This article deals with the Diarium Vadstenense, a Liber memorialis originating in Vadstena, the abbey founded by Saint Birgitta of Sweden. Written by a succession of Birgittine friars, this parchment manuscript is still preserved in its original form. It records internal, monastic events from the founding of the abbey in the second half of the fourteenth century to the time the last brother left the community, after the Reformation. Glimpses from the world outside the abbey are seen here and there throughout the text. However, during a central part of the fifteenth century, some of the entries were extended, and the writing changes character. These texts can be seen as a more or less continuous chronicle, tendentiously describing the complicated political situation in Sweden in the 1460s, a time marked by wars and conflicts. Indeed, parts of the texts were so controversial that they were later (partly) erased by a cautious medieval ‘editor’. The focus in this article will be on the time frame when the text was written, the personal views and opinions of the writers, confidentiality, political bias and censorship.

The Diarium Vadstenense – and especially the chronicle parts of its text – will be at the centre of our attention, but let us start from the beginning. Vadstena Abbey was founded by Saint Birgitta (1303–1373) in the Swedish province of Östergötland and intended for sixty sisters and twenty-five brothers. Not long after the activities began in the abbey in the 1370s, a series of brothers began reporting on events inside the monastery and sometimes also on events outside. Their writings were collected and
took the form of longer and shorter entries in a memorial book. In addition to the factual information found in the narratives, now and then we see a further dimension: a Vadstena brother’s personal views on what was going on in his surroundings. Other documents and written materials preserved from the abbey, such as charters, letters and sermons, do not convey subjective contemporary images in this way to any great extent. Personal opinions and political bias will be discussed later in this article.

The Latin text of the *Diarium* is preserved in its original form, and this medieval source is now kept in the Uppsala University Library. An initial part of an older, medieval volume was separated from the main text at the beginning of the eighteenth century (perhaps in connection with the volume’s acquisition by the Uppsala Library). Consequently, the text is found today in two separate parchment manuscripts in the Uppsala collection – Manuscripts C 92 and C 89 – the latter being the main manuscript (232 pages). The shorter C 92 contains only an introductory text, mostly consisting of a series of years without any narrative. Altogether, the Vadstena brothers’ memorial book spans the period 1384–1545 and consists of almost 1,200 entries, some longer, some shorter texts, often starting with the date of an event. The book was an internal document, written by and intended for the brothers in Vadstena. It seems very likely that their memorial book never left the brothers’ part of the abbey until after the medieval period.

The time factor is important in studying the *Diarium Vadstenense*. Is it past or present? During the more than 150 years covered by the book, it seems that the scribes (sometimes the scribe is identical with the author, sometimes not) narrated the events not too long after they had occurred. It is actually possible to study this somewhat more closely by looking at the inclusion of revealing facts and the use of certain phrases that tell us something of the relative time frame. I have set up a very simple survey (the image is taken from my thesis) in order to illustrate. The survey is based on a review of the entries that were probably written in the *Diarium* within a year after the event described (seen in the first column with x’s) and distinguishing them from entries which must have been added later (the next column to the right).

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3 MS C 92 also contains older annalistic material that must have been in the volume when it began its function in the male part of the abbey in Vadstena. – On the origin of the manuscript and for further codicological information, see Gejrot 1988, 3ff.
4 The numbering of years actually starts with 1323, but very little information has been inserted in the series of years. As the actual recording seems to have started in the 1380s, these entries concerning earlier events (mostly dealing with Saint Birgitta’s life) are to be regarded as retrospective.
5 See Gejrot 1988, 18ff.
Fig. 1. Indications of the time of writing in the *Diarium Vadstenense*.

The list refers to conclusions that can be drawn from comparing the contents with a change of scribes, for instance. One of the first scribes to be identified travelled abroad on three separate occasions, and each time he handed over the writing to a fellow brother before leaving. An analysis of these passages shows that the writing down of entries at this time could take place quite close in time to the event, within weeks. Furthermore, a certain characteristic wording sometimes indicates that the entry was being written more or less directly in connection with what was being described. In an entry made in the year 1413, which gives a detailed account of the death of one of the brothers, the scribe reveals his exact source as the brother ‘living in the neighbouring cell’ to the deceased friar. A close connection with the events described is the normal situation for large parts of the text. However, as it turns out, there are certain periods when the narrating of events seems to have taken place later, and then in a more edited form. This is true for the 1460s and 1470s (see the red box in Fig. 1) – and especially for the section that I will call *the chronicle of the mid-1460s*. We will return to this later.

