. He was succeeded by Christian, who still reigns there.<sup>57</sup>

In 1463 the Pope writes the following note in his *Commentarii*: 'In Sweden the Archbishop of Uppsala is very powerful. Sword in hand he banished King Charles from the realm, but he was thrown into prison by the new King, Christian, who claimed that he had planned to take advantage of a popular rising to dethrone the King in the same way as he had his predecessor'<sup>58</sup>. As usual Rome had received conflicting reports from the two parties. From Christian I the Pope received a letter claiming that because of his insurgence the Archbishop had prevented Christian from pursuing his Crusade against the Russians<sup>59</sup>. But, naturally, the Pope could not accept imprisonments of his Archbishops, and routine procedures were initiated. He called upon the Archbishops of Magdeburg and Riga and the Bishop of Strängnäss to intervene and, if necessary, excommunicate the King<sup>60</sup>. All the same, the papal reaction must be considered moderate<sup>61</sup>, and the wording of his note in *Commentarii* is restrained whether out of consideration for the kinsman of the Brandenburgs or because in mentioning his Crusade against the Russian, the King had adroitly placated the Pope or possibly because the Curia had long been more than familiar with rebellious princes of the church. Thus in 1461 Pius himself had excommunicated the German primate, the Archbishop of Mainz, Diether von Isenburg.<sup>62</sup> Although the Pope could not accept that a conflict between an archbishop and a king was solved by means of unilateral force exercised by the king, he actively pursued an alliance policy with the princely power over the heads of the local church, and in the case of Christian versus the Archbishop of Uppsala he worked with kid gloves. In another instance, i.e. Duke Sigismund of Austria against Cardinal Nicolaus of Cues of Brixen, the Pope had to intervene decisively against the prince who was excommunicated with great solemnity in Rome. Things did not go as far as that in the case of Uppsala, and the conflict

---

regno pulsus in parva insula non longe ab ostio Viscelae exilium agit. Christigernus in locum ejus assumptus, pietate ac justitia melior, iterum tria regna nostro tempore in unum redegit, cui et Gothia paret, Gothorum quondam sedes et patria.' From *De Europa*. See: EUROPA, 133-136

<sup>57</sup> 'Per hoc tempus et Carolus rex Svetiae, cum saeviret in Christi sacerdotes at avaritiae libidinique serviret, adnitente Upsaliensi archiepiscopo qui duxit exercitum, regno dejectus est; et Christigernus ei suffectus, qui usque hodie regnat.' COM, p. 96. Meserve, p. 173

<sup>58</sup> 'Upsaliensis archiepiscopus in Svecia potens, cujus armis rex Carolus e regno fuerat ejectus, a Christigerno novo rege in carcerem rapitur praescripta causa quod se quoque conspiratione popularium, sicut et praedecessorem, statuissse ejicere.' COM, p. 807

<sup>59</sup> APD 2291, Bd. III, p. 349; Janus Møller Jensen, p. 109

<sup>60</sup> APD 2301, Bd. III, p. 353

<sup>61</sup> However Lindbæk, p. 57, counters, 'Paven udtaler sig i skarpe ord om kongens uretmæssige adfærd ...' ['The Pope uses harsh words in condemning the King's unjust behaviour ...']

<sup>62</sup> In 1446 Piccolomini himself had been one of the diplomatic intermediaries who solved the crisis in the wake of Pope Eugene IV's excommunication of two German Archbishops and Electors, the Archbishops of Cologne and Trier, respectively

between King and Archbishop was not allowed to disturb the relationship between the Holy See and the Danish Crown.

#### 4. Denmark and the Crusades

Over the centuries, many armed conflicts were designated ‘Crusade’. In the 15<sup>th</sup> century alone we can think of the Crusades in the Baltic area, the Crusades against the Hussites, and the Crusades against the Moslems in Spain. However, the most important Crusades were directed against the Turks. For generations the Turks had been perceived as the greatest threat to Christian Europe, and with Mehmed II’s conquest of Constantinople in 1453 the Turkish peril gained renewed urgency at a time when the European powers were torn by internal and external wars, and the authority of the Emperor was rapidly approaching nadir.

In the course of his career, Piccolomini was personally three times in contact with Denmark over Crusades directed against the Turks.

