

## II The Case Against Dippel in Altona

Dippel said that he did not himself look up the Nordic revolution, but that a thread had pulled him all of the time and taken him there. (Senckenberg, 1732)<sup>85</sup>

### The Brief Version

This is how the standard version of the reason for Dippel's banishment from Altona goes: Dippel offended Altona's Chief President Reventlow in a letter to King Frederik IV, 21 December 1717. Here, he attacked the Reventlows for accepting bribes to influence the outcome of court cases. Then, a Commission was appointed to investigate this libel, and it sentenced him, in the fall of 1719, to lifelong banishment to Bornholm. All of these three claims, however, are erroneous.<sup>86</sup>

This brief version covers a considerably more complicated process involving the Altona City Council, the government in Copenhagen, two successive commissions, and many other suspects and accused in Altona, all tied together by an extraordinarily determined effort on the part of the Reventlows. This can be established from the case files, now in the State Archives in Copenhagen, comprising Dippel's 1717 let-

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<sup>85</sup> Senckenberg's diary: "CD dicebat er sey in der Nordischen revolution nicht gelauffen selbst, sondern alß an einem faden überall hingezogen v. geleitet worden" (vol. II, 376).

<sup>86</sup> These claims have roots already in the biographical sketch "Dippelii Personalia", probably by Canz, in *Eröff III* in 1747 (743–68), and may be found in Bender (1882, 108): "Er fand sich nämlich veranlasst auch auf das bürgerliche Gebiet überzugreifen und in einem vom 21. December 1717 datierten Schreiben nicht nur den Magistrat von Altena sondern auch seinen Gönner den Statthalter Grafen Reventlow und dessen Gemahlin beim Könige zu denunzieren", or by A. Jantzen in *Bricka* (1890), vol. IV, 273–75. A later example is Winkle (1988). I myself must plead guilty of having continued the dissemination of this myth in Mchangama and Stjernfelt (2016). The only scholar overcoming these misunderstandings, to my knowledge, is Rustmeier (1957) who has a more detailed presentation of the case, realizing that Reventlow was not attacked in Dippel's 1717 letter, and that the case developed considerably over several years. Yet, even Rustmeier is missing several decisive turning points of the case, such as Bandau's accusations against Dippel for bribery or the Commission's mild penalty proposal. Bender and Rustmeier are probably the only investigators having spent some effort with the case file collection, the former around 1880, the latter in the 1950s, and Rustmeier is probably responsible for the present partial ordering of the files. Even detailed accounts of Danish history of the period such as Holm (1891) have little to say about the Dippel case; here we hear that the reason for the case against Dippel should have been offense not of Reventlow but of the King (569). Holm's main source is a short section on Dippel by Andreas Hojer in his history of Frederik IV's reign (1829, ms. originally completed in 1732, vol. II, 208–211). Dippel is rumored to have authored a narrative presenting his version of events (cf. *Eröff III*, 744) which is unfortunately no longer extant.

ter triggering the whole process, witness interrogations, commission reports, correspondence between authorities in Copenhagen, Altona, and Glückstadt, personal letters and complaints, plus a series of other documents. All in all, the case comprises some 100 documents numbering around 450 handwritten pages, most of them in German with occasional Low German, some of Reventlow's personal letters in French. Whether these case files have, at some point, been organized by authorities at the time or by later archivists remains unknown, but they no longer appear in any clear order. At a certain point, they have been roughly sorted in folders by a German scholar, but that order is also not intact, so for all practical purposes the files appear as a pretty chaotic stack. The collection is also not complete. Several important documents referred to in other files are not there and are supposedly lost, if not deliberately destroyed.<sup>87</sup>

The *Case against Dippel* would determine the next decade of his life and career. Now, we slow down our tempo in order to chart the complex trajectory of the case in the decisive years of 1717–19 which has never before been investigated in detail.

## Act 1: Dippel and the Suppressed Fellow Human Beings

### Dippel's Letter to Frederik IV in 1717

On 21 December 1717, Dippel shipped his inauspicious complaint letter to King Frederik IV in Copenhagen, indicating "Altena" as sender location (Fig. 11).

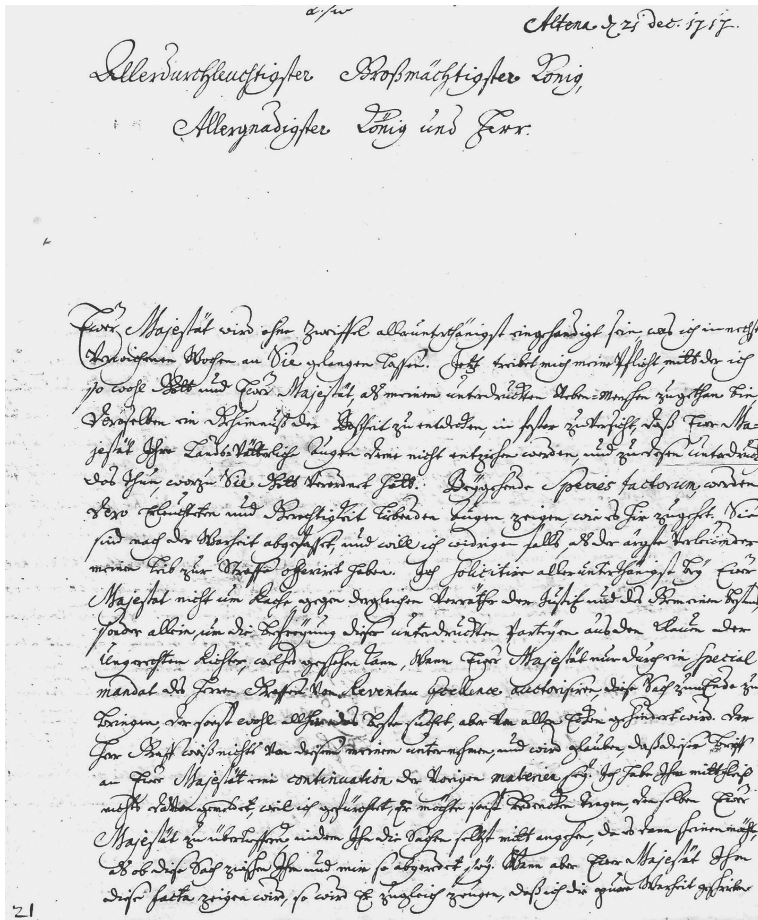
The letter is in two parts: first, a general appeal to the Danish King to consider certain issues in the judicial and political administration of the two Danish cities of Altona and Glückstadt by the Elbe (VIII.7). Altona was the older and larger city, but Danish-founded Glückstadt (1616) further down the Elbe was the administrative center of Danish rule in Holstein as well as the seat of the Appeal

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<sup>87</sup> The collection can be found under the headline of "Arkivskaber: Tyske Kancelli, Slesvig-holsten-lauenburgske Kancelli; Arkivserie: Akter i sagen mod kancelliråd J. C. Dippel i Altona (1718–1719) Løbenummer: B141–B142" in Rigsarkivet, the Danish State Archives in Copenhagen. I have prepared an Index of the documents to be found in the back of this book, taking the existing sequence of documents as my point of departure. This means, of course, that, e.g., Reventlow's many letters are not registered chronologically. Footnotes and references refer to this Index. The collection of case files is probably the documents collected by the German Chancellery in Copenhagen. We know that all case files of the summer 1719 Commission were sent back to Copenhagen and destroyed already the same year, and Reventlow obviously sought to destroy at least those documents that he found offensive. The City Council in Altona would probably have archived relevant case files, but the Altona City Archives were completely destroyed during the English bombings of "Operation Gomorrah" in July 1943.



Court of the realm, which was simply identical with the Danish government chancellery there. A large appendix to Dippel's letter, headlined *Species Facti et Administrationis Justitiæ* – that is, a presentation of the case and of the judicial administration – again in two parts, goes into painstaking detail pertaining to two particular court cases in which Dippel finds that the losers of processes had been victims of maltreatment by local Danish authorities.



**Figure 11:** There is agreement that Dippel's letter to Frederik IV of 21 December 1717 was the snowball that caused the avalanche to slide. But it is not correct that he used the letter to accuse the Reventlows of accepting bribes. Quite on the contrary, the letter demands *more* power for the Chief President so that he would step in against judicial injustices committed by the City Council of Altona.

The initial letter begins with Dippel's presumption that the King himself will receive and process his request in person, sounding a confidential note implying that Dippel appears as a sort of whistleblower speaking confidentially. Dippel claims it to be his duty to stand up for suppressed fellow human beings – "Neben-Menschen" – and appeals to the King's God-given duty to react against such malpractice after having cast his fatherly eye upon it. Surprisingly – given the letter's reputation for tarnishing Count Reventlow – Dippel immediately gives this advice:

I most submissively request Your Majesty, not about revenge on such treason against justice and normal conditions, but only about the liberation of some suppressed parties from the claws of unjust judges, and this may happen if Your Majesty could just authorize Mr. Count Reventlow with a special mandate to bring this case to an end, in general, he seeks the best but is prevented from all sides in doing so.<sup>88</sup>

Thus, the local judiciary is painted as unjust suppressors, and Count Reventlow is invoked as the relevant local authority to correct them, if only the King is willing to grant the Count special powers. Dippel further refers to the divine threat inherent in the principle, much marshaled by Lutherans, that such evil conditions, if not restored, will trigger the revenge of God on the State as a whole and thus necessarily lead to the ruin of the land. Here, Dippel speaks tactically to Frederik the Lutheran, for he himself did not believe that God was capable of acts of revenge. In brackets, he adds that conditions in the neighboring Holsatian County of Pinneberg are even worse than in Altona and Glückstadt – an addition sure to annoy Count von Perckentin there.

Dippel also refers to a another Geheime Rath – a Privy Councilor – named Gabel, presently around in Altona, also taking part in the ongoing defense of those unjustly suppressed by legal authorities.<sup>89</sup> Dippel sketches a short presenta-

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<sup>88</sup> "Ich solicite allerunterthänigst bey Eure Majestat nicht um Rache gegen dergleichen Verträge der Justiz und der Gemeinen Bestand, sondern allein, um die Befreyung dieser unterdruckten Parteyen aus dem Klauen der ungerechten Richter, welches geschehen kann, wann Eure Majestat nur durch ein Special mandat des Herrn Grafen von Reventlau Excellence auctorisiere, diese Sach zum Ende zu bringen, der sonst wohl allhin das beste suchet, aber von allen Ecken gehindert wird" (VIII.7, 1). Transcriptions and translations of case files are my own.

<sup>89</sup> I have not been able to identify this Privy Councilor. It could hardly be the then famous naval officer C.C. Gabel who had recently been instrumental in Danish victories in the North German phases of the Great Northern war; in that case, Dippel would be trying to buttress his case by involving a contemporary military celebrity well-known to the King. This Gabel was a Chamberlain, as of 1717 war minister, and only ascended to the Privy Councilor title in 1731, but it is possible Dippel may have mistaken his title. Otherwise, it might be one Valdemar Gabel, Privy Councilor in 1707 without acquiring much fame for any effort. In any case Gabel the helping hand soon disappears from the acts.

tion of his two suppressed main victims to receive more detailed coverage in his attached report, before concluding his personal letter to the King:

I hope that Your Majesty will understand, most graciously and in the best way, my confidential expressions which have no other reason than the most submissive affection for Your Majesty and the devotion to the well-being of Your states.<sup>90</sup>

In short, Dippel presents himself as a pious and confidential defender of local individuals offended by a malfunctioning judiciary – thus working to the best of the King’s rule and his states. The long, attached *Species Facti* document (“Presentation

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Councilor titles referred to the recent Danish system of *ranks* introduced after absolutism was adopted in 1660. In this system, “Privy Councilor” was the uppermost non-royal title. It involved a detailed ranking list of positions, and it is relevant here to cite the rankings of councilors, as a number of central persons involved in the Dippel case held councilor titles, including Dippel himself (Chancellery Councilor), Reventlow (Privy Councilor), Sehested (State Councilor), von Hagen (Justice Councilor), Soehlenthal (State Councilor), and power relations between two ranked persons would be influenced by their respective relative rankings. The ranking list of 1671 comprises 55 rank classes, including the following Councilor titles (Danish “Raad”, German “Rath”):

Councilors in the 1671 ranking:

1. Royal titles

2.-9. Privy Councilors (Geheime-Raad)

(Subsequent ranks include Generals, Counts, Knights, Barons, other nobility, various top offices at court, etc.)

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23. State Councilor (Etats-Raad)

24. Justice Councilor (Justits-Raad)

(Subsequent ranks include Treasurer, Admirals, Chamberlains, etc.)

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33. War Councilor (Krigs-Raad)

34. Chancellery Councilor (Cancelie-Raad)

35. Chamber Councilor (Kammer-Raad)

36. Admiralty Councilor (Admiralitets-Raad)

37. Commerce Councilor (Commerce-Raad)

(Subsequent ranks include Superintendent (Bishop) of Zealand, President of Copenhagen, Colonels, County Governors, Chamber Valets, Supreme Court Justices, other Superintendents, etc.)

In early Danish absolutism, Councilor titles would often refer to real political assignments; soon, however, many Councilor titles would be given as a sign of appreciation and loyalty rather than involving any particular tasks.

90 “Ich hoffe Eure Majestät werde diese meine confidante expressiones allernädigst zum besten deuten, die keinen andern grund habe als das allerunterthänigste attachement zu Eure Majestät, und der devotion vor das wohl seine dero Staaten” (VIII.7, 2).

of facts”, VIII.8) would be the effective triggering point of the whole Dippel affair, so we should take a look at the complicated claims Dippel brings forward here.

## Bandau v. Meyer

The first case presented by Dippel is the most complicated one and makes him relate a Byzantine story reaching many years back to before the Swedish 1713 devastation of the city. Dippel had studied some law during his time in Giessen and does not hesitate to clothe his narration and argument in Latin legal terminology, actually assuming the pose of a legal expert in a position to correct sloppy local jurisprudence. The following resumes the overall structure of the case, as Dippel conceived of it.

At some point, one Heinrich Nüchtern had decided to extend his Altona bleaching company by acquiring a nearby site for building another bleaching plant, borrowing 1,000 Rix-dollars from a Hamburger named Andreas Bandau for the acquisition. The stream Altenau or Pepermölenbek on the border between Altona and Hamburg had given rise to a whole series of bleaching companies along its course, and textile manufacturing was one of the main industries of the city of Altona (Fig. 12). Among those bleaching facilities, Nüchtern's was situated at the far northern outskirts of the city,<sup>91</sup> and his new plant was connected to the same water supply from the stream as the existing one. This small bleaching empire, however, does not seem to have been successful, and after some years Nüchtern became insolvent. Bandau lost his loan along with the expected interest payments, and he also had to pay the costs of foreclosure in order to take over the plant as a compensation for the loan he had lent. The upstream plant, however, was later sold by forced auction to one Frantz Meyer from Altona having no debt in it. This difference between the two owners is important for Dippel's argument giving precedence to Bandau who had to receive satisfaction for his lost investment, while Meyer was just an ordinary investor. The two now began to struggle over the exact demarcation between the two premises, and it so happened that Meyer stopped the water supply to Bandau's downstream property, thus preventing its use for the water-consuming bleaching process. Bandau offered Meyer that he could buy the premises from him, but they were unable to agree on a price, Meyer seemingly thinking he could force down the price by keeping the water back. So, Bandau was forced to turn to legal means and sought the help of the Pres-

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<sup>91</sup> According to the map *Altona gegen Ende des 17. Jahrhunderts*. In the map *Altona im Jahre 1745*, the premises are indicated as belonging to Mejer.





ident of the City Council, one von Jessen, now deceased.<sup>92</sup> The City Council had judicial tasks, functioning also as a first instance court. The case, however, proved to drag on, also because of the President's death and the reconfiguration of the City Council after the fire. It appears from later documents that Meyer at some point passed away, leaving his property – and the court case – to his widow.

So, two years before Dippel's report to the King, that is, around 1715, the case was finally considered by the present City Council. Instead of a compromise, however, the case went through all standard process phases, and it would have lasted years longer if a certain royal councilor had not been forced to intervene. Dippel does not name this councilor, but the reader soon gets the idea it is an indirect way of referring to Dippel himself. Bandau suspected that his opponent attempted to drag out the process to tire him out in order to let him have the plant at a reduced price – and that Meyer secretly worked to influence the judges to recommend that solution. Finally, a verdict was declared: Meyer should restore the water supply to Bandau, but it still left the road open for further processes. Meyer immediately appealed the sentence, and the judges accepted her appeal payment, even against royal decree, which did not allow appeal without any argument referring to precedence. After seven years, now, the Hamburger Bandau had to give up his Altona case and turn to the superior Appeal Court of Glückstadt where he was only told the time limit for further appeals was long since overdue. Bandau could but conclude the whole case had been one long masquerade to fool him. They even threatened to arrest him in Glückstadt and forced him to pay 1,000 Rix-dollars as a bail in order to accept his appeal. The Appeal Court only convened twice a year, and when the process finally approached his lawyer found it was not registered in the court schedule which made Bandau and his lawyer suspect the case was being pushed in order to be processed by the same judges once again; they even thought that Meyer had once more succeeded in secretly influencing the court. Bandau began to suspect he had gone out of the frying pan and into the fire – Dippel's expression literally means "from the rain into the river", more appropriate to the watery issues at stake. Finally, the case was up on 9 November (must be 2017), and now Reventlow as Chief President made his appearance, demanding that the case be settled, the water flow be reconstructed, and Meyer be punished, also in order not to deter other Hamburgers from investing in Altona. Again, the parties would be free to pursue further lawsuits such as Bandau for his lost interests and his expenses, Meyer to attack Bandau's rights to his acquisition.

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92 Matthias von Jessen, President of Altona 1681–1712, cf. von Jessen (1937).

The Glückstadt appeal judges, however, did not follow these well-founded directives of the Count, instead putting the blame for the drawn-out case on Bandau's lawyer and the rules of appeal. Until now, thus, Reventlow has appeared in Dippel's narrative only as a higher authority who intervened in the case on a relatively late point, if in vain. This makes Dippel's plea to the King to further strengthen Reventlow's mandate understandable. Dippel's complicated account of the case, of which many details have here been left out, concludes as follows:

As presently Mr. Count requires a special order from Your Majesty to the Appeal Court in Glückstadt in which they are enjoined *auctoritate Regia* [with royal authority] not to accept other cases than are appellable according to Hamburg process-regulations, in the hope of thereby to reopen this case, then all of this was yet *surdis narrata fabula* [for deaf ears]. They do not let themselves be inhibited in the currents of bribes ...<sup>93</sup>

Dippel adds that he himself has become the target of a lawsuit for libel, because he helped Bandau in writing a complaint during the case – a lawsuit about which Dippel has filed a complaint to the Appeal Court in Glückstadt but had no answer, and he pleads Reventlow also to intervene in this case. So, the presentation ends by Dippel himself being involved in legal trouble – which would later come to play an important role. But the most important in the quote is probably Dippel's talk about "... den Lauff ihrer accidentien", the currents of payments, that is, bribes, which he implies the Appeal Court is accepting. Reventlow's instruction from the King to allow the Glückstadt Appeal Court to accept only cases that fall within the legal restrictions of Hamburg process rules was not accepted by the Glückstadters – who thus appear as being in open insubordination to royal instructions.

The very last sentence relates that the Count himself has also received this complaint and thus is in a position to easily discover why nobody wants to speak about this case. This is the only place in this case where a vague criticism of Reventlow may be audible. Otherwise, the two appear as partners in the fight against a corrupt judiciary.

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93 "Da während der Zeit der Herr Graff einen specialen Befehl von Ihrer Majestät, an das Glückstädtsche Ober-Appellations-Gericht auswürckt, in welchen Ihnen *auctoritate Regia* injungiret wird, nichts dorth anzunehmen, als was vermöge der Hamburgischer Process-Ordnung appellabel seÿ, in Hoffnung dardurch noch diese Sach zu redressiren, so war es doch *surdis narrata fabula*. Sie lassen sich deswegen den Lauff Ihrer accidentien nicht hemmen" (ibid. 5).

## Lieben v. Buÿser the Widow

The second case is only a bit less convoluted. Again, it is a Hamburger who is allegedly maltreated by local Danish authorities. It concerns a certain Michael Christian Lieben who has even fled Hamburg and sought the protection of the Danish King in Altona. He has become involved, however, in a quarrel over a cloth factory with a widow named Maria de Büser (or Buÿser) who had lost much of her property during the Swedish fire of 1713. She had a wool and silk production plant which was now in a bad shape but which Lieben, out of his good heart, resolved to restore in company with his son Christian Niclas Lieben and the widow, as part of the ongoing reconstructions in Altona. He made his Hamburg father-in-law invest on the condition that he would receive the interests of the property, while profits should be shared equally between the other two parties. The burnt-out premises were rebuilt for 1,000 Rix-dollars which were granted by the value of the building site, and Lieben even bought new materials and added some already-finished cloth to the stock. Dippel paints these activities as benevolent, merciful acts supporting a widow in distress.

She turned out to be quite a malignant character, however, by Dippel's account. She had remained tacit about certain loans she had taken on the property to pay her creditors but not only that: she began to steal ware from the factory and continued to mortgage whatever she was able to lay her hands on. Consequently, Lieben decides to withdraw from their common company. To save his investment he takes hold of cloth and materials there, partly added to the stock by the widow, partly bought by himself.

Now the widow makes a fuss and accuses Lieben of wishing to drive her out of her home and business and demands a verdict against him from the Altona City Council. They reach a conclusion, which Dippel finds completely against common sense as well as against existing legislation: Lieben must pay a mortgage as a bail, after which the company with the widow will be liquidated and split between the two, and only then he is entitled to get bailed out. Lieben contacts Count Reventlow who advises him not to act against a poor widow with full legal force, rather to treat her with equity and let her find a guarantor willing to pay so that the widow would not be forced out by foreclosure. Lieben now expected all to be liquidated and from the resulting sum to be able to pay back the guarantor and then receive the ware. But the widow, through evil lawyers, sought to secure the stock for herself and to pay for the liquidation with it. She also appeals the case to Glückstadt who confirms, however, the bad decision of the City Council. The case still pending, the widow even resorts to hiring some thugs to break into the premises and simply steal the ware. This finally makes the City Council recognize this as a theft and demand that she return the goods. She is thus forced



to recognize Lieben's ownership but now she claims to be no thief as the goods have been returned. In this state of confusion, a new sentence arrives from Glückstadt, confirming the City Council's first decision. This makes Lieben suspect foul play and corruption in the judges. In the middle of this, Count Reventlow learns about the case, wondering strongly about the position of the judges, demanding the complete restitution of Lieben and the return to standard procedure: liquidation of the premises, the caution paid from the liquidum, and then the restitution of the goods to Lieben under threat of forced auction of the widow's property. Now, she finally yields and accepts liquidation with the participation of four arbiters on the side of each party. But still, she appeals to Glückstadt for the payment requested of her and her guarantor. Again, Dippel's conclusion on this labyrinthine process involves the Count – but now also the Countess. The Count sent back the appeal case as it went against his own decision, but the widow and her evil advisors knew that Glückstadt would not reject this “disgusting appeal against all reason and right”. Dippel turns up the volume in his conclusion:

Who can feel safe against this Council of robbers, and who is not appalled by venturing his money at such a place where everybody, judges as well as citizens, go out to loot and encourage each other to robbery?<sup>94</sup>

Dippel relates that the widow and her advisors now sent a plea to the Countess, Benedicte von Brockdorff, attempting to make her postpone the execution of her husband's decision – but no result of this request is reported. This was the first appearance of the Countess in the case files; certainly not the last. Again, Dippel's letter is far from implying any wrongdoing by the noble couple who is rather depicted as well-meaning but sadly unable to halt the judicial malady, particularly in Glückstadt – which was also beyond their formal jurisdiction of Altona. We should not imagine, however, any clear separation of lines of command here: the word of the royally installed Chief President and Privy Councilor, the King's own brother-in-law, with his mighty spouse, the richest noble couple of the realm, would surely have some weight also beyond formal borders of authority. If Dippel's missive might in any sense have been uncomfortable to the two of them, it would not be in implying nepotism or bribery on their part, rather because it painted them as well-intentioned but unable to intervene decisively when necessary. Dippel does not, however, present this as any fault on their part – they just do not wield sufficient royal powers.

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<sup>94</sup> “Wer kann auf diese Rath von Räubern sicher bleiben, und wer sollte nicht sich entsetzen, an solchem Orth sein Geld zu hazardiren, da alle, so wohl Richter als Bürger auf Raub ausgehen, und einander den Raub zujagen?” (ibid., 8).