The source is in its way unique. There is no other Latin monastic chronicle of this size preserved in Sweden. Not counting a few annalistic sources, mainly from monasteries, we know of only one medieval historical work in Latin that was written in Sweden and has been preserved: the *Chronica Regni* 7

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7 See e.g. DV 143–144.
8 DV 228:1: *... prout ille dixit, qui in vicina iacebat camera...*
Gothorum by the Uppsala professor Ericus Olai, composed around the year 1470. It covers Swedish history from the oldest times up to the author's lifetime.

As for chronicles written in Swedish, these are rimkrönikor or ‘rhymed chronicles’. This chronicle series, always in verse, begins with the Erik Chronicle. Written in the 1320s, it depicts the period 1230–1319. From the fifteenth century we have the Engelbrekt Chronicle and shortly thereafter the Karl Chronicle, both of which were completed about 1452. The Karl Chronicle covers the years 1389–1452. A continuation of this text followed in the Sture Chronicle, which deals with the rest of the fifteenth century until 1496. These chronicles were summarised in the term Stora rimkrönikan. In the 1450s the Lilla rimkrönikan was composed, describing Swedish history from the dawn of time until its own day. This chronicle was revised several times, and the final version covered the period up to 1520. Furthermore, a number of smaller chronicles have been preserved, for example, the bishop chronicles of Skara (from the fifteenth century) and Linköping (from the 1520s).

But let us return to the Diarium and look at an entry (DV 658) describing events taking place on 23 February 1455. On this day there were great celebrations in Vadstena, with music played by slide trombones and other instruments, and crowds of people gathering. The reason was that a little girl, only nine years of age, was to enter the women’s convent. We cannot know her thoughts, but it would not be surprising if she felt a little uneasy: she was about to be separated from her familiar environment, her family and friends. She probably knew something about the abbey she was about to join, at least the fact that she would never leave. Perhaps someone had told her what was waiting for her: absolute obedience, bans on unnecessary talk and laughter, no personal possessions; she would have to rise at four o’clock every morning for matins.

The Diarium writer is our eyewitness report on this event, and we are told that the little girl did not show any signs of distress. ‘You could not see any pride, laughter or sadness in this girl, but only great spiritual strength and piety, when the habit was received’. When she was being handed over to the abbess, our source continues, she showed a ‘keen desire’ to enter the convent as she rushed from her father’s hands to the nuns. We are not dealing here with just an ordinary girl, but in fact
with a princess. The father leaving his daughter in the convent was the reigning king of Sweden, Karl Knutsson.\textsuperscript{13}

In fact, King Karl was actively involved in the initiation ceremony. This was obviously an honour for the abbey, but the \textit{Diarium} writer noticed a violation of the monastic rules.\textsuperscript{14} With a crown on his head and dressed in white, the king himself had walked into the closed choir of the abbey church, a place that was to be entered only by confessed Vadstena brothers. In the choir he went so far as to read parts of the Latin ritual during the ceremony.\textsuperscript{15} In addition, the girl was being admitted to the Vadstena convent even though she had not reached the age of eighteen (the youngest possible age for entry, which had been decided by Saint Birgitta herself). A papal dispensation had first been acquired.\textsuperscript{16}

How typical is the story of the young princess for the book as a whole? This question can be answered in several ways. In fact, the narrative of the events of February 1455 comes at a time when the text in this monastic manuscript can be said to be changing in character, from a monastic focus to an increased interest in political matters. What is distinctive about this time? The writing belongs to an identifiable scribe,\textsuperscript{17} who passed away in 1461. That year is a definite \textit{terminus ante quem}, and the entry was written within a time span of six years. All the same, the story was probably written within a year, as was a previous entry reporting on the papal dispensation for the young princess’s initiation into the convent, together with most of the texts describing events during the 1450s.