The first time was in 1454, the year after the Fall of Constantinople, when the Emperor convened a Diet in Regensburg to discuss a joint Crusade against the Turks. Aeneas in his capacity as imperial senior diplomat was assigned with the task of wording the summons convening the Diet, and to act as the Emperor’s representative at it<sup>63</sup>. In a letter dated 14 April 1454, the Danish King replied that in such matters he had to consult his Parliament (*parliamentum*), but that there would be insufficient time to do so before the Diet. Furthermore, he was on his way to Norway to defend himself against a hostile invasion<sup>64</sup>.

Before the follow-up conference in Frankfurt Piccolomini wrote the above-mentioned letter to Leonardo Benvoglianti<sup>65</sup> in which he expressed his great scepticism concerning the resoluteness of the Diet and the European powers with respect to the Turkish crusade. Concerning the Scandinavian countries he directly wrote that they could not effectively contribute to the crusade.

---

<sup>63</sup> The Emperor’s letter to King Christian is dated 9 January 1454; Niitemaa, p. 224; Møller Jensen, p. 63

<sup>64</sup> ‘Verumque impedimentum huic nostro sincero proposito praestitit, quod vestras Imperiales litteras dumtaxat decem diebus festum sancti Gregorii praecedentibus praesentato recepimus bajulo. Cum vero regnum nostrum Daciae, ubi residemus, ad praesens insulis intersecetur, diversis vadis Ponti a se distantibus invicem, et primo tempore parliamentum regni nostri praedicti, cujus consultatione in rebus gravioribus affectari solemus, absque prolixo temporis intervallis congregare minime poteramus. Tum etiam, quia sumus in procinctu ad regnum nostrum navigandi Norvegiae cum expeditione contra hostium nostrorum incursus, quos frequentius sustinemus. Quo propterea Caesareis vestris desideriis et hortatibus pro nunc satisfacere minime potuimus.’ Des Römischen Reichs Tags Theatrum unter Keiser Friedrich V., von Anno 1440 bis 1493. Aufgestellt und illustriert von J.J. Müller. Jena, 1713. Bd. I, p. 485-487. Cf. Møller Jensen, p. 63-64; Niitemaa, p. 225

<sup>65</sup> Cf. Note 25

This private assessment was in a glaring contrast with Piccolomini's official optimism as expressed in his great speech to the conference. In this speech he stated – with respect to the Danish king – that ‘We also have a letter from the King of Denmark, Sweden and Norway, which shows his positive attitude.’<sup>66</sup>

At the conference, Christian I was represented by Archbishop Kalteisen. He declared that the Danish King was ready to take part in the planned Crusade, but first he needed to establish peace with Sweden and the Hanseatic League<sup>67</sup>. This is not likely to have convinced anyone.

At any rate, Piccolomini in a speech to Pope Calixtus III made in the same year, refrained from mentioning the Nordic King among the European kings and princes endorsing the Crusade.<sup>68</sup>

The second time Piccolomini himself had a chance to hear about the crusading zeal of the Danish King was in 1457. During this year, Pope Calixtus took a number of initiatives to organize a Crusade against the Turks. As part of this campaign he sent various messages also to the Nordic region about the Turkish peril. There is no doubt that as one of the Curia's outstanding experts in the Turkish issue the newly appointed Cardinal Piccolomini was deeply involved in this campaign. Now that Christian I was also King of Sweden he answered the Pope in September that his realm was frequently attacked by barbarian tribes (Laplanders, Mambries and Erpions!) from the north. In hosts of up to 150,000 people they ravaged and plundered their way through the northern territories and desecrated the holy places. So, alas, he could not participate in a Crusade at the present time<sup>69</sup>. In another letter from King Christian to the Pope dated November the same year, he says that there is nothing he would like better than to join in the Crusade against the Turks, but before doing so he needs the help of the Pope to create orderly conditions in Norway (the archdiocese of Bergen) and to solve the problems vis-à-vis the Teutonic Order<sup>70</sup>. The letter was carried to Rome by the King's envoy, Paulus Justinianus, the Bishop-elect of Bergen, who also bore written instructions concerning the Turkish file. On the King's behalf Justinianus was to praise the Pope's holy plans and express the King's surprise and grief that the Christian princes could not be persuaded to support this necessary and salutary venture. Secondly, he was to inform the Pope of the situation in Scandinavia and repeat the report of the heathen hordes in the North. Finally, he was to report that the King expected to be able to make 20,000 men available for the Turkish Crusade. However, the Danish commitment was, it was

---

<sup>66</sup> ‘Regis Daciae, Sveciae ac Norvegiae litteras habemus, quae mentem illius optimam exponunt.’ Pii II *Orationes Politicae et Ecclesiasticae*. Ed. G.D. Mansi. Lucca, 1755. Vol. I, p. 283

<sup>67</sup> Niitemaa, pp. 228-229.