Dippel's account of the two court cases is extremely detailed, but his harsh conclusions, both regarding the Altona City Council and the Appeal Court of Glückstadt, are based on indications rather than evidence. Despite being stuffed with Latin judicial terminology, Dippel, while posing as a legal scholar, firmly acts as a part actor, siding with one party and not only disregards the others, Meyer and the widow, but ascribes to them decidedly evil intentions, such as clandestine influences and bribery of judges. It certainly might be the case that the two processes contained injustices against the two parties whom Dippel set out to support, Bandau and Lieben, but his ascription of evil intentions to judges not only seems quite beyond evidence but also without other explanation than they are mere robbers out to enrich themselves.

It is interesting that both cases share the structure of Hamburg investors having come to neighboring Altona only to become caught up in financial in-fights with Altona citizens who are then protected by several levels of Altona-Glückstadt legal procedure. The argument that such court cases may scare future Hamburgers from investing is central to Dippel – an important argument in a sooty ruin city crying out for investors. But Altona was the smaller of the two big twin cities and there had been numerous conflicts regarding commerce, customs, water supply, borders, and other political issues ever since Altona had been granted city rights by Frederik III in 1664. There were even rumors that Hamburg, through the Swedish General von Wellingk there, had clandestinely been supporting the Swedes in burning down the competing city. It is possible that local authorities would seek to protect local citizens against what might be perceived as intrusion from the stronger and richer neighboring city. It should also be noticed that Danish kings had never accepted Hamburg's full independence as a free city but still claimed to possess certain rights over it as part of the Duchy of Holstein, and as recently as 1712, Frederik IV had seized Hamburg merchant ships in Norway and, with his army camping not far from city ramparts, extorted a large sum from the city of Hamburg in order not to attack it for housing Count Wellingk.<sup>95</sup>

In both of Dippel's cases, Count Reventlow seemingly steps in to the advantage of Dippel's tragic heroes, yet without decisive success. It should be remembered we are definitely in a pre-Montesquieu era where no clear tripartition of powers is relevant, so that, even if Reventlow is the Danish King's highest delegated authority in the city, it remains completely unclear how and to what degree his formal power would extend to the City Council in its judicial capacities, or to the superior Appeal Court in another city. Reventlow seems to have acted with much consequence against local sloppy administration upon his arrival, e.g., sack-

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95 Paludan-Müller (1877–78, 6).

ing local mayors deemed incompetent without reinstating new mayors; and Reventlow was invested with considerable powers to reconstruct local rule. In contrast to this, Dippel's request to the King also implies that Reventlow did not or was not able to fully act on his reported intentions which is why Dippel requests from the King a stronger mandate to his highest Altona representative. This might, of course, also be a rhetorically indirect rebuke of Reventlow, implying that he lacked the personal will or power to act on his intentions, or even that these intentions may not at all have been as strong as they appeared. But the standard story that Dippel used his letter to the King to attack his noble benefactors for taking bribes is simply not true. The Reventlows were Dippel's patrons, and in his complaint to the King Dippel directly appears as one of Reventlow's henchmen, anxiously supporting his superior's effort to reinstate proper rule in Altona.

Further striking parallels between the two cases may be noted. Dippel firmly sides with two Hamburg industrialists against two Altona widows; when pondering why on earth he would become involved as a legal advisor at a late point in two protracted court cases from long before he arrived at the place, it may be of some relevance that both of them involved chemical industries – the bleaching and coloring of textile – potentially requiring assistance or inspiration from an experienced alchemist like himself. Was Dippel's involvement with Bandau and Lieben also motivated by chemistry, his official reason for settling in Altona?

In any case, this letter was the very document that triggered the whole ensuing development culminating in Dippel's banishment almost two years later. But its effects were quite different from the standard story.

## Dippel's Zeal for Justice

Actually, Dippel's letter was only one leg of a pincer movement. The very same day as Dippel's letter to the King in Copenhagen one of his two protégés, the young Lieben, wrote a long letter to Chief President Reventlow in Altona, pleading his case (VIII.4). Lieben protested the different moves of his opponent and begged of Reventlow to make the King intervene and stop the widow Büyser from further protracting the case, which was now threatening the welfare not only of this young merchant, but also of his household, his parents, grandparents, and siblings. The widow's guarantor Mrs. Holsten should be forced by royal decree to pay the disputed 1,656 Rix-dollars to Lieben.

And a mere three days after Dippel's letter, on Christmas Eve, the widow Maria de Buÿser herself also submitted a supplication to the King (VIII.3). The administration could not yet have processed Dippel's letter which would have reached Copenhagen at the earliest on the same day as de Buÿser sent hers. She would have heard

rumors, however, that such a letter had been shipped, for she sends her “uttermost-humble and highly-respectful plea” to the King “most-graciously to let communicate to her the wrong presentation which has most-humbly been sent by my opponent” so that she can answer it appropriately. She portrays herself as a “completely innocent, persecuted, and suppressed widow”. Her version of events: she had lost much property during the Swedish fire, including 24,000 Rix-dollars and a factory employing 200 Altonians, yet had already rebuilt three houses with firewalls and intended to reconstruct another two. In the process of rebuilding her factory, however, her ownership of the ware was unjustly challenged by Lieben by means of cheeky harassment. She had received the Council’s support that the ware would be returned to her, but he had succeeded in obtaining the President’s support in making a 21 November claim for her guarantor Ms. Holsten to pay him the 1,656 Rix-dollars. This is why she went to appeal to Glückstadt in which she was successful – only to be surprised to learn that her opponent has taken to deny her case in letters to the King and the Royal Chief President, thus trying to sneak through a counterjudgment. No mention about any investment on the part of Lieben who here appears as but a mean swindler who resorts to putting pressure on high officials trying to overrule standard court decisions. There is no Copenhagen answer to this letter among the files. But it is safe to say that both of the parties in the case were playing out victim strategies, painting themselves on the brink of bankruptcy.

Formal reactions ensued in January. The first of many official and unofficial letters from Reventlow addressing the case is sent to the King 20 January 1718 (VIII.6). He has obviously received Dippel’s letter with its *Species Facti* appendix – maybe directly from the King, as Reventlow’s sender address is indicated as Copenhagen. The letter is calm and not at all offended by Dippel’s request to the King.<sup>96</sup> Quite on the contrary, Reventlow recognizes Dippel’s “... zeal for justice and for some suppressed parties”. It acknowledges that cases such as those presented by Dippel are processes which are but designed to protract to great expenses for both parties. The King has instructed him that such cases must no longer be appealed to Glückstadt for the reasons cited by Dippel. So, Reventlow has demanded that appeal cases are now presented to him before they are accepted, so that unilaterally presented appeal cases are no longer admitted. In short, he has “... the sole intention of helping the parties in dispute to their rights without unnecessary prolongation and without futile costs, by which Your Majesty would only get ruined citizens”. So, Reventlow basically accepts Dippel’s criti-

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<sup>96</sup> An important point regards Dippel’s fleeting reference, in the first *Species Facti*, to the current libel case against himself, The Count writes that he attaches to his letter a document filed by Dippel to Glückstadt regarding this libel case; this might be a version of VIII.9 (below).

cism as supporting the King's and his own efforts to correct errors of messy Altona administration. The bulk of the letter then goes into conditions in Pinneberg which Dippel had addressed in passing only to return to Dippel in the conclusion. Reventlow now sends back Dippel's letter to the King, urging him to act appropriately on the points raised therein. Dippel simply appears here as a local informant and supporter in the Count's ongoing reorganization of lackadaisical Altonian rule. So, no offense taken. It was simply not Dippel's December letter that so offended Reventlow.

There is even a short draft one-pager (VIII.2), undated but seemingly authored by Reventlow, informally addressing the King directly and requesting to let himself, after Dippel's advice, take over the authority to decide the Bandau and Lieben cases. The King is urged to immediately ship a decree about this to the Appeal Court in Glückstadt. Simultaneously, Reventlow directly evaluates the Lieben case, claiming the Court's decision should be withdrawn and Lieben "in integrum zu restituieren"; in short, to intervene just like Dippel was demanding in his letter to the King. If this draft was actually attached to Reventlow's January letter to the King or, more probably, had been submitted to him even earlier in 1717, before Reventlow's unsuccessful attempts to intervene, it would not be the last time we find Reventlow directly giving instructions to his Majesty, short-circuiting the usual most-subservient chancellery style.

A month later, the King would also have handed Maria de Buÿser's letter to Reventlow for comment, for on 17 February 1718, still in Copenhagen, he answers the King commenting upon her claims. He says he is not aware of the claimed falsity of her counterpart's assertions and that such falsity has also not reached the King in Dippel's letter, and he defends his own restitution of Lieben as following process rules.<sup>97</sup> He fails to see why the widow's reference to her earlier efforts with Altona reconstruction is relevant for the case, and he judges her letter to be motivated by the fact that she cannot pay her debts, she therefore "... seeks all possible evasions and expedients with her guarantor to her own and her factory's ruin, in the belief that she has won and time will vindicate this". In short, Reventlow advises the King not to bow to the widow's supplication. Again, Reventlow in the main supports Dippel's claims about the case, and the two simply appear as a patron and his client acting in concert for justice.

It could be that Dippel was also occupied elsewhere at the time. An unconfirmed rumor has it that Dippel, on 3 April 1718, became a father, when Jacob Dip-

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<sup>97</sup> For further elucidation, he refers to two attached documents, an *Extractum Protoc. Præsid.* and a *Memorial*. The two documents are VIII.4–5, the 21 Dec. letter from Lieben to Reventlow containing an attached sheet with different copies of document excerpts, and a 6 Dec. letter from a curator named Weber addressing the Buÿser case.

pel was born to an unnamed woman in Altona. As a young man, Dippel had proposed to a woman twice but had been rejected both times and he says this had made him give up all plans of marrying. If Dippel actually fathered a boy in Altona, that would be his only known offspring.<sup>98</sup> In all cases, Dippel would soon have other issues to worry about.

## A City Council in Arms

Now, who would it be that *actually* began questioning Dippel's account during the spring of 1718? This would not be the Reventlows, but rather the two parties directly attacked in his December letter, namely Count Perckentin of Pinneberg and the Altona City Council.<sup>99</sup> Perckentin wrote a furious 24 May letter to the King, protesting Dippel's radical but vague claims about terrible conditions in Pinneberg which need not occupy us here as it hardly concerns the case against Dippel and had no further consequences. The one who had been really offended by Dippel's letter to the King was not Reventlow but the Altona Magistrat, the City Council. It was they who had served as judicial first instance in the cases that Dippel had attacked for being drawn-out, erroneous, and corrupt. The very same date as Perckentin's letter, the Council began its long, critical digestion of Dippel's claims. Signed by four members, curiously all of them with variants of the name

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<sup>98</sup> The rumor is referred by Kraft (2019, 137f) who refers, in turn, to the ancestry homepage *My-Heritage* where the Danish Dippel family traces their origin to the gold-maker. Jacob Dippel is supposed to have lived from 1718 to 1786 and continued the family line in the North of Zealand. Kraft has sought, without success, documentation of the existence of Jacob in baptism archives in Altona, but as he himself says it is hardly probable that Dippel would let his child baptize in a Lutheran church, if at all. There is little information, more generally, about Dippel's sex life. His first biographer Canz claimed he had never anything to do with women, because he was fit for nothing less than caressing (Eröff III, 750). Dippel remembers how he, at his second proposal, had suggested as a joke the contemporary custom of accidentally opening the Bible; he had put his thumb into the book, and to the shock of everybody the Book of Jeremiah read: "... du solt dir kein weib nehmen noch Kinder zeugen", you shall take no wife nor beget any children (Jeremiah 16.1; Senckenberg's diaries, vol. II, 426). In the same source, Dippel says that "... alte patres ecclesiae primae, wären zuweilen in hurenhäuser gegangen ut non apparerent sancti. Er gehe oft in wirths häuser pp sonderlich den eingebildeten heiligen zu trutz, ne videatur pius. Et ita occultare se suam pietatem" (354), that is, the oldest church fathers used to go to whorehouses in order to conceal their holiness, and that he himself often goes to taverns in order to hide his piety to the conceited-pious. If he would actually frequent brothels as well he would hardly reveal it to his young admirer.

<sup>99</sup> The leadership of the Altona city authorities are referred to as "Rath" as well as "Magistrat" where the latter also comprises the administration lead by the former. I translate both of them as the "City Council".

“Heinrich” – Jo. Henr. Joenssen, Joh. Henr. Archenholtz, Heinrich Neuhaus, and Hinrich Behn – the short letter (VII.1) was sent to a high authority in Copenhagen. The four of them had been appointed to the new City Council when the old one was dismissed after the Swedish Fire.<sup>100</sup> Their letter is basically a plea for prolongation of the deadline for their report on Dippel which they had been requested to deliver by a top authority in Copenhagen on 30 April. The tenor of the letter, however, leaves little doubt about the position of the council. It aims at

... revealing the secrecy of the Dippelian evil, how he abuses his ascendancy achieved out of luck to distort all laws and regulations with made-up sophistries, and to fool, slander, blacken, and mock all those who refuse to subject themselves to his presumptuous dictatorship and also could not do so due to their assumed obligations ...<sup>101</sup>

Their intention now is meticulously to refute Dippel’s libelous writings point by point – but they need just a bit more time to accomplish this obligation. The conclusion, thus, is presented before the investigation. The letter is addressed in a tone extremely subservient even for the time, to an unnamed high-standing authority in Copenhagen titled Secret Councilor, Chief Secretary, and County Governor. This could be none other than Christian Sehested, Foreign Minister and Chief Secretary of the German Chancellery in Copenhagen. So, now an alternative communication line between Copenhagen and Altona authorities opens up. Sehested’s April requisition to the Council is not among the case files, but we must assume the King has turned to his German Chancellery and asked Sehested to hear the Altona Council’s response to the complaints presented by Dippel.<sup>102</sup> That report would follow in June 1718.

It seems that Dippel had not predicted which kind of forces he was about to wake in the Altona City Council. Even if its present members were appointees of Reventlow, it was an institution that may not have been satisfied with being subjected to a new Chief President with wide-ranging powers who had sacked the mayors. Now, they saw a possibility to strike back against one of Reventlow’s henchmen. The four Heinrichs were simply mad with fury, and they did not pull any punches.

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**100** Schmid (1747, 79).

**101** “... das Geheimnis der Dippelischen Bosheit zu entdecken, wie er sein durchs Glück zugeschobenes ascendant dahin gemäßbrauche, das er alle Gesetze und Ordnungen mit geschminkten Sophistereyen zu verdrehen, und alle diejenige welche sich seiner angemaßten dictatur nicht unterwerffen wollen, noch ihren obliegenden Pflichten nach, können, und fingiren, verlästern, anschwärzen und verläumbden ...”.

**102** That letter would probably have been filed by the City Council, but Altona City Hall with all of its archives was destroyed during the English bombings in July 1943, so what the Council may have archived from the Dippel case has vanished.



## Four Heinrichs on a Raid

On 28 June, the four Heinrichs of the City Council finally returned to Sehested with a voluminous report. They introduce it in a brief accompanying letter (VII.3) anticipating their conclusion on the "... Dippelian written slander and the inventions and mockeries used therein"<sup>103</sup> which they set out to refute word for word. They also anticipate, however, that their criticism may be found to use some of the very same means as their opponent: "... should there, from time to time, prompted by him, have floated a somewhat hard echo or a few all too free expressions into the text, then You High and Well-Born Excell. with your inherent high giftedness will graciously and powerfully excuse it in the very best and harmless way ..."<sup>104</sup> Apart from demonstrating their versatility in the demanding "Chancellery" rhetoric, the Heinrichs realize that Dippel's insidious style may have caused themselves to echo his cheeky tricks, but they trust the high intelligence of Sehested to be able to see through this. The same day, the Council directly addresses the King himself (VII.2), alerting him about Dippel's offense of themselves, and they urge him to secure Dippel's body for punishment.

The report is indeed a mouthful. Running to 16 pages titled "Oath- and Dutiful Report on the speciebus factorum et administratæ justitiæ delivered by Mr. Chancellery Councilor Dippelio Counterargued, And firstly in the case of Andreas Bandau contra Frantz Meyer's Heir"<sup>105</sup> (VII.4), it focuses particularly on the Bandau-Meyer case and goes deeply into its 1711 preconditions all the way back to the involvement of the former owners of the relevant properties. Their main argument, however, is that when Bandau appears with a complaint in April 1716 against the widow of Meyer in order to reopen the water flow, the deadline of objections is long overdue (we now learn that Meyer has died, and the case has been inherited by his widow). Still, the case was reopened, and details of the process of 1716 are related until the City Council decision of 11 January 1717 to demand the reopening of the water within six weeks. This decision is immediately appealed by the widow to Glückstadt while Bandau, a whole month later, again against all procedure, brings up the case again in Altona with the City Council where Count Reventlow's proxy officers in the mean-

103 "... Dippelschen Schrifts-Schände und dabey gebrauchten Erdicht- und Verläumbdungen."

104 "... Sollte bißweilen auff seiner Veranlaßung, ein etwas hartes Echo sich ergeben, oder einige allzu freye expressiones mit eingeflossen seyn; so wollen Euren Hoch- und Wohlgebohrene Excell. dero beýwohnenden hohen Begabnißen nach, ein solches gnädig und hochvermögend auff das allerbeste und unschädlichste entschuldigen ..."

105 "Eid- und Pflichtmässiger Bericht So den Von H. Cantzleý-Raht Dippelio übergebenen speciebus factorum et administratæ justitiæ entgegen gesetzt Und zwar erstlich In Sachen Andreas Bandauen ctra Frantz Meyers Erben."



time preside, demanding with lots of invectives and pejoratives that the appeal be canceled, and the first instance sentence of the case, supporting Bandau, be brought to execution.<sup>106</sup> Who these “proxy officers” may be – other than Dippel, of course – is not clear, but the expression indicates an internal struggle in the city administration about which we know little else.

The Council obviously rebels against being put under administration by Reventlow’s proxies, and they even find themselves victims of libel in Bandau’s complaint to the Council. That claim simultaneously gives an impressive example of the Council’s juicy and convoluted version of Chancellery writing style:

Through this [...] writing, completely congested with so many honor-reducing intimations, libel and shameless allegations, among which the alleged crime, committed in a unheard-of godless way by the judges is not the least, the City council finds, to the unavoidable salvation of its so harshly offended honor and the maintenance of respect of their authority, that had been completely exposed for everybody’s eyes, itself forced to arrest Bandau on decree, so that he either remains in prison or is sentenced to the payment of long-lasting caution, until he proves his criminal claims and injurious expressions or gives a judicially motivated satisfaction for their emergence.<sup>107</sup>

In brief, Bandau had been arrested and faced with an ultimatum: prove the claims of your complaint, or you will be punished. Until you do so, you will remain imprisoned or pay daily fines. This is the key point of the long-winded report. For faced with this threat, Bandau had been forced to admit in interrogation, after much beating around the bush, that the author of his defamatory complaint was none other than – Dippel.

This had happened already on 22 March 1717, more than a year before and immediately after the submission of Bandau’s complaint, ghostwritten by Dippel, of 17 March. This throws a completely new light upon Dippel’s December letter to the King. For at that point, Dippel had already been in infight with the City Council for nine months, and they were suing him for libel. So, his motivation was not only to stand up for suppressed fellow human beings, but also simply to up the ante by denouncing the Council to their superiors in Copenhagen.

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**106** An attached “Extractus protocolli” dated the day before (VII.6) reports how an attempt to convince Meyer to pay 3,000 Rix-dollars for the property — Bandau’s minimum requirement — fails as Bandau does not want to conclude the case anyway.

**107** “Durch diese Sub Lit: A angelegte und mit so vielen Ehrenverkleinerliche Anzüglichkeiten, injurien und impudenten calumnien, worunter das auf eine unerhörte Gott-lose Ahrt à Judice sulphurice crimen prævaricationes nicht das geringste ist, durch und durch angefüllte Schrift findet Magistratus zu unumbgänglicher Rettung ihrer so calumniose gekränkten Ehre und Beÿbehaltung des hirbey gänzlich aus den Augen gesetzten Obrigkeitl. respects sich äuserst genöthigt per Decretum Bandauen dahin anzuhalten, daß er entweder in Arrest verbleibe, oder zu längliche Caution bestellen solle, biß er seine criminelle imputationes und injuricase expressiones wahr gemacht, oder in Entstehung deßen alle deßhalb Rechtl. gebührende Satisfaction gegeben” (7).

But what had Bandau and Dippel said in their complaint which so enraged the Council? Luckily, we can see that, for in order to substantiate their claims the Council attaches a copy of the original complaint letter of 17 March 1717 as an appendix. Most of the complaint is actually kept in a cool, legalist tone arguing against the widow's possibility of appeal, urging the Council to take up again Bandau's case, referring to the authority of the King of Denmark and his local representative, Reventlow. Towards the end, however, the tone subtly shifts. Referring to what the letter conceives of as an illegal appeal by the widow, supported by the Council, the letter alleges some sort of understanding between them – that is, nepotism or corruption: “From this confusing and illegal procedure I must necessarily conclude that you, in the quasi-enforced *sententia definitiva* [definitive sentence] not so much sought to help me to my right, but only, covered by a nicer surface to make the case even more long-winded, where it is not even to be feared that you lived in understanding with my opponent and gave him access to this invalid and illegal appeal, for only *pro forma* to serve to suspend the completion of the sentence ...”<sup>108</sup>

These very words decisively triggered the whole Dippel affair, nine months before it is commonly dated. The City Council's apology to Sehested for their free language seems understated: even the polemical Dippel keeps a level of pejoratives far below what the four Heinrichs are able to achieve. A bribe is only indirectly insinuated (“in understanding with”). But the bottom line is that the verdict of the Council on the water supply, seemingly supporting Bandau, had just been given in order to adorn the case with an air of reasonableness, to cover the immediate continuation of the case into an indefinite appeal, all in mutual understanding with Bandau's opponent the widow. A bribe is not explicitly mentioned but may be implied. So, this complaint about the Altona Council of March 1717 was what had made them arrest Bandau, force him to confess, and sue Dippel for libel. This is really the very first phase of the case in which legal action against Dippel is implied, already in the spring of 1717, two and a half years before the final judgment in 1719.

The Council's report continues at length detailing the Bandau-Meyer case, arguing that the appeal followed the very same pattern as other recent cases and that the widow could not be made responsible for her deceased husband's deeds

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<sup>108</sup> “Auß welchem confusen und illegalen Verfahren, ich dann Nohtwendig schließen muß, daß man in der quasi erzwungenen *sententia definitiva* nur nicht so wohl gesucht, zu meinem Recht zu verhelffen, als nur intra einen besseren Schein die Sache noch weitläufftiger zu machen, wo im übrigen nicht gar zu befürchten, daß man mit meiner Gegen Parthey selbst in Verständnis gelebet, und ihn diese nichtiger und illegale Appellation an die Handt gegeben, um nur *pro forma* zu dienen, die execution der sentence zu suspendiren ...” (15, underlining in the original copy).

or crimes. A shorter account is given for the Lieben-Buÿser case which now seems to stand between Lieben's demand of the payment of 1,656 Rix-dollars from the widow or her guarantor, faced with the widow's counter-demand of the return of the seized ware of which much seems to have been perishable goods such as wool. The Council wishes to avoid a dragged-out new case addressing these demands, also because the widow would be barred from manufactory and income as long as it lasts, facing ruin. Their proposed solution is a compromise in which Lieben accepts immediate recompensation instead of some ever more rotting wool, and the Council expresses its puzzlement why he is not willing to accept this compromise. Are they alleging Dippel's hand behind Lieben's hesitation? Dippel's only explicit involvement here concerns that Lieben has proposed him as a sort of expert witness in the case, which is rejected by the Council.