In other respects, however, the story of the little princess differs from the narration of other periods. In the 1380s, the very first decades of the abbey’s existence, the structure of the book is simple and quite uniform. The focus is on internal monastic events, namely the introduction of new sisters and brothers to the abbey, obituaries of deceased members of the community and deceased abbey benefactors. There are reports on the regular visits paid by the diocesan bishops (who were to inspect the abbey) and on travels made by the brothers in matters concerning the Birgittine order, which was growing steadily across Europe. News about monasteries being established is common, and negotiations with the curia were seen as a natural part of the brothers’ duties. Royal visitors are duly noted, from Queen Margaret’s stay in the vicinity of the abbey in the first years of the fifteenth century to events after that time.\textsuperscript{18}

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\textsuperscript{13} Karl Knutsson (Bonde), regent of Sweden 1438–1440, King of Sweden 1448–1457, 1464–1465 and from 1467 until his death in May 1470. For Karl Knutsson’s biography, see Kumlien 1975, 622–630.
\textsuperscript{14} (DV 658:2).
\textsuperscript{15} ... facta est transgressio clausure: Nam primo dominus rex Karolus coronatus intravit chorum fratrum per totum illud officium ibi manens alba subtilli et cappa indutus. Et cum evangelium legi debuisset, ipse dixit ‘Dominus vobiscum’ et sequencia sancti evangelii secundum Iohannem (DV 658:2–3).
\textsuperscript{16} On the Birgittine entrance age for nuns, see the passage in chapter 19 of the Birgittine Rule (\textit{Regula Salvatoris}), printed in Eklund 1975, 168 (\textit{Nulla sororum ante decimum annum annum etatis umquam ad istam religionem suscipiat}: ‘No sister may be taken into this order before the age of 18’). See also Geijrot 1996, 276 (commentary).
\textsuperscript{17} The scribe was Johannes Benekini; see Geijrot 1988, 34–39.
\textsuperscript{18} Queen Margaret (Margareta Valdemarsdotter, 1353–1412) ruled Denmark and Norway from 1387 and Sweden from 1389. For her biography, see Haug 2000.
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During this period, the *Diarium* texts as a rule are short and factual in style. All the same, it is not unusual for the views and opinions of the writer (as a representative of the monks at Vadstena) to come through. We saw it above in the remarks on King Karl breaking the rules during the princess’s initiation ceremony. Just to mention a few typical cases, there is the obituary of a noblewoman, an abbey benefactress, who was buried in the abbey in 1415. She is reported to have been one of the few women to have ‘preserved a praiseworthy manner of dressing’. Another instance can be seen in the report about a nun who died in 1422. In violation of the rules she was found to have kept fur-lined clothes in her cell. ‘I hope they are not her own!’ – *utinam non propria!* – the writer exclaimed.

As mentioned above, the *Diarium* seems to have remained without exception in the brothers’ part of the abbey, and entries like the ones just mentioned show that they seem to have regarded the manuscript in an almost intimate and confidential way. In 1442 there is an interesting annotation that emphasises this sense of confidentiality. Here, the scribe decided to speak directly, as if to a successor:

Brother! Note the following carefully and avoid telling it to other people: Below the floor and in the space between four walls [...] you will find a treasure trove or a vaulted room. This room has been built so that we can safely and securely store books, treasures of the monastery and other things (shrines, communion chalices, etc.) when discord prevails in the kingdom and the church’s immunity is in danger, or when you fear a foreign attack or a war.

The writer then goes on to tell his fellow brothers how to gain access to the trove, but we will omit that here.

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19 DV 252: *Hec quasi sola conservabat laudabilem consuetudinem in habitu feminarum.*
20 DV 331: *Hec reliquit post se multa superflua – et utinam non propria! – scilicet forraturas et similia.*
21 DV 523: *Item, frater, nota attente cautumque habeas neque pluribus referas, quod sub pavimento et in spacio infra quatuor muros, ... est una custodia sive domus testudinata. Que ideo facta, ut – dum in regno discordia aliqua habeatur, et immunitas ecclesie violatur, sive dum extraneorum incursus vel bellum timeatur – ibi tunc libri, clenodia monasterii et res alie, videlicet reliquaria, calices et cetera, secure et provide custodiantur.*
As already mentioned, a gradual shift of focus in the *Diarium* can be observed during the 1450s. The texts on internal abbey events can still be found, but the attention now becomes directed more towards the outside world.²² When Karl Knutsson became king of Sweden in 1448 – as the Nordic union had broken down for a time – the author included texts on wars and political realities, as well as passages on the king’s visits to Vadstena and his interference in the monastic leadership.