<sup>68</sup> Pii II *Orationes Politicae et Ecclesiasticae*. Ed. G.D. Mansi. Lucca, 1755. Vol. I, p. 345

<sup>69</sup> APD 2101, Vol. III, p. 249; Møller Jensen, pp. 67 ff.

<sup>70</sup> Møller Jensen 69 ff.

indicated, subject to the condition that the Pope managed to produce a settlement between King Christian and the Polish King, and that the Norwegian Episcopal conflict (Bergen again) had been settled. In May 1458, the King again wrote Pope Calixtus concerning the Turkish Crusade – a letter of more or less the same tenor. It must have been clear to Rome that the King was not really willing to involve himself in the matter until his problems in Norway and Sweden had been solved. Cardinal Piccolomini, Pope Calixtus' trusted representative on the Turkish Crusade portfolio, will, of course, have seen the entire correspondence. His reaction is not known, but the offer for 20,000 men will not have appeared realistic to him. By way of comparison it may be mentioned that during the Congress in Mantua the following year the figures discussed for the total European crusading army was around 40,000-50,000 men. Pius wrote, *'The strength of their army lies in the janissaries, who number no more than 40,000. If we send as few as 50,000 Christian troops into battle there is no reason to doubt that they will win, for they are far better and braver soldiers.'*<sup>71</sup> When the Venetians demanded that 70,000 troops should be deployed in the land war against the Turks, they were met with scorn: *'You say you need 70,000 soldiers for the land war. But those who have studied the strength of the Turkish arms estimate that we can win the war with 40,000.'*<sup>72</sup>

A few years later, through his envoy to the Curia, King Louis XI offered to send 70,000 soldiers against the Turks if the Pope would support the claim of the House of Anjou to the Kingdom of Sicily. The Pope made a courteous reply, but entered the following note in his *Commentarii*, *'He only said very little about the fanciful, fabricated, and empty offer of 70,000 soldier to avoid appearing to approve of this nonsense.'*<sup>73</sup>

The third time that Piccolomini, this time as Pope Pius, had the opportunity to test the attitude of the Danish King to the Crusade against the Turks, was in connection with the Congress of Mantua held in the latter half of 1459. One of Pius' first acts as a newly elected Pope was to convene the European princes to the congress the purpose of which was to initiate the long-planned Crusade against the Turks. *'Pope Pius' Decree on the warfare against the Turks was published in the city of Rome, and legates were sent to all of Italy and the lands north of the Alps to ask for help from the faithful nations and princes ... A royal attorney was sent to England; Scotland, Denmark and Sweden received written invitations.'*<sup>74</sup>

---

<sup>71</sup> 'Robur sui exercitus in Genizeris consistere qui quadraginta milia non excedant. Nec dubitandum esse de victoria christianorum si vel quinquaginta milia ad pugnam ierint, quando et armis multo ac virtute praestant.' COM, p. 222. Meserve, p. 149

<sup>72</sup> 'Septuaginta milia pugnatorum ad bellum campestre deposcitis; qui res Turcorum inspexere quadraginta milibus confici bellum posse dijudicant.' COM, p. 224. Meserve, p. 155

<sup>73</sup> 'De superstitiosa et conficta atque inani oblatione septuaginta milium pugnatorum paucissima dixit ne approbare nugas videretur.' COM, p. 456

<sup>74</sup> 'Publicato apud urbem Romam Pii pontificis decreto bello contra Turcos gerendi legati per omnem Italiam et ad regiones transalpinas missi sunt, qui ex fidelibus populis ac regibus auxilia impetrarent ... Ad Anglos regius

At an assembly held in Rome in October 1458 concerning this matter, the Pope had heard Paulus Justianianus' inflated description of the Danish King's powers and resources and willingness to join the Crusade, as described above<sup>75</sup>. It was claimed that the King's realms encompassed 40,000 parishes! C.E. Werlauff estimated the number to be much smaller, as at the time, Denmark only had 2,358<sup>76</sup>. Despite his conciliatory comments, the Pope will hardly have put any trust in the assurances of the envoy – the assembly, to be sure, did not.