To the City Council, Dippel was simply an "arch-offending quibbler", caught by a "... zeal for being right, out of yellow-green bile", who is contaminating the truth. These invectives and many more they amass in a further case file, the enormous "Ohnvergreiffliche Anmerkungen" (VII.5) – infallible remarks – with its 30 pages by far the single longest document among the case files, addressing at length the two court cases. It refers to itself as a "counter-report" against Dippel's letter to the King, setting out to disprove every single proposition of Dippel's piece, citing that document in underlined quotes with ensuing, long-winding comments. The document has no indicated author, sender, addressee, place, nor date, but it is obviously also authored by the four Heinrichs of the Altona City Council which it sets out to defend. It is the most thorough attack on Dippel in the whole set of case files, with an impressive congestion of colorful invectives against him, so to speak the Council's own June 1718 report raised to the second power. Dippel is not only an "arch-offending quibbler", he is but a carnival figure, masquerading as "a man in a long robe" (a law scholar), he is a "perfect master of the art of sophistry", and so on. The radical pietist is likened to islamic fanaticism: "How does it go with the success of his new prophesies? Here Mr. Dippel wants to mohammedize". The large text is an extravagant rhetorical masterpiece but remains strangely isolated in the set of case files, no other documents explicitly referring to it. It seems, however, to be the document indirectly foretold in the Council's May and June letters to Sehested, about how they will set out to disprove Dippel "point for point", "word for word". So, either it was simply appended as an extra attachment to the 28 June letter,<sup>109</sup> or it may have served as a sort of draft investigation preceding the more concise "oath-

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<sup>109</sup> Rustmeier (1957) assumes, without further notice, that the document served as an additional attachment to the Council's 28 June letter, even if it might seem a bit strange to attach two competing reports with essentially the same conclusion.

and dutiful report”. As the long “Ohnvergreiffliche” document is indeed ripe with burgeoning pejorative, the Council may have judged it too colorful for use as a proper document to submit, cf. their excuse to Sehested for their “free” style. In any case, the document would probably have been composed by the four Heinrichs through the late spring of 1718. It ends abruptly, though, in the middle of commenting upon underlined Dippel quotes, the very last one going:

Alles sowol Rechten als Bürger: et Sequ

Nullum applausum haberet fabula, nisi ridicula finiretur epanorthosi.

Their Latin-Greek comment means: *the story would have no applause if it did not end in a mocking retribution*. This was a looming conclusion, demanding some sort of satisfaction on the part of the Council. They would indeed prove fit to fight to achieve this aim.

## Attacking Incompetent Judges Is Not Libel

Dippel authored a reply to the 1717 lawsuit of the Council against him (VIII.9). In the extant copy there is neither date nor recipient, but the conclusion indicates it would be intended as a supplication to the King. A small intro by another author shows that the letter is a copy, indicating Dippel as the author; in the text itself, he only refers to himself as “the concipient” or “I”. The main aim of the letter, heavy in legal Latin and indirect references to Roman Law, is to disprove the City Council’s allegation of libel committed by Dippel in the Bandau case. Titled “Answer to the specification given of the alleged libel”, it presents five numbered points. The first argues that the Altona City Council has somehow overstepped the royal decree regulating them; they pretend to have a much more “stately character” than royal regulations ascribe to them.

The next point claims that the City Council has done Bandau wrong, not only by going against standard judicial style but also in that it is unheard of that an elected body like the Council could proceed “in causa spoliū und turbatæ”, in cases dealing with the disturbance of possessions, and thus decide compensation for expenses – which is what allowed for their frivolous appeal in the case, against explicit royal decree. The argument seems to be based on the idea that an elected body represents vested interests which may decide to serve their own aims – in contradistinction to a proper court.

The third and fourth points say that the Council has acted “confusé et illegaliter”, confused in its treatment and sentence of Bandau, and illegally because forced auctions should serve *Utilitas Publica*, the public good – but in this case it has only served to scare Hamburg investors away from needy Altona.

Fifth, the concipient wonders why the Council as “law scholars” do not know that high tribunalia should not prosecute critical presumptions about themselves as libel, also because of the fact that those allegations have until now been made *in fora civile* only – that is, in civil legal context, not in publications. Does a “Lædirte Kläger”, a damaged plaintiff, commit libel when he files a complaint against his process? This is really Dippel’s central argument: those who would answer yes to this question would have in mind to establish a terrible tyranny in the world. Why is that? Here, Dippel goes deeply into Roman Law, and this really forms the crux of his argument: if a judge is incompetent or corrupt, or both, then such a damaged source of decisions will result in further damage if he is able to conduct his case with the force of law; but if he can be called to the court without libel, he can also be warned without libel which is much less than to be accused.<sup>110</sup> So, corrections of a court could not be counted as libel, and the City Council of Altona have no right to complain about libel if a person, mistreated by them, is filing a complaint that they have done him wrong. A further premise lurks in the background: if a complaint is *true*, it cannot constitute libel.

At the end of the document Dippel considers a counterstrike, demanding public retraction of the libel against *himself*, committed by the Council, but remains with proposing to the King that he should just “... des Altonaische Magistrats zu frott ...” Here the extant paper ends – zu frotzeln? To ridicule or tease them?

So, the letter ends as a sort of complaint or supplication addressing the King. When is it written? Could be anytime between the spring of 1717 and the summer of 1718. But was it ever submitted to the King? The fact that it is there, among the case files, suggests that it was sent. At the time, Dippel’s access to the King would yet be open. Alternatively, it may be identical to Dippel’s 1717 complaint to the Appeal Court in Glückstadt, mentioned in his December letter to the King and appended in copy by Reventlow in his January letter to the King.

Dippel still seems confident he could turn higher authorities against the Council. President Reventlow is only mentioned in passing, not by name, but as “the President and Secretary himself, who did nothing but a virtuous and good work”. It was authored at a time when Dippel had no reason to believe that Reventlow would not continue to support him against the City Council.

So, by the summer of 1718, a new flank had opened in the case, opposing Dippel and the Altona City Council. Strangely, the case now seems to have ground to a halt. There is no answer to the angry report from the City Council, as if Sehested

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<sup>110</sup> “Nam si Judex imperité vel corrupté vel utroqvé modo judicons vigore legum litem suam facit, si porti læsæ ad damnum et interesse tenetur, si hino sine injurica in jus vocari potest, poterit etiam sine iniurica commonefieri, quod multo minus est quam accuseri”. I have been unable to trace the quote.

in Copenhagen has just archived the letter from Altona assuming things would calm down or in any case were in no need of further processing. No further documents from the whole second half of that year are found among the case files, and an outside observer in the fall of 1718 might simply conclude that all had been said and done. Still not a single bad word has been heard between Reventlow and his protégé Dippel.

In August-September, however, an event not appearing among the case files placed Dippel in a yet another conflict with the establishment in Altona, namely its superior clerical authority, Dean Fleischer of the Trinity Church. It was Dippel's pamphlet, printed in Hamburg, against the initiative of the Dean with forced baptism of kidnapped babies of dissenters. This prompted Dippel to ridicule the Dean and ironically propose that the executioner might be of assistance in order to force even more people to the church. The actual role of the hangman, however, turned out to be the burning of Dippel's provocative piece, but there is no indication that Dippel suffered any immediate retribution for publishing it, and Reventlow even turned against the activism of the cleric, cf. below. But the Dean is not the only target of Dippel's ridicule which also took aim at the court servants who had been commanded to seize the children from their home. Those servants came from the office of Vice President Land-Reuther. So, it is far from unthinkable that Reventlow was beginning to feel uneasy with Dippel's diatribe embroiling his own second-in-command. But the case is strangely absent among the case files.

A document exists, however – not among the case files – showing that Dippel was himself increasingly becoming nervous. On 5 November, the King issued a letter of protection, a “*Salvus Conductus*”, as his response to a supplication, not extant, submitted to him from Dippel in Altona. Here, the King confirms, yet again, that Dippel has the right to free passage in and out of the realm, that he “... should not be molested, disputed, nor offended”, and that “Our superior and inferior, civil and military servants must observe this”.<sup>111</sup> It is not indicated who else – apart from Dippel himself – would be notified about this royal grant, but it is evident that Dippel already in the fall of 1718 was worried about being assaulted, persecuted, or arrested. Probably, this anxiety reflects that Dippel was learning about the continued obsession of the Council with his case.

So, this was the first act of the Dippel Case, 1717–18. From Dippel as the energetic supporter to unjustly convicted persons in 1717, to his beginning strife with

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<sup>111</sup> “... weder an Persohn noch Güthern molestiret, angefochten, oder beleidiget worden solle. Dernach Unsern Obere und Niedere Civil und Militair Bediente [...] zu achten”, Danish State Archives: “Tyske Kancelli, Indenrigske Afdeling B II Registranter med Koncepter og Indlæg, Patenten (1670–1770), Kopibog over åbne breve, VA VII”, here 1718–1719, 83: a “*Salvus Conductus*” from Frederik IV to Dippel, dated 5 November 1718.

the Council in Altona and his complaints about them to the King in Copenhagen already the same year – followed by the grimly determined effort of the Council to turn the case against Dippel himself. Dippel directed his complaints to the King, the Council theirs to foreign minister Sehested. But there the story stalled.

Now, the case with the City Council was fermenting in darkness all the way through the winter of 1718–19. Only in the spring of 1719, it would finally explode.

## Act 2: The Campaign Against Corruption

### March 1719 – The Case Explodes

Suddenly, all hell breaks loose. There are around 20 case files from the last days of March alone, some of them in several copies. Most of them seem to have been presented and discussed at committee meetings and have been copied for this purpose. So, now there is suddenly a committee working on the case, with participation of the two most active of the four Heinrichs, Joenssen and Archenholtz, who had been working on the report on Dippel the summer before.<sup>112</sup>

Some of the documents are numbered as process files, and there is an overview document by Reventlow himself, listing 10 of them as attachments, to which we shall return (IV.6). A committee meeting of 28 March is intensely addressing the Dippel case, but an important change has taken place. Now, the aim has been radically extended to nepotism and bribery more broadly. Most importantly, Reventlow is now spearheading the agenda as a sort of general purge of corrupt institutions and practices in Altona – and he himself and his office are among those under attack for receiving bribes. So, the broad purge also targets persons in or close to his own household – if not the noble couple themselves. A major incentive of his is simply to clear himself. When he arrived in the city five years earlier he had dismissed the city mayors, and the tension between him and the City Council which was palpable in the summer of 1718 has now all but vanished. Now, the two of them appear to collaborate smoothly in a novel, broader crusade to cleanse the city administration of corruption. Finally, two full years after the Council's first charge against Dippel, they have convinced Reventlow to go public on their side. It is not evident how long the two parties have been collaborating, but it seems this has been going on at least for some time, probably months,

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<sup>112</sup> This committee is referred to in different ways; I call it “the committee” with lowercase “c”, in order to distinguish it from the official Commission with a capital C which was appointed later in spring.

maybe all the way back to the fall. Have they kept a low profile in order not to alert suspects? Dippel was already sufficiently nervous to have sounded the alarm to the King in November. It is also not evident how the searchlight has now been turned towards the President's own office – apart from the fact that Dippel might have attracted interest in that direction as he was the President's invention, his invitee, his collaborator, and even to some extent staying in the greater Reventlow household now under suspicion.

In this process, Dippel's role has been completely reversed. In 1718, he appeared as Reventlow's ally or even deputy vis-à-vis a malfunctioning City Council; now he is among those suspected, while the City Council takes Reventlow's orders. Dippel used to be part of the solution; now he is part of the problem – yea, even growing into the towering symbol of that problem. How did that happen? The almost nine-month hiatus of documents since the summer events gives us little information, and the March documents are not generous with information about events predating March. When and how the new, active anti-corruption committee was assembled, uniting the former opponents Reventlow and the City Council, is not clear, nor how long they had already been collaborating. How has the reconciliation between Reventlow and the Council been negotiated and how have they articulated their common agenda? Maybe the City Council has been successful in broadening its attack against Dippel to incriminate other parts of the Reventlow household, thereby forcing the Count to take action and side with them in order not to be pulled down with the expanding circle of persons facing charges. In any case, the much broader task of the committee implies that a host of new names, both of accused, witnesses, informants, and other characters now fill the case files, and it is far from always obvious to what degree, if at all, they relate to the original Dippel case.

Thus, the earliest 1719 documents are copies of ultrashort missives by members of the wealthy Hamburg financial family, the Ottes, dated 21 February 1719 (IV.11).<sup>113</sup> These two letters are signed obligation documents granting that Johan Berend Otte, alone or with David Otte Sr., declares to be willing to pay some large

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<sup>113</sup> The Ottes were not unfamiliar with protracted financial court cases. They were, at this point, involved in a long and complicated financial court case in Hamburg in which they had filed a complaint against one Magdalena Negenborn and her Jewish financial advisor Elias Salomon for having illegitimately extracted a large gift from David Otte Jr., implying that they had taken advantage of the abnormal state of mind of this "schwachsinnige" family member. Another protracted court case, the Otte lawsuit is indicated as spanning the period of 1707–22 (Staat-sarchiv Hamburg, 211-2\_O 13; Alt-/Vorsignatur: O 1488).



amount of money. In one letter, the name of the recipient of 2,000 Rix-dollars has dramatically been cut out leaving a hole in the paper; in the other, the receiver is indicated as the “Vice/Präsidenten Stelle zu Altona” – the seat of the (vice) president of Altona. “Vice” is added in small over the line – by a later hand, wishing to exonerate the President? Obviously, these two documents appear as evidence that the Ottes have attempted to bribe the Altona presidency, potentially incriminating President Reventlow himself. Thus, they are evidence that the Reventlows’ presidency itself may have involved in corruption. The two documents are virtual bombs ticking under the Reventlows. Did these two documents trigger the whole new anti-corruption movement? In any case, Reventlow threw himself vigorously into the campaign and singled out Dippel as an accomplice if not the leader of a campaign against himself.

Two other brief Otte letters, a month later (20 March, IV.12), by contrast, are sworn affidavits that the Ottes have *not* been involved in bribes, and that Reventlow himself in particular is beyond suspicion: “... I assure hereby under oath that [...] Your High-Comital Excellence Mr. Count receives no money at all or should have anything with it to do.”<sup>114</sup> So, in the month between these two dates, a more or less formal accusation has been brought against the Ottes, forcing them to declare the innocence of both Reventlow and themselves. This would soon imply that focus was instead directed towards two middlemen in the planned transaction between the Reventlows and the Ottes – Johan Vincelius and Caspar Dionis de Caseres – about whom we shall soon hear more. The Otte letters testify to the fact that the committee had been extending their campaign against corruption far beyond Dippel already in the early spring of 1719 – without any explicit relation between the Dippel and the Otte cases. The case would soon develop, however, and Dippel would comment upon it in new “Memorials” entering the case during spring, but not found among the case files.

## Two Portugalöser

But what was the reason behind Dippel’s sudden fall from Comital grace? All points to the fact that the immediate reason was not at all an attack, on his part, on Reventlow and his wife for taking bribes. Rather, it was because Dippel was now *himself* accused of being involved in bribery. This is evident from a striking

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<sup>114</sup> “... versichere hirmit an Eÿdes statt, wie mir denn auch expresse vorhero verbohten worden gegen die Persohn von dem Gelde nichts zu gedencken, indehm Ihro Hochgräffl Excellence dH: Graff gar kein Geld nehme noch etwas davon haben solte” (IV.12).

document containing a testimony given by his old protégé Andreas Bandau collected by the committee, dated 29 March 1719. The committee was now making investigations calling Dippel's old partners as witnesses. Lieben Sr. would be interrogated in April (VII.12) and a handful of his friends already on 31 March (VII.13), soon to be followed by Caseres. The Bandau interrogation exists in two copies (IV.10 and VI.10).

Bandau came walking in from Hamburg, now 67 years of age, seemingly solicited by the committee. It is not clear what made him give testimony, as he was not a citizen of Altona. Maybe the committee would once again have been in a position to threaten him with dire legal consequences like the Council had done in the spring of 1717 when they extorted his confession about Dippel the ghostwriter. Bandau is here received by Joenssen and Archenholtz of the new committee. Now, Bandau relates the following story: He had originally met Dippel through a common broker friend named Stallbohm. As Bandau had been complaining about his drawn-out Altona process, Stallbohm had offered a piece of advice – if Bandau's case was just, as he cautiously added. He would present Bandau to a certain man with good connections to the Count. So, a couple of days later, he had introduced him to none other than – Dippel. He advised Bandau to produce a couple of *Portugalöser*, that is, heavy gold coins (Fig. 13).<sup>115</sup> They would make his case turn out right, as "... these Portugalöser should be one for Mr. Count and the other for Mrs. Countess".<sup>116</sup> One gold coin for each of the noble couple, and Bandau's legal problems would disappear into thin air. Bandau, however, hesitated to leave the coins with Dippel and wished to hand them over in person. Dippel agreed to this, "... as he said, these are exactly the right justice pennies with which one can bend the court or remain bound by it".<sup>117</sup> This testimony obviously implicates Dippel as a middleman to bribery, and, by extension, would compromise the presidential couple as Dippel had implied to Bandau that they were receptive to suborning; yea, that Dippel even functioned as a bribe collector on their behalf.

We know that the Count had indeed intervened on Bandau's side at a late point in his court case in 1717 – did this happen as a result of these two gold coins? Or did the coins ever reach the Reventlows? Or was all of this a fabrication in order to incriminate Dippel?

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115 One Portugalöser corresponds to 10 Ducats, of c. 3½ gram gold each, that is, all in all 35 grams of gold per coin. One Ducat, in turn, would correspond to 2 Rix-dollars, so that one Portugalöser = 20 Rix-dollars = 120 Mark.

116 "... alß welche Portugalöser einer vor den Hr. Graffen und der andern vor die Frau Gräffin seyn solte".

117 "... dabey sagend, dies sind eben die rechten Justitz Pfennige, womit man das Recht beugen kann, oder sich lencken läßet".



**Figure 13:** Decisive in the case against Dippel were two *Portugalöser*, that is, two heavy gold coins, which he was claimed to have extracted as a bribe on the part of the Reventlows. They denied this and accused him of libel as well as bribery. *Portugalöser* with a weight around 35 grams were first minted in Portugal around 1500 – hence the name – and they became a widespread currency also in the north of Europe where many were coined at the mint of Hamburg beginning from 1553, at a value of 10 Ducats.

Here a Hamburg *Portugalöser* of 1665 – the front side shows the port of Hamburg under the text of *SUB UMBRA ALARUM TUARUM*, the protection formula of “Under the shadow of thy wings”. The flip side displays the coats of arms of four bank cities under the motto *BANCHORUM IN EUROPA BONO CUM DEO ERECTORUM MEMORIA* – “To the memory of the banks of Europe erected for the good by God”. The four cities are Venice, Amsterdam, Hamburg, and Nuremberg. In Hamburg’s coat of arms, at the top, the city gate is visible with its port closed; in Altona’s corresponding coat of arms, the gate is open.

On top of the bribery accusation, Bandau adds further incrimination of Dippel. When taking his case to the Glückstadt Appeal Court using his complaint text authored by Dippel, Bandau had contracted with a lawyer, one Dr. Münchhausen, to represent him there for a payment of 20 Rix-dollars. Here, Dippel immediately demanded half of the sum for himself, as a payment for his efforts in the libel case which had been opened in 1717 against Bandau and himself because of the criticism of the Council in their common complaint text, thus keeping Bandau free from consequences. So, Bandau had actually paid Dippel 10 Rix-dollars. The document concludes with the formal declaration that the text has twice been read aloud to Bandau, who signs it with his initials as a sworn affidavit.

After all the assistance Dippel appears to have given Bandau, this is a surprising turn of events. This affidavit was obviously a severe blow to Dippel and in fact seems to have constituted the first decisive step in his fall. Dippel’s famous claim that the Reventlows were corrupt, then, was not an act of criticism; it was not made publicly or in writing. Rather, it was an implication of he himself acting as a broker, presupposing that the Presidential couple were receptive to con-

cealed payments for certain services. Would we have reasons to doubt Bandau's severe accusation? Two years earlier, the Council had, fuming with anger over Dippel's allegations in Bandau's ghostwritten complaint text, threatened Bandau with jail or fines in order to force him to withdraw those statements. Is it possible that they would now have been able to extort false testimony from him under such continuous pressure, making him turn against his benefactor? We are really in no position to know the truth of these allegations, nor – if they are true – whether Dippel actually knew that the Reventlows were willing to accept bribes or even collaborated with them in doing so. But it is evident from the further, swift development of the case that Bandau's turn against Dippel played a central role in late March meetings of the new committee.

## Reventlow's Shapeshifting

We can see from several copied documents that they were “product. in Commis-sione, 28te Mart” 1719”, that is, presented in the committee that date. What would have happened at such a meeting? It so happens that one document, seemingly authored by Reventlow himself in early April, functions as a summary of committee meeting activity around that time, systematically commenting upon all of 10 numbered appendages submitted with it (IV.6). It is a pretty informal three-page text with no headline, dating, or signature, but it evaluates the implication of all 10 documents mentioned, point by point, and so may constitute a sort of precis or conclusion of committee meetings. It is written in the first person and addresses, in the text, “Your Majesty” and thus appears to be a sort of draft by Reventlow of a report to the King in Copenhagen.

The text appears as if torn out of a larger context, beginning abruptly with “Demnach ...” (hence) and immediately addressing the issue of Dippel's *Species Facti*, now deemed to be “filled with highly improper expressions and insinuations, as well as many untruths”, and asking the King to communicate to him before any answer to Dippel. This could hardly refer to Dippel's original document of the same title which the King would already have seen 15 months earlier and which had long since been processed. It would rather refer to a new Dippel text with the same title (meaning only “state of the art” or “presentation of facts”) and to which several other documents refer but is not found among the case files. In any case, in this report to the King, Reventlow strongly expresses a wish to reject circulating rumors that he himself and the Countess have been receiving bribes: “So that no-one should be prejudiced by this, I have found it suitable to show how all sorts of rumors have been spreading, as if everything could be obtained from

us by gifts and presents".<sup>118</sup> Hearsay about the Reventlows seems to be spreading in the twin city of Hamburg-Altona, probably also reported in Dippel's new *Species Facti*. Here, Reventlow refers to the Otte case – to which he also returns later – and to the Altona scribe Michael Christian Lieben spreading similar rumors, whom we know from the 1717 case in which he was involved with his son. Such hearsay is the reason why Reventlow has decided to interrogate a number of people. Here, his run-through of appendices begins. No. 1 consists of the statements of those interrogated; No. 2, based on these statements, an arrest order he has issued on scribe Lieben, and No. 3, a document to be published by the Chancellery. None of these documents are present, and a later but contemporaneous note in the margins also complains that they are not appended with the text.<sup>119</sup> This absence leaves a bit in the dark why Lieben – the father of the merchant Dippel defended in his first *Species Facti* – has now come under the spotlight. He seems to have been a frequent guest with the Reventlows but was arrested already in March and remained imprisoned at the time of his interrogation on 29 April.

By contrast, all of the attachments numbers 4–10 of Reventlow's report are among the case files. No. 4 is the Bandau interrogation, of which Reventlow paraphrases the central allegation. This is the moment when Reventlow decisively disowns Dippel:

**No. 4** claims that he hands over two Portugalöser, one for Mr. Count and the other for Mrs. Countess, to him, which he also willingly received, saying that these are the right justice pennies, with which you can bend the court or let oneself be suppressed by it, with the addition that he had given Mr. Dippelio further 10 Rix-dollars. How now a female person has given him information about this, such as the writing **No. 5** proves, he has himself, according to his writing sent 30 March to the Vicar Hirschfeldt, **No. 6**, not been able to deny this, from which it is easy to conclude that he in doing so has been acting in a highly-punishable way, not only has he received gifts in a prohibited way, but also and in particular abused my and my wife's name, which does not at all fit with his professed piety.<sup>120</sup>

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**118** "Damit iedennoch niemand dadurch préveniret werde, habe ich für nöhtig ermeßen an zu zeigen, wie bißshero allerhand Spargements ausgestreuet, als wann mit Geschencken und Gaben man alhie alles erhalten könnte".

**119** The margin note, hard to read: "diese 3 beýlagen haben wegen abgang der post nicht sogelante abgeschriben werde können, sollen mit ersten folgen." It is a strange fact that these documents have disappeared, particularly the first one with early committee interrogations, presumably of Lieben, Caseres, etc. Was there information here which the Count did not want to go public?

**120** "**No 4** deponiret, daß er zwey Portugalöser, einen vor den Herren Grafen und den andern vor die Frau Gräfin demselben überreicht, welche er auch willig angenommen, dabey sagend, dieß sind eben die rechte Justits pfennige, womit man das recht beügen kann, oder sich lencken läßet, mit dem beýfügen, er hätte dem H. Dippelio noch 10 Rtr: gegeben. Wie nun hirvon durch

So, the pietist is not so pious.<sup>121</sup> The Bandau interrogation proves to Reventlow that Dippel has implied the Presidential couple are corrupt as well as proving Dippel willing to accept bribes himself. Nos. 5 and 6 are a warning letter to Dippel and a protest letter from him, respectively, to which we return below, and Reventlow takes them as further evidence of his guilt with the somewhat fragile argument that he does not deny, in the latter, to have committed this action. So, Dippel has acted so as to make himself “Höchststraffbahr” – supremely punishable – a foreboding expression which Reventlow would not cease to repeat.