Vadstena Abbey, with numerous estates and large revenues, had in fact become an important factor in Swedish financial and political realities. In 1452 factions became apparent in the monastery. During the all but continuous wars against the Danish, King Karl actually managed to remove the pro-Danish abbess (who was the aunt of King Christian²³) and the confessor general (the male leader), from their offices and have the abbey install instead persons whom he considered loyal to his cause. These events are narrated in the *Diarium* not too long after the decisions were made, and we find a somewhat surprised comment by the scribe on what has happened. After reporting on the investigation into the matter made by the diocesan bishop – who found nothing wrong with the old leadership – the scribe commented: ‘But Abbess Ingeborg resigned from her office so that we should not lose any monastic property or expose ourselves to the king’s wrath because of them [the abbess and the confessor].’²⁴

The *Diarium* chronicles the continued battles against Denmark at this time and several other visits by King Karl. We have already seen how the king placed his daughter Birgitta among the Vadstena sisters and dealt with the abbey leadership. But the monarch made repeated visits. He had opinions on many things, he suggested additions to the monastic rule, he bought valuables from the abbey, and he seems to have been eager to give advice in practical matters.²⁵ In the *Diarium* narrative of these years – the early 1450s – he is viewed with respect, but also with some caution, it seems.

In 1457 there was a sudden and dramatic change. The archbishop of Uppsala, Johannes Benedicti (Jôns Bengtsson),²⁶ turned against King Karl, who had to flee the country. As an immediate result, the Nordic union was reinstated when King Christian of Denmark was elected to the Swedish throne. In Vadstena this turn of events meant that the old abbey leaders could now return.

The *Diarium* narrates both King Karl’s defeat and the return of the abbess and the confessor general. The story of the royal escape, which was not at all honourable, is told in a way that shows where the author’s sympathies lie: with the dethroned king. ‘He acted wisely and gave in to their malice’ is the

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²² On Vadstena and the secular politics of Sweden in this period, see also Berglund 2003, 167ff, where the *Diarium* is one of the most important sources used.
²⁴ DV 627. *Sed ne propter ipsos monasterium in aliquibus bonis damnum incurreret et regiam indignacionem, abbatissa Ingeborgis fferia ... infra octavas ascensionis officio resignavit.* – The royal letter seems to have reached the abbey in April 1452.
²⁵ E.g. DV 621, 641, 654, 666.
expression used. The return of the pro-Danish leadership in Vadstena is carefully described. But something interesting has happened here. A later editor has erased the whole entry, apparently careful not to let anything stand that could disturb the important royal relations. Luckily for us, it has been possible to decipher most of the important words in this entry with the use of ultra-violet light.

This raises several questions. When, by whom and exactly why was this erasure done? We cannot answer these questions for certain, but the situation provides an opportunity to discuss censorship in the Diarium. Censorship had taken place before – in earlier parts of the volume, to be precise. In 1403, obviously in connection with a visit to the abbey by Queen Margaret, the abbess had to resign after serious accusations. We do not know the exact circumstances surrounding the resignation, but we would probably know more if someone had not decided to excise an entire leaf.

It would seem natural to conclude that the two pages of missing text touched upon something sensitive, and what first comes to mind are the supposedly scandalous affairs of the abbess. Someone may have thought that keeping this leaf in the Diarium constituted a potential risk for the abbey’s reputation. The first sentence after the excised leaf, in a text dealing with Queen Margaret, has also been erased. Regrettably, it has not been possible to decipher anything in this erased text that makes any sense. A short version of the abbess’s resignation was then squeezed into an empty space on the page before the cut. The text flow is not entirely homogeneous, and the entry seems to have been...
inserted later. We may add that the scribe is the same for the surrounding entries. If our assumptions about the added entry are correct, then this would mean that the manipulation was performed within the active period of this particular scribe, that is, before 1410, when he passed away.\textsuperscript{30} The same thing – a leaf having been cut away because of information about a resignation – seems to have taken place in 1454 when one of the male leaders had to leave the abbey. This time, it was the Confessor General\textsuperscript{31} who was forced by the two convents to resign because of his illness. A longer narrative – obviously replacing information on the excised leaf – was inserted in an empty space in a previous part of the book. The medieval editor is clear about what has been done:

It should be noted that the following section has its place below, i.e. at the year 1454, but as it has been left out there, it will be recorded here.\textsuperscript{32}

It seems that the \textit{Diarium} had become an important text in the abbey. Even if the volume was not meant to leave its safe haven among the brothers, they could not be sure where it might turn up in the future. And there is further censorship in the text, as we will soon see.