Neither the Emperor nor the Kings personally took part in the Congress of Mantua, and despite the oratory exertions of the ambassadors it was clear that the princes did not genuinely support a large-scale Crusade against the Turks, whether because of their own military entanglements or as the result of a general opposition to involving themselves in a venture headed by the Pope: this was, after all, the 15<sup>th</sup> century! Like his colleagues King Christian delivered himself of expressions of profound regret that he was unable to be present at the Congress<sup>77</sup>.

After six months of negotiations, the Congress was concluded with a result so meagre that it must have been deeply disappointing to the Pope. This is what he wrote in his *Commentarii*, '*... we may now disperse. We have done what had to be done here. We pray we have done God's work well. Though we dreamed of more than we actually found, still we cannot let ourselves think that nothing has been accomplished. Nor is all hope lost. Now we must say where matters stand, so that everyone may know what our prospects look like, which kings and countries are ready to protect the faith and which remain indifferent. If the Hungarians receive support they will make every effort to attack the Turks with all their might. The Germans promise an army of 42,000 fighting men ... [etc. until] England, now racked with civil war, holds out no hope, nor does Scotland, lying as it does in the farthest reaches of the ocean. Denmark, Sweden, and Norway are also too remote to send soldiers and they have no money to contribute, for they live on fish alone.*'<sup>78</sup>

In his report on the Congress of Mantua, Pius cuts back to his comments on Scotland, Denmark, Sweden, and Norway in the above-mentioned letter to

---

procurator missus est. Scoti et Dani et Svecii per litteras commoniti sunt.' COM, p. 794

<sup>75</sup> Cf. Note 15

<sup>76</sup> C.E. Werlauff, *Tre Afhandlinger til Kong Christian den Førstes Historie*. Copenhagen, 1819, p. 137

<sup>77</sup> APD 2167, Bd. 3, pp. 278-279

<sup>78</sup> 'Utinam Dei bene acta sit causa, quamvis meliora concepimus quam invenimus. Non tamen nihil omnino peractum est neque spes omnis cecidit. Dicendum est quo res deductae sint ut sciant omnes quid adsit spei et qui reges quique populi ad tuendam fidem vel prompti fuerint vel negligentes. Hungari, si adjuventur, summo conatu et universis viribus suis Turcos invadent. Germani exercitum pollicentur duorum et quadraginta milium bellatorum ... Anglia civilibus agitata motibus spem nullam pollicetur, neque Scotia in intimo abscondita oceano. Dania quoque Svecia ac Norvegia remotiores provinciae sunt quam milites possint mittere nec, solis contentae piscibus, pecuniam ministrare possunt.' COM, p. 238. Meserve, p. 197

Leonardo Benvoglianti<sup>79</sup>. Once again he stresses their remoteness and powerlessness. In the Mantua text remoteness is clarified as a logistical problem, and financial incapacity is explained by the countries' dependence on fisheries. It is to be noted that Denmark is listed among the countries whose non-commitment is excused by the Pope himself, and not among the countries that have failed to commit themselves, i.e. Venice, France, Castile, and Portugal. It is obvious that the Pope has these latter countries, and not Denmark, in mind when he mentions those 'who were indifferent to the Defence of the Faith'.

As will be seen, Piccolomini/Pius personally had no reason to be impressed by the Danish King's zeal in the matter of the Crusade against the Turks. He did not, on the other hand, have reason for any marked disillusionment with the Scandinavian countries. It was, of course, well known at the Curia that the Danish King, like most other European Kings, indeed the Emperor and the Pope himself, for that matter, were entangled in military actions and conflicts which made it virtually impossible for him to take part in a Crusade. General peace-making in Europe was a prerequisite for a Crusade – and this also applied to Denmark. But whereas Pius felt that other European princes might contribute money and men as long as they did so proportionally so that their participation would not weaken them in relation to their enemies, the Pope entertained no such ideas as far as Denmark and the other countries on the northern European periphery. Their non-participation and excuses were accepted with a papal shrug of the shoulders.