Reventlow proceeds into the Otte case. As the Ottes’ signed affidavits seem to cleanse themselves as well as the Reventlows from bribery, spotlights now turn to the middlemen connecting the two elite families. Reventlow brings the heavy revelation that the first person incriminated here is really an important character in his own household, Vincelius, who has accepted bribes for issuing “protecto-riums” to certain persons. This was a standard of the free city of Altona ever since King Christian IV in 1641 had offered general protection in Altona to Jews expelled from nearby Hamburg, but practice was not that such protection documents required a payment. These bribes were not small (14 Ducats) but nothing as compared to what Vincelius, through a Jewish middleman named Caspar Dio-

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eine Frauens person demselben nachricht gegeben, wie das Schreiben sub No. 5 darthut, hat dieselbe, beysage seines am 30ten Martÿ a.c. an den herren Pastoren Hirschfeld abgelaßenen Schreibens sub No. 6. beÿde nicht abläugnen können, woraus dann leichtlich zu judiciren, daß er hirunter Höchststraffbahr gehandelt, indem er nicht allein verbotenerweise Geschenke genommen, besondern auch sogar meines und meiner Gemahlin Nahmen darunter fälschlich gebrauchet, welches iedoch mit seiner vorgegebenen Pietet gar nicht übereinkombt”.

121 Dippel may also have tested the patience of the Reventlows in other ways. According to an anonymous voice in the *Fürstlich Wittgensteinisches Archiv Bad Laasphe*, D49, probably one of Count August’s court officials, Dippel’s departure from the Reventlow household happened for the following reason: “Es wohnte *Dippelius* in *Altona* bey dem Graffen *Repenklau* [sic!] etliche Jahr in seinem Haus und hat daselbst so viel gemerket und abgehöret, daß der Graff, seine Gemahl und die übrigen alda sich befindlichen Beamten *present* nemmen den ungerechten zu helfen den gerechten aber und armen dagegen zu untertruken. Weil nun *Dippelius* sehr gemeinsam mit dem Graff und deßen Gemahlin gewesen, so hat *Dippelius* sich öftters gegen den Graff und seine Gemahlin als ein scharffer Hausprediger aufgeführt, wodurch der Graff und deßen Gemahlin die sehr gelt-geitzig sein soll endlich so scharff aneinander gekommen daß sich *Dippelius* darauf aus dem Haus nach Hamburg zu wohnen hat begeben müßen”. Dippel spent much time, for several years, with Count Repenklau [sic!] and his consort and remarked that they and their staff helped the unrighteous and suppressed the righteous. So, Dippel began to act as a sharp house preacher to the Count and Countess – who should be very greedy for money, as it is noted in passing – and finally, they had become so mad with each other that Dippel had had to move to Hamburg. This could have been a version Dippel later told his friend Count August. Maybe it was not always easy to house a pious prophet.

nis de Caseres, had encouraged Johan Berend Otte to pay.<sup>122</sup> The motivation of the 2,000 Rix-dollars and 200 Ducats promised in the Otte February letters above – Reventlow's Nos. 7–8 – is now revealed. They were really intended as payments for the vacant office of Vice President of Altona to be taken over by Otte. Nos. 9 and 10, the Ottes' affidavits and a Dutch letter presented by Vincelius trying to exonerate himself, further bear witness to this illicit transaction, adding among other things that Vincelius had accepted gifts from Caseres in order to facilitate Otte's acquisition of the high office. Vincelius could be none other than Johan Vincelius who had been quartermaster with the Reventlows for many years and had also functioned as the teacher and servant of Benedicte von Brockdorff's son from her first marriage, Christen Skeel.<sup>123</sup>

It is a new Reventlow we meet here, for the first time: challenged, threatened in his position, livid, self-righteous, and aggressive. The report on the committee meetings concludes with Reventlow simply kicking out these two corrupt members from his own household: "As I under such circumstances could no longer tolerate the mentioned Dippelium and Vincelium in my house, I have let them understand my will, after which they have retired to Hamburg, and in case this has not yet happened they will submit to your Royal Majt. a most-submissive memorial".<sup>124</sup> So, Dippel has already now learnt about Reventlow's disclosures when he was relegated from his house where he may still have had his lab. He has now fled to Hamburg along with his fellow bribe suspect Vincelius. Reventlow predicts that the two would now file a complaint with the King in Copenhagen, and he terminates the letter by admonishing the King to send himself copies, so that he himself can undertake the task of answering the two of them. Reventlow will make sure that no supplication from the two of them should be considered by the

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<sup>122</sup> The name is spelled differently in the files, Cassere, Casere, Caseres, etc. We use the latter version.

<sup>123</sup> Not much is known about Johan Vincelius. He might have been related to the Livonian Vicar Berend Vincelius, for at some point he is presented with the byname "Curlandus", both toponyms referring to the Eastern Baltic area. In 1712, he had accompanied the young Skeel to his studies in Leiden where it is documented that the two of them donated to the Lutheran congregation there (Helk 2002, 327). In 1699, he had been present at a ceremony at the Academy in Sorø, Denmark, which Reventlow had been presiding. He is mentioned three times as a student in Sorø, every time as the quartermaster of a new noble family (Wad 1886, 205; 213), so he seems to have made a career quartermastering.

<sup>124</sup> "Wann nun bey so bewandten umständen ich vorbemeldten Dippelium und Vincelium nicht länger in meinem Hause dulden können, habe ich ihnen meinen willen zu verstehen gegeben, welche auch darauf nach Hamburg sich retiriret, und dem vernehmen nach fallß es noch nicht geschehen, bey Ihrer Königl. Mayts. mit einem allerunterthänigsten memoriali einkommen werden".



King without his knowledge. The Copenhagen connection is increasingly imminent in the background.

The report refers to the long interrogation of the middleman Caseres which took place on 4 April, incriminating Vincelius, and thus it must be later than that date; probably the document sums up the results from a couple of consecutive committee meetings in late March–early April. In any case, this document provides the best window into the workings of the new committee: focusing on corruption issues, spearheaded by the Reventlows, conducting witness interrogations, going through numbered series of evidence, arresting suspects such as Lieben and Caseres, kicking out others like Dippel and Vincelius, and reporting all of it to the King in Copenhagen. Dippel appears as the main culprit, but now he seems but the tip of an iceberg of Altona corruption to be weeded out.

Simultaneously, Bandau's two-Portugalöser story signaled a decisive turn in Dippel's fate. Now, there would be no way back.

## Dippel Panicking

We have no explicit mention of when Dippel fled to Hamburg. If we conclude from Reventlow's report on his eviction, it would be triggered by the Bandau interrogation which took place on 29 March. The next day, 30 March, he would be in Hamburg, for that day he sent two panicking letters from there. So, he probably left on 29 March, taking with him all of his chemical equipment in two large trunks. Many reports on the Dippel case date his exit to Hamburg far earlier, even before his 1717 letter to the King, but I see no documents pointing in that direction. It is important to remember that it was no big thing to go to Hamburg; the distance between the two cities was about five km, less than a one-hour walk. Most probably, Dippel would often have been there, also during the first months of 1719, e.g., to make arrangements for the reissue of a writing by the seventeenth-century mystic Lorenz Grammendorf, including a long theological introduction by himself with a Hamburg book printer, to which we return later. The two cities lived in close metabolism with one another; only if you were wanted or persecuted in one of the two jurisdictions, you would remain in one of them.

The two mentioned letters from Dippel must have been intercepted so as to appear as evidence with the committee, and the same holds for a small handful of other letters to and from Dippel among the case files in copies, most of them undated, but seemingly belonging to the same period. There is little chance that Dippel himself would voluntarily have ceded his mail correspondence to the committee, less certain whether receivers of Dippel letters may have been willing to do so, e.g., the Lutheran vicar Hirschfeldt whom he addressed several times in



early spring. Reventlow and the committee have probably been able to monitor Altona mail service, and it is far from certain that these letters ever reached their intended addressees before appearing as evidence before the committee.<sup>125</sup> These letters prove central, however, both for understanding Dippel and his predicament at the time, but also because they served, to the committee, no less than two purposes. They would be scrutinized for hints to other suspects of corruption, and they were evidence that Dippel was committing further acts of libel and calumny against the Reventlows which would be added to his growing rap sheet.

The two letters No. 5–6 which Reventlow cited as evidence in his report seem to be antedated by less fearful letters by Dippel earlier in spring which are also found among case files. Document IV.10 contains, along with the central Bandau testimony, excerpts from two letters by Dippel to the mentioned pastor Hirschfeldt, “Minister de la Parole de Dieu, Altona”. This refers to one Michael Hirschfeld who had recently, as of 1718, assumed his position at the small Heiligengeist Kirche – Church of the Holy Spirit – in Altona. The two of them may seem surprising bedfellows; Dippel had made his public name as a radical pietist from lambasting Lutherans and Lutheran churches ever since the 1690s. Hirschfeldt, of course, may have been a Lutheran leaning towards more moderate pietism. But Dippel is obviously friendly with the pastor whom he also attempts to bring into play as a communication link to the Reventlows through whom he may originally have met him. In the first small letter extract Dippel refers to an attachment:

... You may give this report to Mrs. Countess, and if it is the wish of her consort to send it to the King in Copenhagen today, she will not issue orders to His Majesty and not report any lies to him. I also send a copy of it to the priest through whom I recently sent my supplication to the King. God be with us, in whom I remain ...<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> Of course, it is possible that such letters could have been opened, copied, and sealed again, so they could be forwarded to the addressees such as not to arouse suspicion – we do not know. Shipment of mail was not anonymous, so it was not difficult to monitor letters. Pedersen (2020) resumes that the possibilities for surveillance were numerous in the mail service at the time. All letters should be delivered in person at the mail office and registered, and the sack of mail was shipped with a list, a so-called “post-card”, over receivers. This list was tacked on the wall of the receiving post office, and recipients would collect their mail there. Christian Erlund, later chief of mail in Copenhagen, had perfected post espionage by the opening, copying, and re-sealing of letters in Hamburg, beginning in 1704, later extended also to the Danish realm. Cf. Pedersen (2008; 2020).

<sup>126</sup> “Siegt es mit Lieben; diesen Bericht können Sie der Frau Gräffin geben, umb so es Ihre Gemahl beliebet, denselbe Heute nach Coppenhagen an dem König zu schicken, so werden Sie Sn. Majestät nicht instruiren und keine Lügen dahin berichten. Ich schicke gleichfelß Copiam davon an diejenigen Minister, durch welchen ich neulich meine Supplic an den König geschickt. Gott seÿ mitt Uns, in welchem ich verharre”.

The report attached might be the new *Species Facti*, Dippel hoping it may reach the Countess. The reference that if she forwards it to the King she will not lie nor give him orders seems to be an ironic way of implying that this is exactly what she is otherwise busy doing. Copies of the same report Dippel has already sent to yet another unnamed cleric who has recently been willing to submit a supplication from him to the King. Could it be one of his gold-making friends among the Hamburg clergy? Dippel is obviously struggling to get in contact with the King to explain his version of events, but still no panic.

The next letter to Hirschfeldt (also in IV.10) seems copied in toto, maybe from around medio March. Here, Dippel goes into a more detailed complaint over the injustices of the committee. He relates how a Council member, one Mr. Stackenholtz (probably Archenholtz), would have loudly declared in the wine cellar under the Altona City Hall that Vincelius and himself would be extradited from Reventlow's mansion, "... because we are both implied in the affair with the Jew and wished to receive part of the agreed-upon sum, and that Mr. Count himself had said this in the court to all members of the Council".<sup>127</sup> So, Dippel only indirectly learns what is going on against him in the committee where Reventlow claims that Dippel is involved in the Caseres-Otte case in which he would also receive bribes. Dippel, of course, appears shocked with this accusation, so he asks Hirschfeldt to inform the Count that he will now request the King's assistance, not only for his own cause but on behalf of other innocent persons involved as well. He urges Hirschfeldt to fetch a copy of his new *Species facti* from a certain Mr. Maas the following Monday, and he asks him to communicate it to the King so that the Comital couple may see that he does not at all refrain from having light thrown upon his activities. In this letter, panic is becoming palpable underneath the cool rhetoric. Dippel is obviously anxious to reach the King, he is now realizing that direct letters from him may be seized and that his first attempt to use another cleric as a middleman may have failed. He does not hesitate to try to make Hirschfeldt threaten Reventlow with the King, maybe in order to hide from Reventlow his problems with getting into contact with him.

As Reventlow had learned in his report (No. 5), there might be people out there wanting to warn Dippel about the imminent dangers now facing him. IV.11 contains a small, touching missive from an anonymous woman. We have no idea who she may have been. Signing herself "Your willing handmaiden", the author does not even know Dippel's exact name, addressing him as "Herr Canzeleÿ Rath

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127 "... weile wir beyde in der affaire mit dem Juden impliciret und die stipulirte Summe hätten participiren wollen und daß der Herr Graff solches selbst in dem Gerichte zu allen Raths verwandtes gesaget".

Tiempel” – or is this an attempt to conceal the recipient? The short note goes directly to the matter, referring a rumor from the day before that three witnesses will now testify under oath about the two Portugalöser to the noble couple and the 10 Rix-dollars to Bandau; that they intend to go to the King in order to “paint my Lord black” and revoke his royal protection in order to put him in prison. Who the other two witnesses on the Portugalöser story might be, in addition to Bandau, we do not know, maybe the broker Stallbohm might be one. She writes in order to make Dippel cautious, for there are further investigations coming up into whether he has received money from someone in order to prove that “... he is a godless man and no pietist or pious quaker, I am happy if he is out of the case and safe, for the Countess is very embittered. I am his old faithful friend”.<sup>128</sup> So, the Countess in particular is on the war path. The letter is sent from Altona one Thursday morning – could be Thursday 16 or 23 March – to “Drimpel oder Dippel”. Strangely, his willing servant vacillates with regard to his name. In any case, the note was sent earlier than Reventlow’s report on late March committee activity in which it appears as evidence, and earlier than Dippel’s 30 March letter referring to it.

Exactly 30 March is the day when Dippel would have realized with full force that the committee was seriously out to get him, for on that date two agitated letters went off from him in Hamburg to where he had probably arrived the day before: a final missive to pastor Hirschfeldt, the other to Privy Councilor Count U.A. von Holstein in Copenhagen, with whom Dippel was obviously on friendly terms.

The former is a long, panic-stricken letter again to pastor Hirschfeldt (in IV.11, with parallel extract copies in VI.11 and VII.11), containing what is probably Dippel’s reaction to the anonymous female warning sign. It is probably the best window into Dippel’s increasingly desperate situation and also takes him to express new libelous attacks. It addresses the “venerable Pastor, highly valued friend”. It mentions a strange letter attached, which Dippel suspects is organized by the Countess – supposedly the warning note from the anonymous woman. In any case, Dippel’s reading of the letter in question is not really as a warning but as an indirect attempt organized by the Countess to scare him. Dippel doubts that she would really have been able to find rogues in Altona willing to testify under oath such things – the Portugalöser story – which is why Dippel now blows his top and goes into a fit of rage. The Countess must have made these persons commit perjury: “... so I ask you to say to her and her husband with all due respect

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128 “... daß er ein Gottloser Mann sey und kein Pietist oder frommer Quäker, ich welte daß er aus der Sache wäre und sicher, weil die Gräffin sehr erboßt ist. Ich bin seine alte getreue Freündin”.

that I not only declare these witnesses to be forswearing criminals, but also declare the investigators themselves to be colluding with such subordinate criminals, and they will learn it from me if they do not know yet what it means to instigate such an inquisition against an honest man, to be the judge of one's own case, and this also directed against a person not recognizing this Altonian forum where you hear witnesses under oath without the other party being present".<sup>129</sup>

Dippel's desperation with the ongoing process is palpable. He has no access to cross-examine the witnesses whom he regards as scoundrels committing perjury, really conspiring with the inquisitors – the committee. The Reventlows – positioned in the city to reintroduce proper city rule – do not adhere to elementary judicial principles. The Count acts as a judge in a case in which he is himself a part, the main accused in the case must learn about the process from accidental winehouse rumors, witnesses are questioned under oath with the other part – Dippel – not present and without any ability to conduct a defense. But Dippel has not finished; his rhetorically masterful fit of anger mounts over a whole page. The whole machine is driven by one "Erboßtes Weib", one furious woman, and the gentlemen of the Council in whom the Count now places so much trust are drawn through the cesspool by her. It would hardly have helped Dippel's position with the committee that it got access to this letter.

Slowly cooling down, Dippel tries to present a short version of what he would say in his defense if he had the committee's ear. What had really happened is that Dippel offered to help Bandau finally to speak out in his protracted seven-years court case. In the presence of broker Stallbohm and a certain Rosenbach, probably his old friend the radical pietist and spurmaker Johann Georg Rosenbach now living in Altona, Bandau had gratefully offered him the two Portugalöser "... für meine Gutheit und Mühe", for his goodness and effort. The modest Dippel had hesitated to accept the offer, but Bandau had forced the coins upon him already the very first time they met, supposedly sometime in 1716. The 10 Rix-dollars, by contrast, Bandau had only given him half a year later, as a payment for his effort in the libel case against Bandau – such as any proper judge would have found in his investigation, Dippel adds. In the case of Lieben, he had blabbered so much about his grand plans and industries that Dippel thought he was wealthy and would borrow a large sum from him, but he would offer him 50 Mark only. Those

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129 "... so bitte ich Ihr und Ihren Herrn anzusagen nebenst meinem gebührenden respect, daß ich nicht nur diese Zeugen vor Meineydige Schelmen declarire, sondern auch die Inquisitores selbst vor collusores zu subordinatores solcher Schelmen, und Sie sollen von mir erfahren, wenn Sie es noch nicht wissen, was es auff sich habe, gegen einen ehrlichen Mann einen solche inquisition anzustellen, Richter in seiner eigenen Sache zu seyn, und dieses auch gegen Jemand, der Altonaische forum nicht agnosciret, Zeugen eydlich abzuhören *non praesente parte altera*".

he refused to be paid back, probably because of all of the food and drink and ink and paper that Dippel had spent on him, he adds. Dippel must have heard of charges against himself of accepting bribes from Lieben: he insists the small sum was no gift, just a loan never paid back. The copy of the letter abruptly stops here, and Dippel's defense in the Lieben case appears less than satisfactory.

This letter rightly pointed out the lack of legal standards of the building committee case and also gave Dippel's version of the fateful Bandau case. It is probably a short version of the defense that would have been in the new, no longer extant *Species Facti*. But expressing his rage against the Reventlows and the Countess in particular was no wise move. Would Dippel have been completely unaware that such a letter might end up in the hands of the committee?

The very same day, he penned yet another cry for help to Count U.A. von Holstein in Copenhagen, another top nobleman, Privy Councilor, and a member of the King's inner circle who would, a few years later, rise to Great Chancellor (VI.7). Holstein was also a brother-in-law of Reventlow, who hated him "souverainement" which may have been a reason Dippel addressed exactly him.<sup>130</sup> That letter may have reached its destination, for among the files is also a letter, which could be Holstein's brief answer. To Holstein, Dippel's tone is more reverential, and the letter goes directly to his central request: "Your Excellency has received a most-submissive memorial to His Majesty in the latest Tuesday mail along with

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**130** Bricka (1890, vol. XIV, 30). Actually, the addressee of the letter is not unambiguous. The letter is addressed to "Privy Councilor, Knight of the Dannebrog Order, Holstein", but these epithets actually hold for two different noblemen: the Counts J.G. von Holstein and U.A. von Holstein, so strictly speaking we cannot see who among the two was the addressee. Both were Mecklenburg Counts with high standing and positions in the Copenhagen government; the former a State Council member from 1712, the latter a member of "the great deliberation" in 1718, State Council member from 1719, and Great Chancellor from 1721. Our assumption that the addressee was U.A. Holstein is but a qualified guess, building partly on his opposition to Reventlow, partly on the fact that Dippel associated with him in Copenhagen nine years later in 1728. There exists a one-page note by Frederik IV to a secretary Muniken, dated 17 April, no year. The note refers to a writing with "Gottlose Reden" which shall be presented and discussed with both of the two Holsteins in order to establish "wer solches geschmiedet und Auttor darfon sein möge" – who could be the author. A hole has been torn in the paper where a name might have been. If, as seems probable, the note addresses Dippel's letter to Holstein, it would not be difficult to identify the author as the letter is signed by Dippel, but the King may have wondered if the letter was really from his Chancellery Councilor or whether it was a forgery in order to blacken him. In any case, the King could also not tell which Holstein was the intended receiver. The note, then, would refer to the government's processing of Dippel's panic letter to von Holstein which would have been seized in the mail. Due to the royal meeting, the letter would have reached both of the Holsteins, and either of the two could have tried to warn Dippel subsequently (Ny kongl. Saml. Fol. 1299e. Kongehuset Frederik IV 202, 1698–1730 Egenhændige optegnelser m.m. ME 211–1).

the attached *Specie Facti* in the submissive confidence in Your dexterity, in which I request the appointment of a commission against the cruel and enormous actions developing in Altena with a cheekiness and impertinence as if they was no God in heaven and no longer a King in Dennemarck”.<sup>131</sup> Again, Dippel reaches out to the King through a possible middleman whom he already recently sent his new *Specie Facti* – not in the case files – and asks for the appointment of a new commission to take action against the terrible Altona events. Now, he adds that Jews but also other honest people are incarcerated without reason, one of them a Portuguese Jew now close to dying from maltreatment. This would probably refer to Lieben and Caseres, so they would already have been imprisoned for some time by 30 March. Prisoners are questioned in the manner of the Spanish inquisition, Dippel continues, and witnesses are instructed on what to say in testimonies. So, torture and perjury are the methods of the committee. The whole process is driven by the Count and his wife as prosecutors and judges in their own case:

The Count, but even more his consort, are prosecutors and judges in their own case, the City Councilors serve them as torturers and executioners in order to suppress and scare honest and completely innocent persons who, against better judgment and conscience, must confess facts about me and other honest people which none of us have dreamed about ...<sup>132</sup>

If these allegations are correct, the case is really spiraling out of bounds. Dippel's reasonable suspicion that letters from him may be prevented from reaching the King now makes him request of Holstein to take the present letter, wrap it in a different envelope and submit it as a supplication to the King, as "... they are now very busy to prevent me from all access to His Majesty". Dippel may have been naive in his supposition that supplications went directly to the King; they were rather typically processed by his administration, maybe only for a brief accept of a response from the King.<sup>133</sup> We have no idea whether Holstein actually forwarded the letter in a new envelope, but much points to the fact the letter did in fact reach the King who summoned both of the two Counts von Holstein to discuss it. For it was not evident from the address whether the recipient was U.A. or

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<sup>131</sup> "Den Euer Excellence habe in nechstverwichener Dienstags-Post ein allerunterthänigst Memorial an Sn. Majestat nebst beýgelagte Specie Facti in unterthäniger confidence auf dero dextérité übersandt, in welchem ich um eine commission solicitiret gegen die grausame und enorme proceduren, welche jetzt in Altena im Schwang gehen mitt solcher Rasereý und impudence, als ob kein Gott im Himmel und kein König mehr in Dennemarck wäre".

<sup>132</sup> "Der Graff, aber vielmehr desen Gemahlin, sind Ankläger und Richter in Ihrer eigenem Sach, die Raths-Herren dienen Ihne als Peiniger und Nachrichten zur Unterdrückung und Erschreckung ehrlicher und gantz unschuldiger Leuthe, die wider Ihr besser wissen und gewissen auf mich und andren ehrliche Leuthe facta bekennen sollen, wovon keinem unter uns geträumet".

<sup>133</sup> Cf. Bregnsbo (1997).

rather J.G. von Holstein, which is probably why the King wished to discuss it with both of them. It is possible that one of the Holsteins subsequently acted to warn Dippel, for there is a brief letter, jotted down in great haste and hard to decipher, which may be an indirect answer to Dippel through a Hamburg intermediate.

In any case, it is an urgent note of alarm informed by high circles in Copenhagen (VI.8): "... I sense from a reliable source, that my High-standing Lord's case in Copenhagen is beginning to look very evil".<sup>134</sup> Authorities in Copenhagen aim at seizing Dippel without hesitation through the "hiesige Magistrat", the local City Council.<sup>135</sup> So, the warning letter seems to have been mailed from a Dippel friend in Hamburg. The author urges Dippel "... if it would not be most cautious as the first thing to move away from Hamburg and get out of the way of a brewing storm, as he would then be better suited to warn and help the rest".<sup>136</sup> The signature is (deliberately?) unreadable; in any case it is an informant with direct or indirect sources in Copenhagen with knowledge about plans being finalized in the German Chancellery about Dippel's arrest by the Hamburg City Council. Could the letter have been sent from a person in Hagedorn's local Danish representation in Hamburg to which Holstein had connections, or just acted on his own behalf? The letter, hard to read, refers to its source as a certain "Mhochst. H" or even "Hln" with a well-meaning intention to warn Dippel. In any case, Dippel should simply get out of Hamburg as soon as possible. We do not know from when this acute warning note stems – probably late April 1719 when Dippel's arrest was imminent – nor whether it ever reached him, but we do know Dippel did not make it out of Hamburg before it was too late.<sup>137</sup> His correspondence frenzy – of which we may know the tip of the iceberg only – was to no avail.