Let us now return to the point where we left off a while ago, at the exile of King Karl and the reinstated union in 1457. It is time to see how the \textit{Diarium} writers deal with the complicated political situation. From 1463, there is a relatively uniform, coherent, unbroken narrative – a chronicle within the narrative frame of the memorial book itself – which continues for a few years, covering about twenty manuscript pages. Who were the main players? And how are they portrayed? Is there a tendency to favour any of the main characters in the turmoil that follows? The standpoint of the \textit{Diarium} is clear, as we will see.

There is the Danish monarch, Christian, since 1457 also the king of Sweden. In opposition to him we find his arch-enemy Karl Knutsson, the exiled Swedish king. A third powerful constellation is seen in two church leaders who also represented two of the leading families of the Swedish nobility, the Archbishop of Uppsala and his young cousin, Kettil Karlsson,\textsuperscript{33} then bishop of Linköping.\textsuperscript{34} The chronicle of the mid-1460s reaches its climax in the story of the remarkable Battle of Haraker in April 1464, when it reports how a Swedish peasant army celebrated a complete victory over the trained Danish troops.\textsuperscript{35}

\textsuperscript{30} DV 118–120. On the scribe, Andreas Lydekini, who was the abbey’s librarian, see Gejrot 1988, 26–27.
\textsuperscript{31} Botulphus Haguini (Botulf Häkansson).
\textsuperscript{32} DV 579: \textit{Notandum, quod hec, que sequuntur, locum habent infra, videlicet anno Domini etc. liii. Sed quia ibi omissa fuerunt, ideo hic ad memoriam reducantur.}
\textsuperscript{33} Katillus Karoli or in Swedish, Kettil Karlsson (Vasa), was Bishop of Linköping from 1459 until his death in 1465; see Schück 1959, 113ff.
\textsuperscript{34} On other sources available for these events, see Hagnell 1941, 204.
\textsuperscript{35} DV 753–755.
The *Diarium* is practically the only source for this event. By concentrating on the course of events (no dates are given) and using such stylistic devices as parallelism, exaggeration and heightening of action, the writer managed to give intensity and force to the narration. A brief summary of the contents gives a sufficient illustration of the technique used.

DV 753:1–5: Bishop Kettil and other relatives of the imprisoned Archbishop of Uppsala desire revenge on the king and prepare an uprising. The well-known fighters of Dalarna, *Vallenses... qui maxime sunt feroces et bellicosii*, are among the men recruited.

DV 753:6–8: Kettil is proclaimed *dux tocius regni et guerre incepte*, a fact which makes him even bolder: *et factus ex hoc audacior*. Stockholm is besieged by the rebels.

DV 754:1: Meanwhile, in Copenhagen, King Christian hears about the Swedish revolt and hastens to form a large army (*congregavit ... exercitum magnum*).

DV 754:2–6: The Danish troops march at great speed through Sweden; along the way they ravage Bishop Kettil’s residence in Linköping and reach Stockholm much sooner than expected.

DV 754:7: However, just before the Danes arrive, the bishop and his men leave Stockholm, pretending to flee in panic. They halt in Västerås.

DV 755:1: Christian stays only one night in Stockholm. Like Kettil in 753:7, he is confident – *factus animosior quam prius* – and immediately sets out to fight the rebels.

DV 755:2: Kettil and the Vallenses once again feign flight; acquainted with the area, they know where to hide. In the forest by Haraker Church they wait for the enemy to come.

DV 755:3: The king, unsuspecting, calls a halt in order to speak to his men in a field just beside the forest, *nesciens hostes in eadem latitare*.

DV 755:4–5: As soon as the Danes leave the field, the Swedish rebels make a surprise attack *cum impetu maximo*; the battle goes on for two hours, and there are great losses among the king’s troops, while Kettil’s men win an overwhelming victory: *Vallenses vero campum et victoriam optinuerunt*.