Although it seems as if Johannes Lindbæk did not know Pius II's *Commentarii* one still has to agree with his conclusion, 'The Pope, however, did not take exception to his [Christian I's] refusal; he was more familiar than his predecessors had been with conditions in the Nordic region, and knew that assistance was an impossibility.'<sup>80</sup>

Whether or not Rome thought that the Danish King personally was at all interested in a Crusade against the Turks, the opinion in the early 1460ies was – rightly or wrongly – that Denmark and the Nordic region did not possess the financial capacity or military capability to be an effective partner in the Crusade against the Turks. This view is further supported by the fact that Pius, who is normally very meticulous in reporting the legations sent by the European Kings, does not even mention the envoys sent by the Danish King.

Whereas the prevarications and excuses made by other European princes were brushed aside with contempt, those made by the Danish King were accepted at face value. Therefore, the issue was never a barrier to the gradual improvement in the relationship between the Danish King and the Holy See which already in

---

<sup>79</sup> Cf. note 25

<sup>80</sup> Lindbæk, p. 51



the day of Pius II was to replace the tense relationship characterizing the Marcellus-era<sup>81</sup>.

## 5. Conclusion

Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini (Pius II) saw Denmark and the Nordic realms as a vast area on the northern periphery of Europe. His general concept of the nature and economy of the region was influenced by his own experience of Scotland which he frequently mentioned in the same breath as the Nordic realms, i.e. as an indigent and barbaric peripheral area.

He sees Denmark as part of the German sphere, yet acknowledges the status of the Danish King as a sovereign prince vis-à-vis the Holy Roman Empire although at other times the kingdom had been dependent upon the Empire.

During Pius' pontificate the relationship between the Curia and Denmark improved – replacing the tense relationship under Marcellus. This development was not least due to the Pope's general pro-princely policy, and we must assume that it was reinforced by his sympathy and respect for the Danish royal couple's relations in Brandenburg and Mantua and his need for a positive relationship with the Brandenburg and the Gonzaga families.

We must assume that the Nordic Union made a certain impact on him, but only to such an extent that it was still possible for Piccolomini as Pope to excuse king Christian's non-participation in his crusading endeavours by referring to the underdeveloped state of the country – based on fisheries! Throughout his career at the Imperial Court Piccolomini had come into such close contact with the European princes that he can hardly have laboured under strong illusions about their religious fervour. Therefore, he might not have attributed any great interest in the crusading cause to the Danish King, but in any case he did not expect Denmark to have significant resources to make available for his Crusade against the Turks.

## Abbreviations

---

<sup>81</sup> Lindbæk, pp. 19 ff.

APD: Acta Pontificum Danica : pavelige Aktstykker vedrørende Danmark 1316-1536. Vol. I-VII. Copenhagen, 1904-1943.

COM: Pii II Commentarii rerum memorabilium que temporibus svvis contigervnt ad codicem fidem nunc primvm editi ab Adriano van Heck. Città del Vaticano, 1984. (Studi e testi; 312-313)

EUROPA: Enee Silvii Piccolominei postea Pii pp. II de Europa. Ed. A. van Heck. (Studi e Testi; 398). Città del Vaticano, 2001

TT: Michael v. Cotta-Schønberg, *To tekster af Æneas Silvius Piccolomini om Danmark*. In: Umisteligt – Festskrift til Erland Kolding Nielsen. Red. af John T. Lauridsen og Olaf Olsen. Copenhagen, The Royal Library, 2007, pp. 55-74. It has been published in the h-prints repository in a slightly revised English edition as: Two Texts by Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini on Denmark, cf. [http://www.hprints.org/docs/00/45/77/36/PDF/Cotta-Schonberg\\_2010a\\_Two\\_texts\\_by\\_Eneas\\_Sivius\\_Picvolomini\\_on\\_Denmark\\_A.pdf](http://www.hprints.org/docs/00/45/77/36/PDF/Cotta-Schonberg_2010a_Two_texts_by_Eneas_Sivius_Picvolomini_on_Denmark_A.pdf)

VIRIS: Enee Silvii Piccolominei postea Pii pp. II De viris illustribus. Ed. A. van Heck. (Studi e Testi; 341). Città del Vaticano, 1991.

WOLKAN: Der Briefwechsel des Eneas Silvius Piccolomini. ed. Rudolf Wolkan. Vols. 1-3. Vienna, 1909-1918. (Fontes rerum austriacarum. Diplomatarium et acta 61-62, 67- 68).

In the above texts, Latin quotations are reproduced in keeping with normal orthography.