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134 "... von sicherer Hand vernehme, daß meines Hochst. Herrn Sachen in Copenhagen sehr übel zu sehen beginnen".

135 Rustmeier (1957) thinks this letter stems from some Dippel friend in Altona, but "hiesige Magistrat" would rather refer to Hamburg as we have no indication the Altona City Council was involved in Dippel's arrest in Hamburg. The address on the flip side of the letter goes: "A Monsieur/ Mons. Dippelius/ a / Hamburg", with an addition in small: "Bey H. Percent abzugeben." and "Franco", meaning postage had been paid. Did Dippel stay with a Mr. Percent in Hamburg? Or was it the name of a servant of his?

136 "... ob es nicht am rahtsamsten seyn würde Sich vors erste von Hamburg zu entfernen und ein drohenden Ungewitter etwas aus dem wege zu gehen, da denn hernach etwa dem übrigen desto beqvemer zu achten so zu helffen seyn möchte".

137 Dippel also tried to reach out in French (VI.6) with a brief letter to a certain "Monseigneur", attaching his "pièces bien sanglantes" which he has also been forced to send to the King, as he says, maybe the new *Species Facti* again. This "Excellence" seems to have been another person close to the King to whom Dippel meticulously pledges allegiance.



Dippel was not in the wrong when detecting a moral panic in the Altona leadership. The last day of March, Reventlow decided to go public with a general warning against corruption. In a period before regular newspapers, the main communication channel to people at large, the subjects of absolutist rule, would be the state church and other temples.<sup>138</sup> So, Reventlow had a notice composed which was dispatched to the Altona clergy with an order to read it aloud for congregations in all churches, probably at services taking place on Palm Sunday, 2 April. It warned Altonians against giving or taking bribes. The Count has been informed that there are persons, who

... not only demands gifts, perquisites, or presents from people here which is unjust and strictly forbidden in the royal decree of the year 1708, and whom they extort with all sorts of pretexts. But they have even abused the name of me and mine in a calumnious manner.<sup>139</sup>

Certain officials have requested gifts and bribes from people on all kinds of pretexts and even misused the Reventlows' good name in doing so. These were the rumors about Dippel, Vincelius, Lieben, and Caseres generalized. Now, Reventlow declares that anyone who are or have been requested any such kind of gifts should meet at city secretary Esmarck's office and report the name of who had made the demands and also of who collected the payment. It is certainly understandable or even admirable if Reventlow wished to purge his city administration of corruption. This would happen with tough tools: the reference to the 1708 legislation is an indirect threat of death penalty to those guilty of bribery. But given the legal standards of his actual prosecution of potential offenders, his public admonition might just as well have called forth a wave of denunciations of persons people just did not like. Maybe Reventlow's public campaign was more aimed at purifying his own house from the rumors circulating? Regardless, now the case against corruption went public. This fed directly into the next issue looming on the horizon: what to do about the now discredited Dippel, a public name in wide circles of Europe?

<sup>138</sup> IV.9); variants in IV.8); VII.14); VI.1).

<sup>139</sup> "... nicht allein ungutäßige und durch der Königl. Constitution de A.o 1708 hart verbohtene, Geschenke, Sportuln und accidentien von den Leüten alhier gefordert, und unter allerhand erfindungen erpreßet, sondern wohl gar mein und der meinigen Namens Calumniose gemißbrauchet". The royal decree of 4 September 1708 for all the King's lands and counties deals with bribery and is a sharpening of Christian V's decree of 20 March 1676. It shall prohibit and abrogate that clerical, civil, and military persons receive gifts in exchange for favors within these fields. Persons in such offices who violate this decree will be punished "without mercy on their life, honor, and property", that is, with death penalty (Eggers, E.A.F. (1788), 369ff). The church proclamation is the only case file referring to any legal basis; this is absent in commission reports as well as in the final sentence and punishment decisions.

## A Cascade of Culprits

The more or less improvised investigations and interrogations undertaken by Reventlow and his committee from March into April testify to the fact that what began with one target in the shape of Dippel was now spreading to an increasing series of other suspects. We already heard about the Bandau interrogation of 29 March; three days later, it was three friends of Lieben named Jorge Jenckel, Christian Philip Schroeter, and Michael Dencke (IV.13), while a written testimony about “dem Juden Casserer” appeared from the Hamburger merchant Joh. Hend. Sentrup, also on 31 March. Caseres himself along with two friends, Claus Eickhoff and Isaac Israel, were interrogated on 4 April in what proved to be a long and fateful interview. Only on 29 April, a signed document has Lieben Sr. answering 16 detailed questions. These interrogations seem semi-structured at best; unlike the work of the later, more systematic May Commission, they do not follow a common scheme. Also, 31 March seems to be the date when the investigation committee selected among City Council members acquired a bit more formalized status.<sup>140</sup>

Bandau seems to have escaped further prosecution by framing Dippel even if he had to sustain one briefer interview under the next Commission in May, but other suspects such as Lieben and Caseres remained imprisoned at the Altona City Hall and faced incisive interrogations, maybe even, if Dippel was right, torture. Both of the Liebens, of course, had been drawn into the case by Dippel already in 1717, but now the father, the city scribe Michael Christian Lieben was a suspect and had, in some way, implicated some of his friends – Jorge Jenckel, Christian Philip Schroeter, and Michael Dencke with whom he had been discussing the Countess and her practice of receiving bribes. From where the committee and interrogator Archenholtz would have collected information about this private and delicate conversation between friends, we do not know, but they had obviously learned that the four of them had met on Saturday 10 December 1718 at Dencke’s home, informally discussing this and that at a small get-together before Christmas (VII.13). The three are a merchant, a theology student, and a shopkeeper, respectively, – Lieben himself a chamber scribe, that is, a financial official keeping budgets, so he would have known the Reventlows from his position with the city administration.

Their common friend Lieben had told the three witnesses, maybe even boasted a bit, about how he enjoyed free access to the Countess; Jenckel remembers how he

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<sup>140</sup> The interrogation of Caseres and his friends (IV.13) begins by presenting the questioning team, Joensen, Archenholtz, and secretary Esmarck as the special committee appointed by Count Reventlow 31 March.

was even having an appointment with her the very same Saturday evening. In this context Lieben had related how he would bring her many “Sportuln”, that is, perquisites. The other tradesman, Dencke, confirms this while the theologian claims he does not remember, for he was focused on his sermon for the next morning. Was it true that Lieben told them the Count and Countess had asked him what they would do with such gifts? The two tradesmen: yes – even if one of them does not remember the Count mentioned here, only the Countess. Lieben had answered the noble couple’s question that the Countess should take the gifts and “in die blaue brockstecken” – hide the presents in the blue net. This was an idiom which the Countess obviously didn’t know, so she asked, and Lieben explained that this was a local expression in Hamburg and Altona: if you get your hands on something you hide it in your blue net.<sup>141</sup> Their gracious lordship had laughed heartily at this explanation. This small piece of intimate discussion at the Reventlows’ is extracted from the two tradesmen by the interrogator. The theologian, by contrast, remembers nothing. But was this because he actually realized the imminent danger and tried to keep their common friend Lieben out of trouble by feigning ignorance? This is the only interrogation in which clear and detailed testimony – if second-hand – refers to the Countess taking bribes. We do not know exactly when Lieben had been arrested but this interrogation, in any case, would not help him in jail. So, Dippel was not the only informant implying a bribery accusation against the Countess.

It is harder to judge the exact connections of Dippel to the whole Otte-Caseres-Vincelius complex of cases, in which the wine cellar rumor would implicate him. While Bandau and the Liebens had come under the spotlight because of Dippel’s original letter, it does not seem evident it was he who formed the link to the Otte case, and there are no indications in the documents relating how Reventlow and the committee got a whiff of that whole complex in the first place. Seemingly, the Ottes’ affidavits got them off the hook – was it also because they were a rich and prominent family in Hamburg, beyond Altona jurisdiction? In any case, this move swiftly focused the searchlight on their middlemen, Vincelius, Caseres, Israel, and their complicity in the vice presidency affair.

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<sup>141</sup> Maybe the expression refers to Low German “Brooken”, a saying from the port of Hamburg about the nets used for the offloading of goods, cf. [https://www.ndr.de/kultur/norddeutsche\\_sprache/plattdeutsch/woerterbuch101\\_abc-B.html#alphabetnav](https://www.ndr.de/kultur/norddeutsche_sprache/plattdeutsch/woerterbuch101_abc-B.html#alphabetnav).

## A Middleman Caught in the Middle

Caseres and his contact Isaac Israel in Hamburg had been implicated by the Otte affair, and they seem to have been interrogated several times in late March, but the results are not preserved. Caseres seems to have been jailed in order to put pressure on him to give more satisfactory testimony.<sup>142</sup> The long interrogation of Caseres with two friends on 4 April would cause considerable controversy through the spring investigations (IV.13). It is indeed the document containing most details pertaining to bribe practices involving the Reventlows' quartermaster Vincelius – and potentially the Comital couple themselves. It must have caused some concern in the interviewer Archenholtz and his fellow Heinrichs to hear allegations going dangerously near the household of their new partner and overlord in the ongoing public struggle against Altonian corruption.

The first 13 questions, out of 63, address how the witness Claus Eickhoff tried to pay 14 ducats as a present (two to Vincelius, 12 for the Countess) for a protection document to one Heinrich Hoffstedt, – the coins for the Countess were refused, however, but also the others. Eickhoff did not receive the protection from Vincelius directly; Hoffstedt fetched it himself from somebody else. So, no decisive result comes out of Eickhoff's interrogation, effectively doing what he can to deny bribery. But why would he himself have gotten the idea to pay bribes for a protectorium, in the first place?

This would be different in Israel's and particularly Caseres' testimony in the remainder of the long session. First, the issue of the 2,000 Rix-dollars obligation. Caseres himself had asked Vincelius whether the vice presidency was vacant, and Vincelius had answered: "Ja, aber es müste Geld dabeÿ seÿn ein paar tausend Rthl" – yes, but it costs a couple of thousand Rix-dollars. Israel had then given Caseres the obligation from the Ottes, "... in order to give security for the money which Mr. Otto should pay for the Presidency".<sup>143</sup> So, there seems to have been

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<sup>142</sup> The final 5 May report from the committee (VII.8), cf. below, mentions interrogations of the two on 25, 27, and 31 March. They were probably recorded in the interrogation appendix no. 1 missing from Reventlow's report. Did he ditch them because they contained stuff he wished to hide, and which might be left out in a repeated interview after incarceration? The committee report claims, with reference to the long interrogation of both of them from 4 April, that neither Caseres nor Israel "deviated a jota" from what they had already said about the "main circumstances around the alleged service-brokering" (that is, the bargain about the vice presidency). But we only have the committee's word for it. So, whether incarceration did in fact force Caseres to change his first explanation, we do not know. Later, however, he would withdraw all that he had said.

<sup>143</sup> "Um die Securität wegen des Geldes zu geben welches Mons. Otto für die Präsidentschaft zahlen solle".

several links in a chain connecting the Reventlows and the Ottes: *Vincelius-Caseres-Israel*. Then the second obligation from the Ottes on 200 Ducats – what was that one for? Caseres outspokenly explains: half of it was to the witness (Caseres) for his effort; the other half Israel would keep for himself. So, the two middlemen would be paid well for the transaction. There were also a few *Portugalöser* around, however. Caseres claims that the Ottes paid four gold coins to Israel of which he passed on three to Caseres and he, in turn, one of them to Vincelius. So, the whole of the contact chain was greased by extra gold coins on top of their more explicit salary granted by the obligation. Caseres even testifies to the fact that the Ottes had told Hagedorn about the transaction, the Danish representative to Hamburg – this indicating that buying such a position might be far from abnormal.

But how does Dippel enter the picture? Caseres had told Vincelius that he had better tell the Count about the deal with the Ottes as it would be better than if somebody else did it. When coming to meet with Vincelius again four days later, Caseres had instead met Dippel there, and he had told Caseres that “... if Mr. Count knew about the 2,000 Rix-dollars obligation, he would regard you as an evil human being”.<sup>144</sup> Vincelius had said that the Count did not know about it. Now, Dippel had become angry, leaving. But did you not tell Vincelius secretly that he did know it well, the interrogator continues. Caseres: “Yes, the witness had told him in his ear that he knows it well.”<sup>145</sup> Caseres had whispered in Vincelius’ ear that the Count *did* know about it. Then Dippel had opened the door again and slammed it shut in anger. So, he would have been eavesdropping from outside and heard Caseres despite whispering: The Count knew. This is the only testimony in the case files that directly implies Count Reventlow himself in corruption, claiming that he knew very well about the 2,000 Rix-dollar payment for the position as his second-in-command. Simultaneously, it is a testimony about an angry Dippel distancing himself from this big bribe case – or was Dippel rather becoming angry because he thought Vincelius tried to cheat the Count, keeping all of the bribe for himself?

The interrogator Archenholtz continues: “Whether the witness after that had accused Mr. Vincelio, that if he did not tell the Count about the case, then he had acted evil?”<sup>146</sup> Caseres answers: yes. So, Caseres actually implies that the Count would normally know about such things, claiming that he chastised Vincelius for

144 “... wenn der H. Graf wusste von der Obligation von 2000 Rth. so wurde er euch für ein quaden Menschen ansehen”.

145 “Ja, Zeüge habe ihm in die Ohren gesagt das weiß er ja wohl”.

146 “Ob nicht zeuge dem H. Vincelio abermahl vorgehalten wann er die Sache dem H. Grafen nicht gemeldet, hatte er übel getahn?”.

not telling him. This might imply that Vincelius had been trying to hide the transaction from the Count but unsuccessfully; somebody had informed the Count, maybe Caseres himself? It is a pretty complicated network of who-knows-what about who-knows-what appearing here.

This exchange had obviously been a turning point for all parties, for the next issue is that Vincelius had now presented Caseres with a Dutch declaration to sign (in two copies among the files, IV.12 and IV.14). The declaration is allegedly written by yet another, presumably Dutch, contact person between Vincelius and some Hamburg friends, stating that he had been offered a sum by these friends for the vice presidency which Vincelius had then rejected on behalf of the city, while still accepting to receive the sum of 10,000 Rix-dollars for his personal assistance. Strange, if he would get a reward this huge for a deal which came to nothing. Was this in order to explain a large amount of cash in his possession? This Dutch letter is dated 26 March, that is, after the Ottes had signed their affidavits but before the Bandau and Caseres interrogations. Seemingly, Vincelius was now feeling the heat of the situation and tried to get Caseres to exculpate him in the vice presidency case. In the interrogation, Caseres claims that Vincelius had been begging him for an hour to sign it before he finally gave in. None of the two copies of the Dutch document has a signature.

Unlike this document, Caseres in the interrogation indeed strongly incriminates Vincelius very directly – maybe in order to try to save his own skin? As clear as he is in denying any wrongdoing on the part of the Countess when asked directly, Caseres does not hesitate to frame her caretaker Vincelius who, in his account, appears routinely to accept bribery, even with an impressively detailed list of what he had to pay him. As question no. 47, Caseres is asked what he paid the Count to receive a protection for a Jew. Nothing, he answers. And to the Countess? Nothing. But Vincelius? “Six bowls of china, two sugar plates, one Pistol, 1½ Crusados and then four quarter Ducats”.<sup>147</sup> Caseres willingly goes into further details; the Crusados was the standard payment to Vincelius himself for a protection while the other valuables in this particular case were extra gifts for Vincelius’ sick wife. So, Caseres had added extra grease; it seems as if Vincelius was an important man to be in favor with. The Caseres interrogation proved extremely controversial. Contrary to what the questioners may have wished to

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147 “Sechs Kummern von Porcellain, 2 St. zucker Pletten, eine Pistole, einem Ducaten und 1½ Crusados, sodann Vier quart Ducat, dafür habe H. Vinceli alle Memorialen und alle depeches für zeugen gemacht”. Pistols are Spanish gold coins about 7 grams or a corresponding gold coin of the same value; the Crusado is a large Portuguese gold or silver coin. If the 1½ Crusado is the standard bribe for a protection letter which we have heard could also cost 13 or 14 Ducats, then it is probably a gold Crusado, approaching a Portugalöser in size.

hear, he incriminated the Reventlows' quartermaster Vincelius in great detail but also, more indirectly, intimidated the noble couple as possible accomplices or in the know.

Three weeks later, on 27 April, however, Caseres all of a sudden signed a separate French document (VI.5, an extract in VII.10) addressed to a certain "Monsieur". Reventlow would later claim the letter was addressed to himself and was sent to him. In the letter, Caseres claims that he had been forced to lie to the committee, forced to make statements which Dippel also had the audacity to send to the King in Copenhagen, he now states. He does not say explicitly what those exact claims would be, and he also does not say who forced him but is almost implying that Dippel did it. Caseres appears to be regretting having been too ambiguous, in the interrogation, as to whether he had ever heard anybody claim that the Countess would receive bribes; now he claims, for the record, that he has never said that and that she has never done so.<sup>148</sup> The most important name does not at all appear in the text: Vincelius. For an important effect of the document was to invalidate not only Caseres' own pronouncements about the Countess, but the whole of the long, detailed 4 April interrogation framing Vincelius for corruption. In any case, that is how both Reventlow and his committee would interpret Caseres' retraction letter.

Thus, the issue of this "reverse" document, maybe written by the Hamburg merchant Sentrup to be signed by Caseres, will appear again and again later. Reventlow, of course, will refer to it in order to prove the innocence of his household – on the other hand, questions in the Commission hearings in May-June will ask Caseres if he had been maltreated in jail and threatened with torture in order to make him sign this retraction document.<sup>149</sup> Another question there refers to a

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**148** The beginning of Caseres' letter: "J'apprens avec etonnement des mensonges, qu'on veut me faire dire et que Mons. Dippelius a eu la Temerité d'ecrire Sa Majeste. A Savoir que je me dois avoir plains, qu'en m'examinant devant le Magistrat, on m'a obligé de dire des mensonges, et de les confirmer par un faux serment, de quoi Dieu me gardera, et m'a gardé toute ma vie. 1) Que j'avois avoué de n'avoir jamais endendu, que Madame la Comtesse prenoit ou avoit pris des presens, ce que pourtant j'avois entendu des plussieur et savois même le contraire par experience. Je declare: encor à Vottre Excellence et confirme que je n'ai jamais entendu que Madame La Comtesse prend des presens: ni scai le contraire par experience, ce qui n'est jamais sorti de ma Bouche, n'u le pourra avec verité". So, Caseres claims that he has been forced to say that even if he has never experienced her taking bribes, he has heard this claim about her from several others. Now, he retracts that and says that he has never even said that. The letter addresses a certain "Monseigneur"; according to Reventlow it was aimed at and sent to him.

**149** According to a question in the Commission interrogation of Caseres' son (I.16), the questioner (maybe Dippel) also claims to know that Dr. Koltemann had looked up Caseres on behalf of the Count and put pressure on him with promises and threats (*ibid.*). According to the same



source like Caseres' Jewish friend Steffens for claiming he heard Caseres say that he was forced to lie in this retraction but would tell the truth, once it becomes possible.<sup>150</sup> In those later interrogations, Caseres generally refuses to answer or says that he does not remember, or briefly says what he seems to expect the Commission would like to hear (I.5). Now he may have learned the hard way how to keep his mouth shut. Similarly, his wife and son are questioned in detail in May-June but generally refuse knowing anything (I.15–16). All of the Caseres family now knew how keep silent.

From this and several other documents we can see that Dippel at this point had been making detailed allegations against certain deals and tradings between the Countess and Caseres in three “Memorials” of which at least one actually got through the firewall and reached the King in Copenhagen, but those documents are not found among the files.<sup>151</sup> Probably, one of them had been his new *Species Facti*. We can see, however, that Dippel here claimed, e.g., that the Countess had forced Caseres to accept less in payment for some parties of luxury goods than what he originally paid himself in the Netherlands e.g., china, silk curtains, silver coffee pots, dolls' dresses – a sort of indirect and less visible bribe as a payment for other services (cf. letters from Reventlow to the King like VI.12). Dippel thus appears to have been informed, to some degree, about Caseres' ongoing trade activities with the Reventlows; from whom we do not know.

As to the relation between Vincelius and Dippel, both had accommodation with the Reventlows and probably would know a bit of each other from there; they were reportedly relegated together, probably on 29 March, and may have fled to Hamburg together, but their more precise relation is hard to determine. While other middlemen had now become suspect due to their connection to Caseres, such as Israel and Eickhoff, it is less evident what the connection was to a young Jewish girl in Altona, allegedly subjected to torture with thumb screws and/or beating by the City Council for theft, also reported to have been mentioned by Dippel in those “Memorials”. The indirect picture we get about those no longer extant writings by Dippel is that he attempted, during the spring months, a counterattack, actually fleshing out in detail such accusations as he was earlier himself

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questioner, Caseres should have been complaining that in he Netherlands, they would never proceed like this: first squeezing all sorts of propositions forth by means of “Marter und übele Tractement” (torture and evil treatment), and then require the taking of an oath that what was said during torture is true.

<sup>150</sup> According to a question in the interrogation of Caseres' wife, I.15.

<sup>151</sup> In September, a furious Reventlow reminds Sehested and the King that Dippel succeeded, both on 23 March and 11 April, to submit letters to the King, in which he had threatened to go public with the case (III.11). These letters have not been localized.

accused of, e.g., by proving in detail that the Countess was guilty of extorting Caseres. Such claims would of course be interpreted as libel and added to the list of his crimes, as it would later become clear, cf. Reventlow's summing up of the charges against Dippel in June (below).

Most of the witnesses in these early interrogations are asked, of course, whether the Reventlows, particularly the Countess, would accept bribes, and in all cases but the few mentioned, they consistently deny this. When you reflect about the conditions of these interrogations, however, this almost clean sheet of the Countess might not be so strange. Everybody would know that the Count was spearheading investigations, interrogations took place in their home, and in some cases the Countess herself might even appear in the background during interviews, urging witnesses to tell the truth.<sup>152</sup> Despite the whole case revolving around the two of them being accused for bribery, she or her husband were never themselves interrogated, being – as wrote Dippel – judges in a case in which they were parts, and interrogations were made without the presence or the information of all parties. Under such conditions, it is hardly surprising if the noble couple would appear very virtuous in most witness accounts.

The case file collection does not reveal what would further happen to new central suspects like Lieben, Caseres, or Vincelius. The latter escaped to Hamburg where the next Commission proved unable to trace him; the former two were jailed in March and Dippel implied that Caseres was maltreated there, but it does not seem that any formal prosecution would ever pass a verdict pertaining to their assumed crimes, and we do not know when exactly they were released. With regard to Caseres, the report of the committee (5 May, below) claims that he had been arrested in late March to squeeze him to testify truthfully after some unsatisfactory early interviews but to have been released soon again, no dates given. In the Commission's later interrogation of the committee, 5–6 or 8–9 days of arrest are mentioned.

Lieben was still under arrest when he was interrogated on 29 April, so he has been incarcerated a month or more. His interrogation (VII.12) was considerably later than the other suspects – was he a tougher nut to crack? His testimony circles around two issues: had Dippel paid a bribe in order for Lieben to get his

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<sup>152</sup> In the later Commission interrogation of Lieben on 25 May, he said that the committee interrogation of him took place at the Reventlows' house, not presided by the Countess, "... sondern Sie wäre zweymahl mit inhrem ältesten H. Sohn ab- und zugegangen, und habe Ihm zugeredet" (I.6), she had twice come in with her eldest son and spoken to him during interrogation. According to the Commission's interrogation of the committee on May 24, she had only come in after the interrogation, asking why Lieben did what he did and admonishing him to tell the truth, but that one Oberförster Ritter and the young Count Frederik did go in and out. In any case, the conditions of the March-April committee interrogations had been pretty special.

position as a chamber scribe? This Lieben rejects. And: did members of the City Council enrich themselves personally from the surplus of means dedicated to street-sweeping, such as Dippel in some non-extant writing claimed he had heard from the responsible street-sweeper von Fielden, the collector of means for street-sweeping Johann Janssen, and Lieben himself?<sup>153</sup> Also this, Lieben refuses to know anything about. He thus consistently avoids incriminating Dippel further to the committee who now seems to be on the hunt for more that could burden Dippel. Despite his long-winded incarceration Lieben refuses to say anything disadvantageous about Dippel. Dippel also seems to have claimed that Lieben's son attempted, on Easter Saturday, 8 April, to ransom Lieben from jail for the enormous sum of 20,000 Rix-dollars – which in that case would be an attempt at bribing the City Council who indignantly rejects this rumor a couple of days later, on 1 May (VII.9). In the Commission's later interrogation of Lieben's son, he says that he had offered, to the Countess, a bail of a size after the judgment of the Count (I.7). He had not received any answer to this request, but soon after his father had been moved to a harder arrest in the City Hall jail. The final report of the committee simply concludes that Lieben has been paid by Dippel for taking his side in interrogations and even predicts a court case and punishment of Lieben for that reason (VII.8, cf. below). It may seem as if Caseres, by withdrawing his statements, may have ransomed himself from prison while Lieben, refusing to incriminate Dippel, did not get out so easily.