The distance between Linköping and Stockholm is about 200 kilometres; that between Stockholm and Västerås, about 100 kilometres. It is obvious that the author simplified and shortened what must have
taken quite some time for the troops to achieve. But the story needed dramatic speed. The increasingly hurried and parallel movements of the royal army and the Swedish recruits and the suspense caused by Christian’s ignorance of the ambush combined to create a dramatic effect; the passage ends in an epigrammatic climax, with the men of Dalarna, Vallenses, at the centre of attention. The prejudices of the chronicle of the mid-1460s are clear, not least in the passage from 1464 retold above. The Danish king is shown as a nervous man, easy to fool. In other parts of the chronicle he is portrayed as a greedy inventor of new taxes and a violator of ecclesiastical immunity.

According to the chronicle above, Christian’s presumptuous behaviour led to the Danish disaster at Haraker in 1464, as we have seen, but in addition, the author managed to portray Christian’s timorous character. It is the return of the exiled King Karl that Christian fears:

A rumour was spread that King Karl was about to return. This news so frightened King Christian that he no longer wanted to reside in the palace in Stockholm. Instead he boarded his ship and hurried towards Denmark.

Christian is portrayed as a coward, but if we continue reading, the author does not show any more benevolence towards the leaders of the episcopal party. After the Battle of Haraker, the author remembers the men of Dalarna and does not mention Bishop Kettil as one of the victors. In fact, the bishops are soon shown to be deceitful and conspiring traitors.

Thus, neither King Christian nor the bishops and their followers seem to be treated favourably by the writer. Instead, he has chosen to support the third of these three alternatives, Karl Knutsson. The partiality towards Karl is revealed here and there, for instance, in the following passage describing the exiled king’s return to his country in 1464, to which he was recalled after the Battle of Haraker. The purpose is to convey to the reader a general impression of a popular monarch, who accordingly is connected with the victorious men of Dalarna:

King Karl arrived from Prussia on the outskirts of Stockholm, bringing with him a large number of ships and armed men. He was at once received with benevolence by the people in his realm and by the Vallenses.
Soon, when Karl is again betrayed by the cunning bishops, the wording of the Diarium shows the author’s sympathy with a king in distress. The narrator depicts the bishops as ‘eagerly’ looking for a way to expel poor King Karl.\footnote{\textit{et de expulsione pauperis regis Karuli studiose pertractatur} (DV 758:3).}

‘Poor’ Karl is indeed in a hopeless position, or, as our writer, borrowing a phrase from the Bible’s King David, puts it, ‘in the midst of tribulations’ (\textit{in medio tribulationis positus}):\footnote{DV 762:6; cf. Vulgata, Psalms 137:7.} Surrounded by enemies, Karl is soon forced to surrender. This humiliating turn of events is, however, reported in words that praise King Karl’s wise conduct, whereas the archbishop, despite his temporary success, is referred to as a usurper. The bias of the chronicle in the 1460s can be summarised as follows:

- \textit{Christian}: a coward, only interested in raising taxes
- \textit{The bishops}: traitors and conspirators
+ \textit{Karl Knutsson}: an efficient king; the victim of evil and treacherous enemies

Karl Knutsson having left the political scene again – this time travelling to Finland – the bishops rule for a short period, but they fail to establish their secular power. When Bishop Kettil dies from the plague, their rule is practically over. Finally, two years later, King Karl is once again back in Stockholm, and now his position is supported by a new, forceful group of leaders.

Karl Knutsson’s third reign (1467–70) has been described by historians as ‘completely illusory’.\footnote{Andersson 1956, 95.} The Diarium treats the period without any longer narrative, but the lingering picture is nevertheless that of a forceful and efficient monarch whose rule is still being marred by treacherous enemies.\footnote{Cf., for instance, DV 787 and 789 on the struggle for control of Axvall Castle in 1468 and 1469. Here Karl is the careful ruler, who has to act with force, when – once again – he is betrayed: \textit{Et tunc quibusdam proditoriis procurantibus factum est magnum bellum...} (DV 789).} The author of this section is at pains to put King Karl in as favourable a light as possible. We have also seen that the chronicle’s bias or prejudice towards King Karl Knutsson is quite strong in the mid-1460s. What is the reason for this obviously partisan way of describing the king and his actions? The answer may be found in the opinions that were current after King Karl’s death in May 1470, when his nephew and ‘political godson’, Sten Sture, was appointed regent of Sweden.\footnote{Sten Sture the Elder (Sjöbladsätten) was the son of Karl Knutsson’s half-sister Birgitta Stensdotter (Bielke). He was the regent of Sweden from 1470 to 1497 and from 1501 until his death in 1503. On his biography, see Palme 1968.} The new Swedish ruler based his powerful position on a direct connection to Karl Knutsson, who is said to have transferred his authority to Sten Sture on his deathbed.\footnote{DV 804.} It was clearly in the new leader’s interest to describe his predecessor in as positive a light as possible.
We may conclude that the chronicle text of the mid-1460s and the remaining entries of the 1460s were composed and written down at the same time, probably around 1470, but no later than the autumn of 1471, that is, perhaps six or seven years after the first events took place in 1463. This is indicated both by the regular appearance and coherence of the manuscript pages and by the text itself, for instance, in a remark about an outbreak of pestilence that says that the epidemic lasted for two years (et duravit hec pestilencia in regno continue fere per duos annos).\footnote{DV 759.} And it is further shown by what the text does not say. In the autumn of 1471 Christian I and his followers were defeated at the decisive Battle of Brunkeberg; the fact that this battle is not mentioned indicates that the writing was finished before this momentous event took place.\footnote{In MS C 89, the battle is mentioned on an inserted, loose piece of paper (in medieval script, but not in the hand of the main scribe of the 1460s).}

One explanation for the inclusion of these external, political narrative parts could be that the town of Vadstena seems to have served as the headquarters of King Karl during the operations of 1469. It is not far-fetched to assume that relevant records – and witnesses to the operations – were close at hand. We may further assume that at this time, when the abbey was geographically – and, it seems, politically – close to Karl Knutsson and his supporters, the author\footnote{It is, in fact, possible to suggest a name for the author of the chronicle in the 1460s: Brother Johannes Johannis. He had been elected confessor general at Vadstena in 1468.} of our chronicle had access to various written sources that are now lost, sources that may also have been used by writers of other, vernacular, texts, such as the \textit{Sture Chronicle (Sturekrönikan)}.\footnote{Above all, \textit{Sturekrönikan}. See further Gejrot 1988, 49.}

Let us close by looking at an unusual part of the chronicle, a sort of climax when it comes to bias and critique. It comes in the form of a forceful poem written in the metre of a late medieval sequence\footnote{DV 762a. On the metre, see Norberg 1958, 173–174.} and is found in the middle of the chronicle of 1465. In the previous cases, interior monastic problems (the resignations of an abbess and a confessor general) were behind the manipulations. This time the criticism is directed towards the highest Swedish ecclesiastical leaders. The targets of this highly critical poem are the bishops who ruled the country in 1465. The tone is indeed harsh, and this led to something that we have already seen several times: the erasure of a controversial text from the parchment, most probably by a cautious later editor in the abbey.\footnote{The verses were discovered during the author’s work on the edition of the manuscript in the 1980s, and the passage with the erased text was closely examined under ultra-violet light. The results were first reported in an appended entry to the edition in Gejrot 1988, 317–318.}
Here we see the same kind of censorship discussed above, even if this time no leaves were excised.

Regnum manet absque <rege>

<--- --- --- --- --- --->

<-- --> et opprimitur

per tres post sequentes annos,
donec ipsum per tyrannos
in partes dividitur.

Civitates depredantur,
navigantes spoliuntur,
franguntur ecclesie

B<ona> cleri rapiantur
et plebani pregrav<antur>,
<da>ti sunt inedie.
Nullus gaudet in tellure
nec in mare nec in rure;
sed letantur impii

Quis predatur non est cura;
latro firmus stat cum fure,
cum sunt ambo socii.

Translation (prose)
The kingdom is without a king
<-- --> and is oppressed.

During three consecutive years
until the tyrants decide
to divide it into three parts

The towns are looted,
people at sea are plundered
the churches are broken down.

Clerical property is stolen
the priests are suffering gravely
and must starve.

No one is happy on the earth
not at sea, not on land.
But the impious are joyful.

They do not care who is being ravaged;
the robber stands firm with the thief,
as the two are companions.
Let us now summarise. We have seen a monastic memorial book that changes its character from an internal narrative, recording mostly monastic events, into a chronicle directed to events in the external world. The text allows personal opinions to be expressed, but also sometimes political inclinations. This later led to censorship of sensitive passages, by erasure or excision. The reasons for this carefulness with the opinions expressed and for the editorial manipulations are to be found in the fact that the book was preserved and used by a succession of Birgittine friars who rightly thought – and feared – that present or future readers would see it as expressing the views of the brothers at Vadstena.

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