To sum up, the second act of the case during March-April 1719 saw Dippel suddenly being incriminated as corrupt by his old fellow Bandau, and Reventlow's own household came under crossfire attack for corruption, partly from Dippel, partly because of documents from the Hamburg tycoons the Ottes who tried to buy the vice presidency. As a response, Reventlow appointed a committee of two of the four Heinrichs, starting an investigation which, apart from Dippel, particularly focused upon the middlemen of the Otte affair: the Jews Caseres and Israel plus Vincelius from the Reventlow household. This prompted Reventlow to jail Caseres and chamber scribe Lieben, who had also incriminated the Reventlows, and kick out Vincelius and Dippel from his mansion to go to Hamburg. Dippel protested and accused the Countess of bribery in a handful of documents not among the case files and probably lost but which only served to increase the libel charges against himself. Reventlow reacted partly by generalizing the campaign against corruption with a speech to Altonians in all churches, partly by forcing Caseres to withdraw his evidence against Vincelius and his own household.

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<sup>153</sup> In the Commission's interrogation of Miss Schlemann, whom von Fielden owed some money, she says that he claimed to have to give back 100 Rix-dollars of his wage, but we do not get an indication to whom this kickback would go (I.10).

So, the broadening of the case to a grand crusade against corruption at large seems to have exploded in the face of the Reventlows and the Heinrichs themselves with the interrogations of Lieben's friends and Caseres far from exonerating the Reventlows, quite on the contrary. In late April, the committee seemed to have regained control with Caseres retracting his claims. Still, with the increasing circle of persons implicated through spring, as suspects, witnesses, or both, Dippel clearly remained the main culprit. Soon, however, the ambitious campaign against corruption would lose importance and shrink into the background.

### **Act 3: Reventlow's Letter Storm and a New Commission**

#### **Reventlow on the War Path**

Now the third act of the case began with focus returning to what should happen to Dippel. From late April through early May, Reventlow really took the reins. The first thing he seems to have realized was that it might have been a really bad idea to scare Dippel away to Hamburg. With Dippel out of Altona, he would be free to continue his attacks against the noble couple, maybe even in the public sphere, as he may have threatened to do in the lost documents.<sup>154</sup> Reventlow now realized he would need stronger forces than those of his improvised City Council committee in order to apprehend Dippel and have him convicted.

So, now he embarked on an intense letter campaign to authorities in Copenhagen, virtually bombarding the King and his top officials with requests, formal documents drawn up by a scribe in his position as Chief President of the city, but also informally, in his own hasty handwriting in French or German, particularly mas-saging Foreign Minister and head of the German Chancellery in Copenhagen, Christian Sehested who would be on the receiving end of both types of letters, formal and personal (Fig. 14a-b). Mail between Altona and Copenhagen was regular and at least biweekly, Tuesdays and Fridays, and appears to have taken three–four days in each direction, so that a request might receive an answer within little more than a week, sometimes less. The core transport of letters between the capital and the cities by the Elbe was scheduled to take 51 hours based on the principle that a letter should always be on the move.

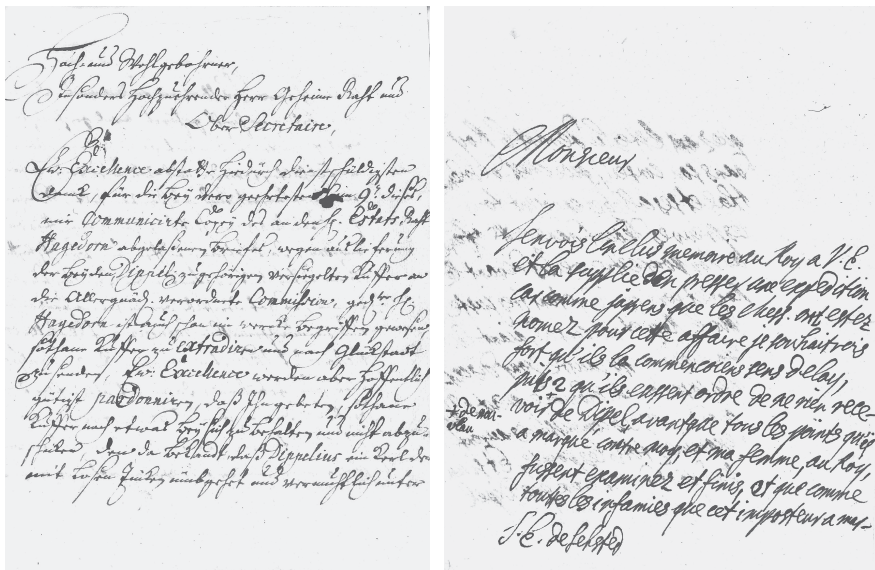
It is evident from this letter storm that even if his March campaign may have sounded idealist notes of fighting Altona corruption on a broader front, Reventlow

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<sup>154</sup> That Dippel had threatened to go public with the case is also claimed by the anonymous source in *Fürstlich Wittgensteinisches Archiv Bad Laasphe, D49*.

had now become increasingly focused on one very precise target: Dippel. He seems to have continually fed his anger with further documents such as the Dippel letters seized, but also with other, new documents like the mentioned “Memorials”, among them probably royal supplications and a new “Novi Facti” account of the whole case – neither of which are found among case files but which are mentioned in other documents. Some of these no-longer-extant documents seem to have reached Copenhagen from Dippel, others only as appended evidence from Reventlow, some not at all. Maybe the letter storm from Reventlow also had a tactical dimension: by focusing all energy on Dippel and staging a public process against him, all interest and indignation may be brought to focus on him – thereby letting the charges against Vincelius and the Reventlow household itself vanish in the dark.

In hindsight, you may get the impression that already by the end of March, Dippel's fate had been sealed. What remained for Reventlow was first to rebut the storm of allegations against his own household, then to create a legitimization, find a legal procedure, settle upon a punishment, demand a satisfaction – and,



**Figure 14a and b:** Reventlow's impressive letter campaign of April–May 1719 bombarded Copenhagen authorities with public and private writing promising a harsh punishment for Dippel. Here, a formal letter to foreign secretary Sehested printed by Reventlow's scribe, with full titles: “Hoch- und Wohlgebohrener, Insonders Hochzuehrender Herr Geheime Rath und Ober-Secretaire”, that is, High- and Well-Born, particularly Honorable Mr. Privy Councilor and Supreme Secretary, dated 12 May 1719. To the right, a private letter in French to the very same recipient, foreign minister Sehested, jotted down in Reventlow's own hand three days earlier – here, the addressee is titled “Monsieur”, Mister.

not least, to negotiate all of it with Copenhagen. This was no small feat and required massive ingenuity, administration, communication, and paperwork, fascinating to follow in every nook and cranny and requiring a large amount of the Count's not inconsiderable energy, intelligence, dexterity, and network. But it no longer seemed a real possibility that Dippel might get off the hook.

The very first issue was to get hold of Dippel. A long personal letter in French from Reventlow to Sehested dated 25 April (III.3) is the first of a protracted series of such letters by Reventlow appealing to his friend in the old Chancellery building in Copenhagen with a request to put pressure on the King (Fig. 15). Such pleas would routinely be accompanied by insistent complaints about the terrible "calumnies" he has been subjected to by Dippel spiced with a current of invectives about this arch-offender, this "gottlose Bösewicht", this godless scoundrel. It is temptingly easy for a modern view to be somewhat dismissive about the richest couple in Denmark-Norway suffering deep humiliation because a traveling chemist has made some sour comments, mostly in private letters, none of which ever reached the public, neither in print nor quoted by others. But Reventlow's endless rantings leave no doubt that he is really deeply affected, also on behalf of his wife whom he rarely forgets to mention. His honor is suffering severe damage, not only here and now, but potentially in the eyes of the whole world and for posterity, and oftentimes he expresses fears that it is only a matter of time before the well-known provocateur Dippel will take the next step to go public with his defamations of the noble couple.

In his 25 April personal letter to Sehested, the first of many to his foreign minister friend whom he addresses directly and without formalia, we find Reventlow writing in a speedy, associative style with few periods.<sup>155</sup> He begins complaining

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<sup>155</sup> Reventlow would, time and time again, put pressure on Sehested in official as well as personal letters, in order to make him influence the King's decisions. To understand the structure and possibilities of such influence, it might be helpful to resume Sehested's tasks as head of the German Chancellery (Tyske Kancelli). The field covered by this Chancellery was the Duchies Sleswick-Holstein, including Altona, and the County of Oldenburg, but also general foreign policy outside of the Danish-Norwegian realm. This office and its parallel, the Danish Chancellery, basically functioned as the two secretariats of the King's Council which was the central forum for the presentation and discussion of cases in the King's presence, to his final decision. So, the Chancelleries would process incoming mail and other issues and present them in a shape ready for the Council to discuss, potentially with proposals for decision. Thus, there was an instruction "... for the Chief Secretary of the German Chancellery Christian Sehestedt who had succeeded Thomas Balthasar von Jessen in this office. He should prepare cases, read aloud the resulting conceptions in the presence of the Council and countersign the fair copy transcriptions, before they were presented to the King for his signature. For the King's information, he should write a list of expedition covering all that was expedited in the German Chancellery and make a brief but clear extraction of these expeditions of the Chancellery which should, at the end of each month, be delivered by him to the King's own chamber" (Hassø et al. 1962, 9, my translation). Thus, Sehested

that he has already sent case documents to Gabel – probably War Secretary C.C. Gabel in the government – but he has not passed them on to the King's Council, so he includes copies here once more and now asks Sehested to do the job. Then he goes into the first among several developments about noble honors. We quote in French to give an idea about the style:

... le plu joly de laffaire est, qu'il denonce ces infamies, sens sengager de les prouver, jespere pourtant que le Roy/ et tout son conseil trouvera, qu'il est juste, at den som vil tage ære han maa ære voge, car sens cela, les calomniateurs se trouverois les en abundance, et les honestes gens seroient trop malheureux, car je pretends, que de tout ce qu'il avance de moy, et de ma femme, quand cela viendra a lexamen, qu'il nen prouvera pas un seul point, et alors jespere, que S.M. aura assez de grace, qu'elle songera aussy a me faire avoir une satisfaction eclatante ...<sup>156</sup>

Dippel does not prove his allegations, which is why Reventlow demands from the King and his Council the offer of “brilliant satisfaction”, for an honest man must protect “loneur”, his honor, as he says with a proverb in Danish (the only Danish expression in the whole case file corpus): “den som vil tage ære han maa ære voge” – he who strives for honor, he must risk honor. An “honest man” means a man of honor, an honorable man, and he is forced to risk his honor and take up the fight when faced with a challenge. So, this compact theory of noble honor is the premise for the central demand of the letter, the extradition of Dippel from Hamburg:

... but the worst is that he is a vagabond, and when he has a sufficient amount of defamations, he will escape, so if H.M. would permit me to have him extradited from the town of Hamburg, so that he can prove the denunciations given, and if he did not have the title from the King, the town of Hamburg would let me have him extradited ...<sup>157</sup>

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prepared cases for the Council of which he was also himself a member, and thus had a considerable influence of how cases were presented, processed, and concluded there.

156 “... the most striking in the whole affair is that he expresses his offenses without engaging in proving them, I hope, therefore, that the King/ and all of his Council will find it just that *he who strives for honor he must risk honor*, for without this, the offenders will exist in abundance, and honest men will be much too unhappy, for I expect, that among all what he has said against me and my wife, when examined, he will be unable to prove a single point, and this is why I hope that H.M. will have the sufficient mercy to dream about also letting me have a brilliant satisfaction ...” The passage in italics appears as a proverb in Danish.

157 “... mais le pis est que cest un vagabond, et quand il aura assez de difamies, il seschaperera, ainsy si S. M. vouloit permettre que je me le fisse extrader de la ville de Hamburg, pour qu'il peut prouver sa denonciation lon le tiendrait, et sil avoit pas le caracter du Roy, la ville de Hamburg me lauroit extradé”.



Reventlow is presently unable to have Dippel expelled from Hamburg because he is protected by his royal title of Chancellery Councilor, so that he needs royal assistance (and potentially the renunciation of Dippel's royal title, a subject to which he will not hesitate to return). In any case, the letter's central pragmatic



**Figure 15:** Reventlow's most essential lifeline to Copenhagen was Foreign Secretary and leader of the German Chancellery in Copenhagen, Christian Sehested, who received an ongoing stream of pleas from him during 1719. Unfortunately, fewer of the answers in the opposite direction are preserved, particularly in their private correspondence. There is no doubt that Sehested, as the supreme Secretary of the German Chancellery and simultaneously a member of the State Council was indispensable in persuading the King to support Reventlow's initiatives against Dippel. You may speculate, however, what Sehested himself may have thought about the case. It could be significant that Sehested let the German Chancellery preserve copies of the case files there, despite Reventlow's repeated demands that all case files be handed over to him – or, at least, were affixed with a disclaimer that every single one of Dippel's claims was false.

purpose is to make Sehested exert pressure on His Majesty to take formal steps to have Dippel sent back to Altona.

Speaking about risking one's honor, the letter ends on a strangely disappointing note: "... if I, or my wife, would be found guilty on a single point, we would not wish this to be presented so that he could prove his denunciation, and I hope that Y.E. as well as all men of honor will work to grant that such accusations cannot shamelessly pass".<sup>158</sup> Not much risk-seeking here now, is there?

In a typical pincer movement, Reventlow sent no less than two letters three days later, on 28 April, a long letter directly to the King and again a short note to Sehested (VI.12; III.4). The letter to the King is a much longer, more formal document with reference to four attached pieces of evidence, and Reventlow spends much space on refuting allegations made by Dippel concerning the transactions of the Countess with Caseres.<sup>159</sup> This is the first time Reventlow really bleeds his heart to his brother-in-law the King. The letter goes directly to the central matter. The King has sent Reventlow a copy of a recent supplication by Dippel to himself in Copenhagen containing further "Calumnien" regarding Caseres. This document is also not extant, but as indicated above we have a good idea of what would have been in it: Caseres was forced by the Countess to sell underpriced goods to her. Of course, Reventlow takes care to quote the recent Caseres declaration that he has been forced to lie, and he goes into a lot of detail trying to disprove that there could be anything suspicious in his wife's dealings with the tradesman. Reventlow pedagogically takes the King through all the central issues, the competing versions of the Bandau story with the two Portugalöser, Lieben who is also a calumniator, and Dippel's recent attacks on himself and his wife in the letters to Hirschfeldt. Now, the King must be updated. Then follows the conclusion: punishment.

But because I and my consort through these rude accusations are attacked in a highly-defamatory way and moreover are libeled with many offenses in an infamous manner, all of which is so much more sensitive as this takes place in writing, and therefore is spread all over to our increasing degradation in a supremely-punishable way, and the threat is also added that such calumnies will be made known to the whole world in a published writing.<sup>160</sup>

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158 "... si moy, ou ma femme trouvions coupables, dun seul point, nous ne souhaitrions pas, qu'on leur present afin qu'il puisse prouver la denonciation et jespere que V.E. de mesme que tous les gens doneur travailleront a cela que de telles accusations ne se passent impudiquement".

159 The four attachments seem to have been (1) Caseres' "reverse" letter; (2) Dippel's letter to Hirschfeldt 30 March; (3) the affidavit signed by Bandau; and (4) a document supposed to prove that Lieben Sr. has, in his office, abused public funds for his own purposes; the latter is not found among case files.

160 "Weilen aber durch diese Grobe beschuldigungen ich und meine Gemahlin höchst-ehrenrühriger weise angegriffen, und dabeneben mit vielen Lästungen schändlicher weise injuriert werden, welches alles umb so viel empfindlicher, da solches in Schrifften geschehen, und selbige allenthalben zu unser desto mehr verunglimpfung höchststraffbarer weise divulgirt, auch die

There are many indications that Dippel, in those no longer extant writings, explicitly threatened to publish his allegations. In any case, Dippel's actions are "supremely punishable", also because of the implicit threat of making them accessible to nothing less than the whole world in future published writings. This is why he pleads to the King that he must "mich deßen Person zu versichern", secure Dippel's person, and start a formal judicial process in order to give the calumniator his well-deserved punishment. How that process should more precisely be constructed, he does leave to His Majesty to decide.

So, this important letter initiates the process by making Copenhagen authorities work on the project. All the points are reviewed: the facts of the case, the extradition of Dippel, a severe punishment, Reventlow's satisfaction, proceeding with great haste, and, finally, considering the legal means to obtain these goals. The short letter to Sehested the very same day relates that Reventlow has already himself sent a demand to the Hamburg City Council that they extradite Dippel at their next meeting and that he counts on His Majesty's support here – so couldn't Sehested, in the next ordinary mail, send him a formal royal order to proceed with extradition?

Reventlow's crossfire pressure on the King and Sehested proved effective. Already April 29, an arrest order was sent from the King to the Danish representative in Hamburg, von Hagedorn. He was instructed to approach the local magistrate of the King's "hereditary-subordinate" city of Hamburg. They should be ordered to seize Dippel in a way so that he would not be warned beforehand to flee and subsequently extradite him to Altona. On 2 May in the evening, Dippel was arrested in Hamburg, and on 4 May, he was transported from Hamburg to Altona.<sup>161</sup> Given the panicking letters of 30 March from Dippel in Hamburg more than a month before, however, it remains a strange fact that he was still there. Why did he not escape from Hamburg beyond the reach of the Danish Crown through April? Didn't he realize the danger, was it a personal choice to stay and put up a fight, did he think God would protect him or had a plan for events, was he in the lack of a new refuge to go to, might he have been monitored there, from some point, by Hamburg authorities? Hamburg, unlike Altona, was no open city but had guarded gates. In any case, from now on he would remain under arrest in Altona until his final transport to Bornholm in September.

In the first instance, however, it was no humiliating arrest. Cells in the City Hall were occupied – supposedly by Lieben, Caseres, and others – so Dippel was

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Bedrohung annoch hin zugefüget, daß man sothaner calumnien gleichsahm der gantzen Welt in einer publiquen Schrifft bekandt machen wollen".

<sup>161</sup> Cf. Letter from the King to Hagedorn 29 April 1719 (Cf. State Archives: von Hagedorns gesandtskabsarkiv. Løbenummer: 18–109; III.1) Letter from Reventlow to the King 2 May 1719; IV.3) Letter from Reventlow to Sehested 5 May 1719).

lodged, strictly guarded, on the second floor in a bourgeois house in the Elbestraße, not a bad address (IV.1, cf. below). These costs, however, Reventlow would be sure to get covered later. On 27 April, Joenssen of the committee had sent a detailed invoice to Lieben requiring him to pay for his own arrest (VI.9).

One thing in Reventlow's eagerness to catch Dippel is striking. There are no signs at all that he did anything similar in order to get hold of his old quartermaster Vincelius who had been relegated together with Dippel and now also sat in Hamburg. Did Reventlow think that by making a big thing out of Dippel's crimes, he could simultaneously let Vincelius' offenses vanish in the haze, now that Caseres had been forced to annul his testimony with the many detailed claims about him? Dippel was primarily framed for libel, while Vincelius had fared much worse in the interrogations of the committee after which much seemed to indicate he might be deeply involved in bribery. Why should he not be extradited and brought to trial? Would he know too much about how conditions were at the Reventlows? Was it a tactical move to attack the accuser and discreetly let the real criminal escape?

## Raising the Stakes: From Libel to Blasphemy

Reventlow did not waste his time. Already on the day of Dippel's arrest, 2 May, his next letter drive introduced no less than two new subjects. A short note to Sehested (III.6) thanks him for his support in the extradition case and seems also to have contained a thanksgiving note to be forwarded to the King. Immediately, a new detailed demand is added: could Sehested convince the King to appoint two or three judges in Glückstadt to examine all the defamations against himself and to investigate Dippel's person, "... a man difficult to observe"? It seems that Reventlow now realizes that judicial expertise must enter the picture, that a case terminating in a proper punishment could no longer be run by himself and his improvised City Council committee, and that the King is too slow on the uptake to get things up and running. So, this would be the root of a proper investigative Commission soon to arrive, taking their seat in the Danish administration center of Glückstadt, 60 km down the Elbe.

It was not uncommon in Danish jurisprudence that prominent court cases were dealt with by specially appointed commissions – recently, there had been a large case against one War Councilor Möller for passing false information to the King; not much later, a commission was appointed against the civil servant Povel Juel who was executed for high treason because he secretly tried to hand over Greenland to Sweden, and in 1725, the King would appoint a special commission to investigate rumors about Copenhagen top officials such as Frederik Rostgaard accepting

bribes.<sup>162</sup> Commissions were appointed directly by decree from the absolutist king, and they were a way to take a case out of normal, slow, public administration and process it swiftly under deepest secrecy. During absolutism, it was often used in cases against officials who had abused their power, in one way or another, and thus constituted a danger against absolutist reign itself. So, it was also a protection of the system to be able to process such cases in the closure of a commission. In the *Danish Law* (1683) counts and barons enjoyed the privilege of being prosecuted only by commissions appointed by the Supreme Court, the king's personal court; Christian V had recommended Crown Prince Frederik to let all larger cases be treated by commissions, and it was increasingly standard that all cases against higher persons of rank would take place in commissions.<sup>163</sup> Here, the Dippel case was atypical: Dippel did have his Chancellery Councilor title, but he did not function as an official and the case hardly constituted any danger for the absolutist government itself and was only triggered by Reventlow's pressure on the King and his government. You could also ask how "big" the case was; it is evident that to the Reventlows it was enormous but, seen from Copenhagen? If it constituted a danger, it would only be for the Reventlow's local government – which could be protected if the case was sealed within a commission. Another motivation for a commission might be that the accused was a person of rank whose judicial status was difficult to decide, a fact that does hold for Dippel: he was a German from Hesse with a Danish title, now under Danish protection in Altona, invited by the Chief President. Commissions could be granted after application, or they could be ordered by the government. In Dippel's case, the commission was granted to Reventlow after a number of letters from Altona to Copenhagen. It was a classic criticism of commissions that they might favor the party who had applied for them – this, e.g., would be the argument of Christian VI for restricting their use in the 1730s.

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<sup>162</sup> In 1725, a "Privy Investigation Commission" was appointed in Copenhagen, spearheaded by Bishop Deichman and State Councilor and Finance Deputy Møinichen, investigating circulating rumors that high officials in the administration would accept bribes with reference to Queen Anna Sophie. The commission investigated officials like Chief Secretary Frederik Rostgaard and War Minister C.C. Gabel for taking bribes (both were later sacked), as well as innkeepers and others claiming to have leverage with high connections, and the commission is reported to have caused a panicky atmosphere among state officials in Copenhagen (Holm 1891, 317–44). There is no indication, however, of any direct connection from the Dippel case six years before to the appointment of this commission, but you can say both of those cases demonstrate an increasing political sensibility to rumors and accusations pertaining to nepotism and corruption among absolutist officials.

<sup>163</sup> On the use of commissions during absolutism, see Pedersen (2002), which is resumed in this section.

So, why did Reventlow decide to push for a commission? The standard step would be a normal case in Altona. If it should address libel of the particularly severe kind, publicly attacking the victim for being criminal, it would be a criminal procedure which, in the special case of Altona, would be decided by a summoned jury of citizens in the City Hall after they had heard an investigation judge and a defensor proceed.<sup>164</sup> This might turn out to be a long-winded affair with the possibility of appeal, impossible to keep secret, and Reventlow could not at all be sure what would be the outcome of such a process. A commission appointed by Copenhagen authorities, of course, would also be out of his hands, but here, he would be capable of continuously influencing the procedure through his Copenhagen network.

Another important letter the same day (III.1) introduces a completely different issue. Now that Reventlow has begun lecturing his friends in Copenhagen about noble honor and sharing his feelings of offense, he may have realized that a broadening of the case away from his own personal passions might prove wholesome. So, he introduces the idea of a more extensive legal attack on Dippel's overall career and character, also apart from his personal hurt feelings. In a letter to a certain anonymous Councilor of Justice, most probably seated in the German Chancellery in Copenhagen, he puts it as follows. I quote the whole of the letter:

By His Royal Majt.s most-graciously order to Mr. State Councilor Hagedorn, the well-known honor-offender and arch-calumniant Dippelius has been arrested in Hamburg this evening and will be extradited early tomorrow. As I should now like to see that the Council as well as the Theological Faculty there could to some extent see, which kind of a godless evil man and whose spiritual child he is, I hereby send 1. a copper from a writing he published some years ago, "A Shepherd and a Flock", from which it can be seen how he, in the title copper, imagines the holy supper, 2. the pamphlet, produced by him and burned by the executioner, against Mr. Dean Fleischer, and 3. some verses against the King of Prussia who had, some years ago, this knave arrested for them, to which is also added 4. a writing, in which he has added a four-sheet accompanying preface, if you just turn up those passages which are under-

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**164** Cf. Schmid (1747, 140; 168). In "peinliche", that is, criminal cases proper, Karl V's "Carolina" from 1532 was the relevant legislation, and here "... wird die Bürgerschaft in einem Ausschusse aufs Rathhaus berufen". This selection of citizens watch, led by the city clerk, how a fiscal, an investigation judge, proceed orally as against a defender, also responding orally, "... und nachdem die Bürgerschaft in einem Zimmer mit einander sich berathschlaget, wird die von ihnen gefundene Urteil publiciret ..." – the citizens convene behind closed doors, after which the announce their verdict. On the next level, both the fiscal and the defender may appeal to the City Council, in which case the procedure will again take place in open doors. Reventlow would have no possibility of keeping things secret during such a procedure. Another reason might be that a royally appointed commission would be independent of the whole of the local judiciary and its obligations toward local legislation and precedent.



lined, & you will find how hope- and godlessly he treats the Holy Writ and the achievements of Christ, the holy preachers in Hamburg has, for this reason, put him at public scrutiny at the pulpit and warned the audience against publicly mentioning his name. I request of my honored Mr. Justice Councilor to formally make the Council and the Theological Faculty aware of these pieces, so that they may be informed and see to that this arch-scoundrel can get the deserved award for his deeds. Time prohibits me from reporting more to him this time, so I must break off here ...<sup>165</sup>

Now, the Theological Faculty of the University of Copenhagen is required to step in, in order to investigate whose spiritual child this godless scoundrel really is – that is, the devil's spawn. This is a novel route of attack, insisting that the arch-scoundrel is really none other than the Devil's offspring. But the decisive step is the expansion of the zone of struggle. The first item indicted is the title copper of Dippel's *Ein Hirt und eine Heerde* ("A Shepherd and a Flock", cf. below), originally published in 1706 in Hamburg, an early classic calling for full freedom of religion and full freedom of expression – guided by the idea that without these liberties, true religion and unity in faith could never be found. This book had appeared not long before Reventlow had recommended Dippel for his Danish title in 1707, so he may have known it and had it on his bookshelf from back then.

The second is the just published 1718 pamphlet attacking the recently appointed Dean Fleischer for his activity with forced infant baptism of sectarian babies in the central Trinity Church, a piece that had already been condemned and burned at the stake by the henchman the year before. The third is the abovementioned

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165 "Auf Ihr Königl. Maytt. Allergnäd. Ordre an H Estats Raht Hagedorn ist der bekannte Ehrenschränder und Ertz-Calumniant Dippelius diesen abendt in Hamburg arretiret worden, und wirdt morgen frühe außgeliefert. Weile ich nun gerne sehen möchte daß sowohl das Conseil, als auch die dortige Theologische Facultet einigermaßen sehen möge, waß er für ein Gottloser Bösewicht und weißen Geistes Kindt er seÿ, So über sende hirbey 1. ein Kupferblatt von einem Schrifft so er vor einige Jahren ausgegeben, und Ein Hirte und eine Heerde genandt, aus welchen zu ersehen, was Er auf dem Kupferplate vorstellet von dem H. Nachtmahl, 2en die von Ihn gemachte und durch den Scharff Richter verbrannte Schmähe Schrifft wider den H. Probst Fleischer und 3ten einige Verse wider den König von Preussen, der dieselbe diesen Bubes vor etlichen Jahren arrestiren laßen, deme auch 4ten beygefüget ist, eine schrifft vor welcher derselbe eine in 4 Bogen beistehende Vorrede gemacht, wen nur der passages nachgesehen werden, welchen unterstrichen sindt, & wirdt man finden, wie Heyl und Gottlos derselbe die Hl. Schrifft, und das Verdienst Christi tractiret, die Hll. Prediger in Ham/ burg haben Ihn auch schon desfalls öffentlich auf den Cautzeln durchgezogen und die Zuhörer dafür gewarnet, mithin seinen nahmen öffentlich genandt. Meinem hochgeehrten Herrn Justiz-Raht dienstl. ersuchend, von der gute zu seÿn solche Pieces so wohl bey dem Conseil als auch der Theologische Facultet bekandt zu machen, damit Sie daraus informiret werden und sehen, daß dieser Ertz-Bösewicht meritire für seine Thaten der verdienten Lohn zu empfangent. Die Zeit verbietet mich diesmal ein mehrten vor Ihn zumelden, weshalb damit abbrechen muß, unterdeßen verbleibe stets ...".



tioned song, titled *Berlinische Arrest-Gedancken*, ridiculing the King of Prussia in 1707 when Dippel was jailed in Berlin for attacking the Superintendent of Swedish Pomerania in Greifswald.<sup>166</sup> The fourth is a brand new publication from the month before, a reprint of the seventeenth-century mystic Laurentius Grammen-dorf to which Dippel had contributed a long introduction, all of it titled *Hell-Polirter Secten-Spiegel* (“A Blank-Polished Sect-Mirror”), and allegedly extremely blasphemous.<sup>167</sup> Reventlow’s hard verdict of this piece in particular may also have the motivation that it contained an easily decodable, anonymous portrait of the Count himself. We shall return to these writings below.

It is a curious handful of Dippel writings selected by Reventlow; Dippel had published many more well-known writings with explosive theological contents ever since the late 1690s, even collected them in his enormous big-hit edition in 1709. Maybe the four pieces were just what Reventlow would have had at hand as evidence, and he might have had the idea that proper theological expertise would be able to more thoroughly scrutinize Dippel’s overall career, character, and enormous authorship.<sup>168</sup> So, Reventlow’s general idea was to portray Dippel as not only a libeler, but also as a blasphemer. We have no indication that Reventlow was otherwise a particularly pious person, preoccupied with defending God, church, or clergy against offense. But this was an important broadening of the case and may also have had the motivation that blasphemy was a considerably more serious offense than libel. The latter offended a person, but the former offended God himself. In the recent *Danish Law* of 1683, blasphemy was one of the most serious offenses, punished by execution preceded by torture in the shape of

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<sup>166</sup> None of the four attachments are found among case files.

<sup>167</sup> “Mirrors” was a widespread text genre all the way back to Antiquity, expressing a normative presentation of some subject in which institutions and persons might mirror themselves in the norms of how to behave. There were many “prince mirrors” teaching how kings were supposed to act and in the religious field “mirrors of faith” expanding on how true believers ought to think and act. Among pietists, e.g., Francke had published the pseudonymous Philalethes’ mirror of faith with a preface in 1699; in Denmark, the state pietist Erik Pontoppidan gave out his mirror of faith in 1732.

<sup>168</sup> It does not seem that Reventlow’s request to the theologians had any result. There is no theological analysis of these Dippeliana among the case files. According to Rasmus H.C. Dreyer, there is also no sign indicating theological processing of Dippel in the annals of the Faculty. In the years 1718–19, Dippel is mentioned only in the context of the case with Dean Fleischer. Reventlow writes on 9 September 1718 to the Faculty on that case – and Faculty professors answer that Fleischer should have a sharp rebuke for his actions, just like they approve that “... the writing earlier submitted has been burned by the executioner” (Dreyer, personal comm.). Only 17 years later, the theologian Peder Holm – Petrus Holmius – wrote his doctoral dissertation with The Theological Faculty in Copenhagen refuting Dippel under the title *Errores Dippelianos*, Dippelian Errors (1736).

cutting off the tongue or hand of the blasphemer. *Danish Law* was not the law of the land in the Duchies, but judges there would be trained in the Danish system and might be prejudiced by it. In any case, this new idea was strongly upping the ante and may later have fed into the final ceremony at the City Hall square before Dippel's banishment.

An interesting detail mentions that the Hamburg City Council had made a public scene out of the arrest of Dippel the same day, before delivering him into the hands of Reventlow. He had been put on public display in one of the Hamburg churches with a warning to the audience against mentioning his very name – in a certain sense a contradictory initiative. You make public an action in order to prevent publicity of it. It is a classic dilemma in press freedom cases: by publishing a prohibition against the utterances of a person, you may create curiosity around the case and de facto function as a promotion for that which you attempt to silence. Reventlow himself would face the same dilemma. The recipient of Reventlow's blasphemy charge has probably been Sehested's official in the German Chancellery, the experienced lawyer and Justice Councilor Franz von Hagen.<sup>169</sup>

In the middle of these machinations about punishments and having a proper legal Commission look into things, Reventlow's initial, more homemade committee of the Heinrichs from the City Council finished its final report (5 May 1719; VII.8). It is a long text, mockingly choosing the very same title as Dippel's original, scandalous document: *Species Facti*. It is a strange piece. Even if it refers to attached evidence in the shape of interrogations by the committee, it is evident it is not authored by trained or experienced lawyers.<sup>170</sup> Again, it is ripe with pejoratives, exaggerations, even irony, mocking suspects such as Caseres, Lieben, and, of course, Dippel. The report presents the committee itself as originally appointed in order to investigate the affair of the vice presidency, which is why Caseres occupies most of its first main part. Lieben Sr. is also discussed, his stubborn rejection to incriminate Dippel is interpreted as an indication that he has been bribed by Dippel to lie, and the committee claims to know that Reventlow's public announcement

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**169** There is one letter from Sehested to von Hagen among the case files (V.8) – an instruction from August 1719 to prepare a letter to the Commission to open the sealed package (below) – so von Hagen was involved in processing the Dippel case in Copenhagen. He had been in the Chancellery many years and took over, from 1721, the position as Chief Secretary after Sehested.

**170** Six attachments are appended, of which we may identify five of them: (A) Caseres' "reverse" letter (VI.5 – but not the original interrogation which he renounced); (B) Dippel's letter to Hirschfeldt of 30 March (IV.11); (C) the interrogation of Lieben (VII.12); (D) the interrogation of Lieben's three friends (VII.13); (E) Reventlow's letter to the churches (IV.9); and (F) a document signed by Lieben Jr., rejecting Dippel's rumor about the 20,000 Rix-dollars caution; could be VI.9. Earlier interrogations of Caseres, Israel, and Lieben than those we know are also mentioned. Strangely, evidence such as the Bandau affidavit is missing.

in the churches prompted citizens to report Lieben's corrupt activities which he even admitted himself (none of this is found in other case files) – which is why the committee predicts both a case and punishment of Lieben. We have no indication that this was in fact executed. Again, the third suspect Vincelius is mentioned only in passing and disappears completely because Caseres' testimony about him as the "main God" of the case is invalidated by his "reverse". So, an explicit effect of Caseres' reverse declaration was to get Vincelius off the hook, and this maneuver is finalized by the report of the Heinrichs, in so far as Vincelius now disappears from the case.

In the latter part of the report, the Caseres and Lieben cases are mostly used for establishing what lies about the two Dippel is guilty of. So, the text slowly turns in the direction of Dippel, even if the vice presidency affair was its main subject. And while Reventlow was busy upping the ante by raising accusations from libel to blasphemy, his committee follows him in introducing the issue of torture: "... he may not yet have realized that a judge has the power to punish a contradictory accused giving changing claims not only with jail, but after circumstances also with torture, without thereby committing any horribility against the Dippelian doctrine of right"<sup>171</sup> Dippel should be subjected to torture as he had obviously "... gone against all divine and human laws" – a rather extravagant verdict. The report's conclusion is only preoccupied with Dippel; the vice presidency is now completely forgotten. As to his sentence, the report only concludes by mockingly stating that Dippel's final reward will not be paid in the currency of his beloved *Portugalöser*. An incoherent tirade of taunt rather than a standard legal document, it proved to be the last major effort in the case from the Altona City Council which had been caught by sublime rage with Dippel's initial letter for Bandau more than two years before, triggering the whole case. The committee does not mention the new Commission about to step up. Now, they would soon slide into the background along with the whole list of characters of Caseres, Lieben, Vincelius, etc. while the more professional Commission was assuming its position in Glückstadt.

Simultaneously, the four Heinrichs of the committee ventured to directly address the King in a shorter letter, submitting their report to Copenhagen authorities (VII.7). Already in their report, Dippel's offenses of the Reventlows had come second; now, in this letter, the noble couple all but disappears completely, and the committee only addresses Dippel's defamations not of the Reventlows – but of themselves, the Altona City Council. The central issue is "... the successive

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171 "... ihm aus den Rechten annoch nicht bekand seyn, daß ein Richter wol befugt einen contumacirenden und in der Aussage variirenden Deponenten nich allein mit Gefängnis sondern nach befintlichen Umständen gar mit der tortur zu belegen ohne gegen die Dippelsche Rechts Gelahrtheit eine horribilitæt zu begehen".

and calumnious accusations produced against the Council here". The committee also requires satisfaction, but for themselves. Reventlow and his City Council henchmen, closely collaborating through months, are now parting ways. They had really, each of them, been fighting for their own reputation exclusively. The proud principles of campaigning against bribes and corruption on a larger scale now definitively evaporate. The City Council had been seminal in instigating the whole case against Dippel the year before, but now they discreetly disappear from events with this embarrassing report which later case files do not refer to.

The very same day, 5 May, Reventlow continues his campaign with yet another double letter. His new request to the King is an astonishing document (IV.1). You would not believe his anger had yet another higher gear but now Reventlow virtually explodes. Was he not convinced that his first letter had really touched the King? An enormous fit of rage covers several pages, serving as the premise to his demand for the appointment of a special Commission of Judges to sentence Dippel, so as to prevent him from roaming around to disseminate his calumny. Here an excerpt from his long rant about how Dippel "... will, in all ways possible, seek to make himself invisible and escape, only to get the possibility to use his damaging, blasphemous tongue and his abusive, poisonous feather against honest, decent people and, if unchecked, will furthermore make use of his shameful and offensive writings which he has not only sent to Your royal Majesty but also spread them in Hamburg and other places, and where he has attacked me and my wife with all the most inimical and rude libel and in a wicked way attacked ...".<sup>172</sup> And so on and so forth. This fit of rage acts as the premise to Reventlow's pressing on about a new Commission with members selected in Copenhagen or among the judges of the Appeal Court in Glückstadt. As he is finally about to cool down in a more arguing mode in the middle of dictating the letter, the ordinary mail arrives, presenting Reventlow with a letter from Sehested containing the copy of a new piece by Dippel having reached Copenhagen, his third calumny of him. This makes Reventlow resume his frenzy on an even higher level. Now, this miscreant is accommodated in Altona at my expense! It takes eight gendarmes to guard him, four on the street, two at the door, two in the room! You can almost feel Reventlow trembling with fury: while attacking me and my wife, this villain lives in "... the decent house owned by Mayorin Knittel in the Elbestraße on

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172 "... auf alle vor ersinlige Ahrt und Weise dahin trachten werde, sich unsichtbahr zumachen un wegzulauffen, umb nur gelgenheit zu haben, seine Lästernnd verleumbdersche Zunge und schmähsuchtige gifftige Feder, über ehrliche redliche Leüte noch ferner ohngescheuet zugebrauche, seine Schand- und Schniche Schriften aber, die derselbe nicht allein für Eu: Königl. Maytt: zubringen, sich nicht gescheuet, sondern auch hin und wider in Hamburg und andre Ohrten außgestreuet, und worin er mir und meine Gemahlin mit aller eins feindtligster herbesten njurien angegreiffen und boßhafftiger weise verleumbdet".

the second floor in a nice lodging, where he has a good clean bed, table, chairs, and other necessities, and two times daily he gets good food and drink on a tavern on my account, so that he does not suffer the least lack of necessary alimentation...”<sup>173</sup> As it is a formal letter not in his own hand, Reventlow would have been dictating the text to his scribe; it is almost cinematic to imagine Reventlow’s erratic behavior through the composition of this document. This is probably as close a window as you could possibly get to the depths of his Dippelian passion.

Whether the King felt entertained by this double seizure or whether he was beginning to tire out, we do not know. Reventlow’s brief note to Sehested the same day (IV.3) pales by comparison; here he announces the submission of the report from the City Council committee and Dippel’s arrest, but he has not completely recovered: “... briefly, I doubt that if Lucifer and his dear Proserpina [the Queen of the Underworld, FS] ascended from hell, they would be as malicious, evil, and mendacious as this rascalion ...”<sup>174</sup> Maybe Reventlow’s rage culminates in such an eloquent mode because he is able to simultaneously triumphantly report Dippel’s extradition to Altona the day before, now turned over to his mercy.

Four days would expire, now, until Reventlow was ready for the next mail dispatch, now a three-pronged thrust with letters to the King, Sehested, and Justice Councilor von Hagen, on 9 May. A Commission has already been appointed; Reventlow must have learned this from the appointment letter, not among the documents, of 5 May from the King to the new commissioners with copies to relevant authorities – a Commission consisting of three top dignitaries from the Danish rank system: Councilor of State Freiherr von Soehlenthal, Justice Councilor Wolff, and Chancellery Councilor G. Schroeder.<sup>175</sup> The fact that the appointment letter to the Commission is missing also implies that we do not have the initial commissorium outlining its tasks which would have been part of this letter. But it appears

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173 “... honnetten und zwar der Bürgermeisterin Knittels in der Elbestraße belegenen Hause, in dem andern stockwerck auf einem gute logement, vorunter ein guht rein Bette, Tisch und Stühle auch ander nohtwendigkeiten hat, und täglich 2 mahl ans einem Wirtshause auf meine Kosten mit guthen Eßen und trincken vor sehen wirdt, so daß er an benötigter alimentation gar der geringste mangel nicht leydet”.

174 “... bref je doute, que si lucifer et sa schere proserpine sortioiens des enfers, qu’ils puissent estre aussy malicieuse, meschants et menteurs, comme ce coquin lest” Proserpina was Lucifer’s spouse, a goddess originally kidnapped by him, now the Queen of the Underworld.

175 Chairman of the Commission Baron von Soehlenthal signs himself FUSöhlenthal, so he must be Friedrich Ulrich von Soehlenthal, and not one of the two more famous brothers von Soehlenthal, Heinrich Friedrich and Georg Wilhelm. The former was busy as a Danish envoy in London, the latter was but 20 years, busy becoming a pietist under Zinzendorf’s wings and not yet State Councilor. Schroeder and Wolff must have been members of the Chancellery government in Glückstadt, simultaneously functioning as Appeal Court.

from ensuing correspondence that the task of the Commission is to investigate Dippel's crimes and pass a sentence – that is, not to continue to the broader investigation of Altonian corruption in general. Hereby, an important flank to Reventlow had been closed: the wider accusations against his own household.

Reventlow thanks the King (IV.4) for this nomination and immediately jumps to his next demand: this Commission must expressly be ordered to act swiftly to avoid that “... this pointed head will make all sorts of inventions and play them out in the broad field and thereby avoid his fully-deserved punishment”.<sup>176</sup> Extreme speed of the Commission is important to prevent Dippel from spreading his accusations “in the broad field” – this danger would repeatedly be mentioned in subsequent discussions: Dippel going public. Furthermore, an urgent plea is added to the King to make sure the Commission will submit, as its very first task and before it does anything else, a separate report clearing him and his wife of Dippel's accusations. In a 13 May answer (I.1), the King grants Reventlow's requests: that the Commission operate in haste “so that Dippelius does not play the case out in the broad field and gets the possibility to avoid punishment”, echoing Reventlow's words and agreeing that addressing Dippel's attacks will indeed be the very first task of the Commission. The very same day, a letter from the German Chancellery to the Commission gives the same instruction, again referring to the danger of Dippel “playing into the broad field” (V.7), that is, going public. That is the danger upon which authorities now focus.

The parallel, personal letter to Sehested (IV.2) continues with the urgency of the new Commission to begin working immediately and not to receive anything about Dippel before they have examined his claims about the Reventlows and had all of those claims read aloud in the State Council in the presence of the King himself. Obviously, Reventlow is anxious whether his letters to the King have really reached his person, and he is concerned that his version of events will reach the Council to the same extent as that of his opponent. He even admits the possibility that if on a single point Dippel might turn out to be correct the King would have to denounce himself, but otherwise he wishes to proceed at great speed. This admission may be for rhetorical reasons – he realizes that the new Commission will have to hear both sides – but it also testifies to the fact that Reventlow could neither be certain of the King's support nor whether his letters to him actually reached him or were rather processed by his administration. This adds another dimension to Reventlow's letter storm: the large number of letters not only adds still further points for Copenhagen to consider but also forms a barrage in-

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176 “... dieser spitzige Kopf allerhand inventiones machen werde sothane Sachen in das weite feld zu spielen und dadurch der vollwerdienten Straffe zu entgehen”.

tending to force its way through the administration maze at Slotsholmen in Copenhagen to the gaze of his brother-in-law. It also demonstrates, however, that Reventlow is actually not completely certain there could not be any critical or even criminal aspects of the financial behavior of his own household. Is this the ghost of Vincelius, or does he even doubt his own wife, the Countess?

Finally, the third 9 May letter continues with the new blasphemy issue. The anonymous Justice Councilor – probably von Hagen – has obviously answered in a 6 May letter that he is passing on Reventlow's selection of suspect Dippel writings to the King's Council. As to the "Blank-Polished Sect-Mirror" preface in particular, Reventlow proceeds into his own theological analysis:

... therein can be found the most defamatory ways of speaking and blasphemies; for there he says and argues in an ungodly way that it should be an absurdity to trust the achievements of Christ, etc. and calls the Holy Writ the so-called Bible, other blasphemous expressions about God, which can be found in the copy submitted, to a large extent underlined.<sup>177</sup>

Reventlow tries to force the hands of the theologians and presses on in order to make von Hagen alert the Theological Faculty. And for the same reason, he orders copies of these pieces to be shipped to the new Commission in Glückstadt for their investigation. In general, Reventlow would like to monitor the new Commission and instructs the Councilor to communicate to him a copy of their Commissorium. He obviously does not trust Copenhagen and wants to check himself how the Commission is instructed (asking von Hagen but not Sehested about this). Not least, the Commission should prioritize the rebuttal of Dippel's claims, and Reventlow orders the Councilor to grant that the Commissorium is articulated in "real expressive words". Here, we find Reventlow in a commanding mode to a lower-rank councilor, very different from the more reverential or friendly tone most often used in addressing Sehested or the King. In a P.S., he refers to his attachment of a new pamphlet titled *Hell-Polirten Geckenspiegel* (Blank-Polished Fool's Mirror), a brand-new parodic response to Dippel's recent *Sect Mirror* (Fig. 16a-b). Reventlow refers to it as "a portrait of Dippel".

Reventlow's intense three-week letter campaign culminates with a 12 May letter to Sehested, now in German and in full formal "most-submissively" communication mode. Now no longer addressing "Monsieur", but "Hoch- und Wohlgebohrer, Insonders Hochzuehrende Herr Geheime Rath und Ober-Secretaire", high- and well-

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177 "... darin aber finden sich die Aller Lächerlichsten Redens arten und blasphemien enthalten; maßen er darin anführhet und es Gottlosen weise vorgibt, daß es eine absurdität seÿ, sich auf die Verdienste Christi zu verlassen etc. und die H. Schrift die so genannnte Bibel nennet, anderer Gottes Lächerlichen Sätze, die in dem einen gesandten exemplar sich guten theils unterstrichen befinden ...".





**Figure 16:** (a) and (b) Two opposed publications played an important role in the Case against Dippel in the spring of 1719. The former was that one among Dippel's writings that triggered the worst fit of rage in Reventlow, *Hell-Polirter Secten-Spiegel*, published by Dippel in Hamburg in the spring of 1719 while the struggle between the parties was already in full bloom: "The Blank-polished Sect-Mirror". The author's name is given as the old seventeenth-century mystic Lorenz Grammendorf, of whom the booklet reprints a piece, but the really controversial text is but mentioned in small writing towards the bottom: the preface by Christianus Democritus with the title: "In which the essential of religion is made understandable even for reason with a continuous proof and unpartially defended against all sectarian unreason." It was an example of Dippel's enlightenment strategy to base himself on the concept of reason in ongoing debates against unreasonable churches. Here, he presents an updated version of his theology with the emphasis on its political implications – and with an easily decodable frontal attack on the Reventlows themselves. It came out around Easter, allegedly printed in Amsterdam, but in fact in nearby Hamburg.

Already the next month, Reventlow or some of his kinsmen kicked back with the almost eponymous *Hell-Polirten Geckenspiegel*, "The Blank-polished Fool's Mirror", parodying Dippel's title. It was a pasquil directly attacking Dippel the fool, particularly ridiculing his alchemy which is attacked not only for its failure to deliver any gold, but also for being both fraud and satanic disbelief. The enigmatic subtitle contains a threat: the pamphlet presents a "fool, namely Dippelium, who does not see therein the two somber girders of the doubly unfortunate wooden □□, nor is able to see, in his name, this infamous anagram:

□  
Sile Diu  
□"

The figure anagrammatizes the name of Dippelius. "Sile Diu" is Latin for "Silent for a long time", and the two upper-case *rs* form the profiles of wooden gallows. The piece directly markets the idea that a proper punishment for Dippel would be to silence him by hanging him in a golden gallows, just like his Berlin colleague Caetano had been in 1709. Reventlow sent the pamphlet to the German Chancellery in Copenhagen, but we have no information, however, regarding whether he may, in fact, have more directly attempted to persuade the King to go for capital punishment.

born, especially most honored Mr. Privy Councilor and Chief Secretary. The issue behind this stylistic change is that in a recent letter from Sehested, he had attached a copy of an official letter to Hagedorn, the Danish representative in Hamburg sent 9 May (Hagedorns gesandtskabsarkiv, 1719, Løbenummer: 18–109). Here, Hagedorn was instructed to collect Dippel's papers, letters, and other belongings in sealed suitcases to be shipped to the new Commission in Glückstadt. Reventlow will have nothing of this. He aggressively insists on interfering in the handling of those two valises potentially containing evidence. So, he requests Sehested to stop the shipment ordered and issue a counter-order to Hagedorn, for Reventlow demands to be present when those suitcases are opened. This can easily be organized after 22 May when the Commission is supposed to gather, he adds. He immediately grants that he will not, of course, remove or purloin anything from them, but he insists that he must ensure that things are not done one-sidedly and that everything is handled properly; also if something is found there would be evidence of further steps that Dippel may have taken against himself in Hamburg. You can hear from these assurances about not stealing evidence that Reventlow himself realizes he is now on thin ice. Reventlow excuses this long and complicated demand to his old friend whom he is now addressing in his formal office as head of the German Chancellery – probably because Reventlow realizes that a demand of an official counter-order to Hagedorn would annul an existing, filed document and so could not proceed through their more intimate channel with the French letters only. This demand, however, would also prove to be the end of Reventlow's successful spring campaign to alert Copenhagen authorities of the Dippel case.<sup>178</sup>

## The Threat of a Golden Gallows

Reventlow, then, had got his hands on a new pamphlet about the “Blank-Polished Fool's Mirror” mocking Dippel and shipped it to Copenhagen – if he had not authored the anonymous pasquil himself. It is a piece remarkably well-oriented about the life and activities of Dippel all the way up to the most recent events only the week before, and it also contains a number of Reventlow's favorite pejoratives. In this new Fool's Mirror – playing both on Dippel's recent Sect-Mirror and his old copper with the telltale mirror – the famous and infamous Christianus Democri-

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<sup>178</sup> It is probable, however, that Reventlow made the same request in an informal French letter to Sehested not among the case files, for there exists a single sheet in his hand with a P.S. in French (III.7): “P. S: I ask Y.E. if you would have the goodness to send my, by first ordinary mail, a letter to Mr. de Hagedorn, not to deliver the valises to these gentlemen, until they arrive here, which will be 22. this month, and that they open them in my presence ...”.

tus is revealed to be, in fact, nothing more than Dippel, a fop, a fool. The eight-page pamphlet is uncut, in one sheet, as if it comes directly from the printshop, which is given as Henrich Betkuis, Amsterdam, just like with Dippel's booklet. In Dippel's case this indication was false, as it was in fact printed not far away, with Hertel in Hamburg.<sup>179</sup> Maybe the counter-piece against Dippel could be printed the same place?

The text is one long smear poem without meter or rhyme, set up with centered lines, calling upon a wanderer passing by whose eyes will become enlightened when he sees that Christianus Democritus and Dippel are actually one and the same person. For this vagabond has, on his way, given rise to deceived, seduced, and godless people only. The Devil and Dippel have closely related names: "Diabolus und Dippelius" – one of them has been grinding and the other polishing Dippel's Sect – Mirror, in which "The very largest pranks/ The most subtle forgeries/ The most magical blindings/ The most poisonous destructions/ The strongest seductions/ and/ The most shameful offenses/ of the honor of the divine name/ of the truth of his words/ of the sacredness of his heavenly teaching/ and the beatific faith/ comes shining through with more than the fire of Hell". The definite article "Die" ("The") is spelled with a capital I through this list, in order to emphasize the devilish character of it all.

But the Devil is but a mere child against this candidate from Hell. As a "chymist" he has, all of the time, searched for darkness, so it is no wonder that decency and truth in him becomes quicksilver which has never delivered him anything but the sulfur of Hell. As an alchemist, he has polished his mirror with rust from Hell whose spirit has ignited the burning desire in him for gold, burning most actively among the greedy. Thus, the circulating accusation of greed against the Countess is shot back in Dippel's face. He will use violence to become the strongest of the strong, Victoria among the victors, in the rich Amsterdam, and he will procure Hungarian vitriol from the richest merchants in the gold bourse. It seems like Dippel has spent considerable funds from Reventlow when equipping his Altona lab, with no result. The pamphlet continues: but if he even did succeed in procuring *Victriolum* and *Antimonium Hungaricum* – that is, stibnite from the Carpathians, a treasured and expensive mineral among alchemists chasing the "materia prima" – then he only managed to transform dirt to dirt, never to light. He "spoke philosophically enough/ after nature/ nature rejoices over nature/ nature helps nature" – this sounds like parodies of Dippel's philosophy of nature – but, quite on the contrary, he sophistically polished his mirror against nature and achieved nothing but transmuting a riding servant into a pedestrian beggar, stone into nothing, gold to shit,

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179 Cf. Weller (1864, 69).

hope to water, and this in a completely natural way and without any sophistry. The pedestrian pauper, then, is the poor fugitive on his way to Hamburg, into whom Dippel has now transmuted himself. The text is well-oriented in alchemist lingo and the ideas about transmutation which are mockingly kept at arm's length.

If Reventlow is actually the author or the initiator behind this writing, then his regret over the missing gold from Dippel's Altona lab is coming to the surface here. Dippel's original task in Altona and Reventlow's alleged motivation for inviting him in the first place, gold-making, plays no role in the case files, but a deeper reason for Reventlow's grandiose fits of fury over Dippel could also be huge investments lost during five years of impatient waiting for gold, all in vain. He is an alchemist grey wolf with many exits, the verse continues, a polished arch-impostor who, with his decoy call flute, is drawing unholy men to himself as his disciples who, in turn, keep blowing their tune to naïve gold-greedy persons, whom they fool into believing that Dippel alone knows how to make the tincture to produce the hermetic bird or the world spirit *Spiritus Mundi*.

Here, the mock verse insinuates that Dippel has been capable of gathering a group of younger disciples around himself in Altona. But it was a mockingbird who sat in the thorny bush, he sang so alluringly like such black birds always learn to do: "*Cras Cras*" could be heard from Hamburg to Altona, the seductive sound whereby he "*all zu nah*", almost, repeated his earlier, chemical fate in Berlin when he also fled and, during his escape, wrote a lese-majesty song – the verse from his Berlin arrest which Reventlow had also appended to von Hagen. But in this mirror – the precedent with the arrest in Berlin – this self-obsessed Narcissus did not reflect himself; on the contrary, he "*sought presents in which he was used/ to mirror himself*". So, also the accusation of bribery against the Reventlows is turned around and shot back at the alchemist. But in the pamphlet's parallel to Dippel's adventure in Berlin where he left and published his mock verse against the King may also lie the fear that he, despite the successful arrest, might do the same thing here in Altona. If Reventlow is the author, then the pamphlet is a preemptive strike: better mock first than wait to be attacked.

But all of this mockery on the part of Dippel, the verse goes on, only lasted until a high, crowned head like the sun in the sky darkened the smaller lights and thus took away from this false, deceptive, and bronze-shining gold its very shine: a crowned head who "*... through the desired extradition [...] with one stroke took away from this mirror its shining layer*". It is the extradition decree of Frederik IV to the City Council in Hamburg little more than a week before, exposing the fool's gold and depriving Dippel's mirror of its mirroring capacity. So, fool's gold now becomes the overarching symbol for the whole of Dippel's career.

Whether the slag from Dippel's lab will now prove to contain as much fool's gold "... as Jürgen Hanawer in Sturckard would give to a coat/ and/ Cajetani in





**Figure 17:** In the “Blank-Polished Fool’s Mirror” by Reventlow or some of his henchmen, Dippel is threatened with the same destiny as the gold-makers Jürgen Honauer and Count Caetano – namely, to be strung up in a gilded gallows, dressed in a golden gown. Here, a leaflet from 1709 with the execution in Küstrin of Count Caetano whom Dippel knew from Berlin. In the wagon, the Count prays for his life, to no avail.

Berlin would finally yield/ to a singlet/ the future will soon show”. As we heard, Dippel had met the Italian Count and fraudster Caetano in his Berlin years when he worked for the Prussian King as a gold-maker and had impressed Dippel with an experiment that seemed to transmute quicksilver into silver. In 1709, however, Caetano had been revealed as an impostor and hanged in Küstrin in a gallows coated with fool’s gold, so it was a threatening parallel to invoke (Fig. 17). Georg or Jürgen Honauer was an earlier example of such a destiny: he was executed by Duke Friedrich I of Württemberg in Stuttgart in 1597, also because of an unfulfilled promise of gold-making from which he attempted escape. He was hanged in a golden coat in an enormous scaffold gilded with fool’s gold and constructed from no less than 36 centners of iron – the exact amounts of ore which he had

promised to transmute. Thus, the poem's talk about coat and singlet refers to those pieces of golden clothing in which the two unfortunate gold-makers were strung up – the only gold they ever achieved. Thus, the reference to the two hanged gold-makers is but a thinly veiled threat about a gilded gallows for Dippel in Altona. The Prussian King Friedrich had been ashamed to have been fooled in several instalments by Caetano and had published warnings against similar golden impostors.<sup>180</sup> Maybe Reventlow, for his part, was embarrassed that he had not heeded the King's warnings, for apart from this anonymous mock verse he does not mention, in his manifold and long-winded complaints over Dippel, his disappointment with his failure as a producer of gold. But with the reference to the two deceitful alchemists hanged, the question about the relevant punishment was out in the open.

If the reader beholds this blank-polished Dippel mirror, the poem continues, he will see that if Dippel loses the case, it will not hurt anybody but the following sects: gold-makers, alchemists, epicureans, indifferentists, blasphemers, seducers, calumniators, offenders, lambasters of religion, of sacraments, of sabbats, of Bible and Church – and, and, and. But the two champions of these sects, the Devil and his mirror polisher Dippel, are bound to lose, and the whole world will be shocked by realizing the stupidities revealed by the mirror. The pamphlet is well-oriented in Dippel's use of "sect" as an invective which is here thrown back in his face.

Concluding, the reader is encouraged, above all, to realize that a GOD exists who is now in the process of acting and aims to expel the fraudulent "solve & coagula" – that is, the alchemist motto "dissolve and reduce" – and to strike Dippel with blindness. It is a GOD who will let him suffer whipping for his own whip to the papism of the Lutherans (the title of Dippel's concerted attack on them of 1698) and give him what he deserves.

But pray for him, goes the final pious advice, pray for GOD to convert him, that GOD will bestow upon his poisoned victims a better doctor, that GOD will, through a good shepherd, again convert his misled flock (another Dippel title), and finally pray for the dear authorities to break the rusty magic mirror rather than letting the sword of their authority rust. This is the final appeal of the verse: to the action of authorities. The agitated fantasies of revenge of the pamphlet, with blinding, whipping, swords, and gilded gallows do not leave the reader in doubt that Dippel may expect a severe punishment.

It is a fantastic small pasquil which, with its local orientation, its insight in recent events all up to the extradition from Hamburg the week before and its

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180 Cf. anonymous (1709).

prophecy about Dippel's defeat in the upcoming case, could not originate from any other place than the current city administration of Altona. No one else knew a case was under preparation. Dippel had been handed over from Hamburg on 4 May, and already on 12 May, Reventlow was able to ship the printed version of the *Fool's Mirror* to von Hagen in Copenhagen. The pamphlet must have been both completed and printed in the week between these dates, and it is impossible that it could have gone back and forth to a printshop in Amsterdam. It has been produced by a local printer, in Altona-Hamburg, and Reventlow has intercepted the printed sheet with wet ink directly from print before cutting and binding, so that it could be hurried to Copenhagen by the Friday mail. Whether Reventlow himself was the writer or whether he had a talented author at his disposition, maybe one of the wordy and eloquent Heinrichs, to write on his behalf, is difficult to decide. The result, however, is a colorful, zestful, and wicked mocking verse. It did not seem to have occurred to Reventlow, however, whether it would be honorable to publicly mock a man whom you have just put in prison.

We must assume that the pamphlet was for sale in Altona-Hamburg. But the pamphlet obviously also had another intended reader: the government in Copenhagen.<sup>181</sup> Reventlow was speedy getting it to the German Chancellery and it contained a proposal, if indirect and anonymous, that the relevant punishment was – death.

## Two Trunks and a Speedy Commission

Reventlow's campaign had been a remarkable success. In a little more than two weeks, Dippel had been extradited; a speed Commission of top officials had been appointed to assemble already on 22 May in Glückstadt, instructed to refute Dippel's claims before going into further investigation of him; Dippel's blasphemous writings had reached the King's Council with copies ordered to the Commission, a severe punishment was discussed, even a death penalty had been aired. All of Reventlow's demands had been met, one by one. But unlike the case with his own March committee, he would now realize that he had overplayed his hand and would not be able to control the workings of the new royal Commission.

This already became apparent when the German Chancellery in Copenhagen, on 16 May, embarked on a virtual countercampaign with three official letters. One from the King and Sehested to Reventlow (V.4), one from Sehested to Hage-

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<sup>181</sup> Maybe the circulation of the pamphlet was not very ambitious; I have been unable to find a single copy of the piece in any library.



dorn (V.5), and one from the King to the new Commission (V.6), all of them addressing the issue of the two sealed Dippel trunks. Reventlow should *not* decide how to proceed with them. Reventlow is bluntly instructed that His Majesty has decided that Dippel should *also* be present at the opening of suitcases and the examination of their contents; that this should take place at the Commission in Glückstadt, not in Altona; that Dippel should be escorted there by the Councilor of War commanding at Glückstadt; and that Reventlow himself is requested to make his way to Glückstadt so that both parties can be present when the seals are broken. Similarly, Hagedorn in Hamburg is instructed to wait for the arrival of von Soehleenthal in Hamburg and have him bring the suitcases by a special boat directly from Hamburg to Glückstadt, that is, bypassing Altona completely. Finally, the Commission is explicitly instructed to open the suitcases only in the presence of both Reventlow and Dippel, "... also to monitor that not the least of the letters contained therein are destroyed", and that all the letters therein are examined by this occasion. Most importantly, they are instructed "... that if one or the other party needs something therein for their information or defense, they should only be handed copies from the suitcases, no *originalia* ...".

Somebody in the German Chancellery or the Council in Copenhagen must have realized that after the appointment of an expert Commission, Reventlow could no longer continue to act as a prosecutor and judge in his own case, no matter how angry letters he sent. Now, at least to some degree, he is relegated to a mere part in the case, on a par with Dippel, and both of them may need material from the suitcases for their defense and should be subject to the same rules for document access. Nothing in that direction is voiced explicitly, but you almost get the impression that Reventlow is under suspicion for wanting to tamper with evidence.

Reventlow must have taken a severe blow reading this letter. All of a sudden, some degree of rule of law would be applied by Copenhagen authorities. The message was crystal clear. Reventlow would not be allowed to continue as a city king beyond the law, intruding in a case in which he was a part. If Reventlow was shocked, however, he did his best not to show it. In his private answer in French to Sehested on 19 May (III.8), he does not address the suitcase issue at all, but rather two different issues: as he has put Dippel into custody, he must be strictly guarded on a transport to Glückstadt so as not to escape, and Reventlow refuses to hand him over until the case has been examined. Another issue – in which Reventlow would of course prove correct – is that it would be impossible, in fact, for the Commission to conduct their investigations from Glückstadt. As he said, they will learn more during 24 hours in Altona than several weeks in Glückstadt because all victims, witnesses, and suspects are in Altona. So, Reventlow appeals to Sehested to allow the examination to take place in Altona – maybe also with the tacit implica-

tion that he would then avoid turning over Dippel to Glückstadt. In practice, that would also be what happened.

The Commission began working already three days later, on 22 May, and they did indeed proceed with great speed. In the course of three days, 23–25 May, they conducted nine interrogations of, all in all, 11 witnesses. This took place in Altona, like Reventlow had predicted. It seems like all parties, Dippel as well as the Reventlows, were present during interrogations, but it is not evident from the otherwise meticulously prepared interrogation records who is asking which questions, Commission members or one of the two parties. On 26 May, a different type of document relates an interaction in the shape of a back-and-forth discussion between Dippel and Dr. Koltemann, a representative of the Commission, recorded by the latter.

Already on 30 May, after a week's work, the Commission submitted their initial report to the King. This was a professional investigation. After a break and some further communication with the King, the Commission resumed interrogations three weeks later, adding another seven interrogations of seven witnesses during 20–22 June, only to submit final reports to Copenhagen on 23 and 26 June. In little more than a month, the Commission had done an impressive piece of work, collecting close to 100 pages of testimony.

The sequence of interrogations was as follows:

#### May

23 May: Caseres

24 May: Lieben Jr.; Joenssen, Archenholtz etc.; Bandau; Dehncke

25 May: Lieben; von Fielden; Janssen; Miss Schleman

(26 May: Dippel)

#### June

20 June: Esmarck; the Jewess de Caseres

21 June: de Caseres Jr.; Lieben Sr.; Lieben Jr.; Kühn

22 June: Janssen

Lieben Sr. and Jr. as well as Janssen are interrogated twice. The interrogations are conducted using the same overall form, distinguishing (1) initial and identical, general, introductory questions: the age and occupation of the witness, his or her piety (when did you last take the Eucharist?), impartiality, etc., and (2) special questions regarding the case. The latter all take the shape “Wahr, daß ...?” followed by some state-of-affairs with a question mark: “Is it true, that ...?” This means the witness is free just to say *yes* or *no* or *don't know* – or to enter into more detailed explanations. Both parties would be present and participate with

questions, approaching interrogations to the conditions of a proper court case. As mentioned, it is not recorded from whom the single special questions stem.

All of the main actors now involved in the case are subjected to this procedure – except for Dippel himself who appears otherwise; nor indeed the Reventlows who are again not interrogated at all. An important feature here is that the members and secretary of the March committee are also interrogated, not as expert witnesses, but rather as parties in the case. It would have surprised the honorable City Council members now to be critically scrutinized, even openly suspected of foul play and deletion of testimony during their spring process a few months earlier. Particularly in critical questions to the witnesses, many assumptions of corruption and bribery appear – maybe this has been a way for Dippel as a questioner to signal his hypotheses on the case now that he was not himself interrogated.

Obviously, there was a big step from the homemade wild justice in March-April and to this seriously working expert Commission with a certain judicial level in May-June. When that is said, even the latter is ripe with oddities as viewed from our time and current norms of a legal process. But even central participants already wondered what was going on – if in quite different ways.

## What Goes on in That Commission?

The day after the first three days' round of witness interrogations where both opposing parties were present, each of them would express very different accounts of the state of the case. None of them was satisfied with the experience.

Dippel protested in a special document emerging from the Commission's work, a conversation between Dippel and Dr. Johann Koltemann, officially a representative of the Commission but referred to by Dippel as his opponent's lawyer (I.22).<sup>182</sup> It does not take the standardized shape of the other interrogations, and Koltemann's interventions are counterarguments to Dippel's procedure complaints rather than questions. Dippel's arguments are related by Koltemann's summary, so that Dippel speaks about himself in the third person. Unlike the witness interrogations it also does not seem to have been appended with the Commission's 30 May report, so its status in the case is far from evident.

It is interesting, however, because it is the last extant case file document providing a window into Dippel's reflections on the case, and it is indeed the only

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<sup>182</sup> Dr. Koltemann, probably referred to Dr. Johann Koltemann, county auditor and lawyer in Itzehoe, not far from Glückstadt.

extant document where Dippel finds a possibility to express a protest to an official of any kind.

Dippel is the first voice heard in the document. He has been asked by the Commission to produce evidence for his claims about the Reventlows, he says, but he is unable to produce such evidence because he was not allowed himself to call witnesses and to question them about his own initial evidence. His opponent – Reventlow – has been invited to interrogations without having seen Dippel's evidence, and the witnesses have also not seen it, so they could not be asked about it. He has also been prevented from submitting a supplication to the King protesting this process, and he now calls for the King's intervention and protection.

Dr. Koltemann's answer is brief: the very fact that Dippel is now protesting goes against the Commissorium of the Commission and it is, for that reason, in itself punishable. This is no ordinary process, such as Dippel's legal requirements presuppose, but an investigation of his terrible crimes. So, guilt seems to be a premise rather than a conclusion.

Dippel gets the word again and inquires how producing evidence should be possible for an arrested person without access to pen and ink and without the ability to call witnesses. Even so, he has managed to deliver some writings both to the Commission and to the King, but they have been rejected on the pretext that they contain *Facta Nova*, new facts, which is not the case. The only new facts in these texts pertain to his protests about the violent conditions of his arrest to which the King could not possibly have given permission, and about which he is now not allowed to inform him even if he has submitted such documents to the Commission. It sounds as if the arrest in Hamburg has been no smooth transaction.

Dr. Koltemann's answer is to refer to the fact that the King's intention with the Commission is also to prevent Dippel from spreading his defamations "ins weite Feld" and to investigate them speedily "ohne einige Zeit verlust". The broad field and high speed again. As Dippel has already submitted three supplications (none of which is among the case files), it is easy to predict that a new one will look like the preceding ones and contain a lot of new truths and false accusations, so the Commission is not authorized to receive it. Dippel has actually produced witnesses as late as the day before, Koltemann says, referring to Lieben Sr., Fiel-den, Schlemann, and Janssen, and his arrest is necessitated to keep him from fleeing and from publishing his new "Species Facti" such as he has been demanding of the Commission to do.

Dippel retorts that even the King as a king could not prohibit a defendant from producing a defense and that Koltemann makes a radicalizing interpretation of his Commissorium. Dippel's central argument, then, is that "What is further produced in order to suppress, if possible, the supplications and documents in his own hand submitted by himself, is of such a kind that his counterpart behaves as if they detest the

investigation of truth, that even the authority of the King himself would become prejudiced if one of the King's subjects, he be as big as he will, would prevent that the complaint of a subject could reach the King ...".<sup>183</sup> Preventing documents from reaching the King corrupts the King's possibility of judging and is tantamount to preventing discovery of the truth. Finally, Dippel seeks to bolster this legal argument with a pietist and natural law underpinning: his supplications to the King do not really belong to the case itself, rather they have been submitted to the Commission.

... only to persuade it, as righteous and Christian hearts, to let arrive to the King what is absolutely necessary in the present conditions that the King knows, and which cannot be kept away from him without offending the authority of the King himself; I request most fervently to do about this what Christian obligation, the law of nature, and the King's interest itself demand, and consequently to send all what I have submitted to His Majt. ...<sup>184</sup>

Dippel's argument implicitly refers to what everybody knows: that in absolutism, the King is the highest judge, and his sovereignty implies that he ultimately decides punishment on a scale from relaxing punishment to full pardon and, at the other end, to sharpen it to the law's highest punishment, execution with torture. So, it is not surprising that Dippel is desperate that the final judge is prevented from hearing his version.

But the parties again and again talk past each other. The Commission and Koltemann only wants documents pertaining to the truth of Dippel's allegedly criminal claims of which they never provide a list, while Dippel resorts to protesting against the very nature of the process and appeals for access to the King.

Koltemann's final rebuke only repeats that the Commission is mandated to decide upon a punishment, and further protests will not be heard, for as the plaintiff has no lack of "fictions and inventions" the case would otherwise protract endlessly.

It is striking that Dippel is missing a defendant lawyer to represent him; and why he has not got one is not at all clear. The bottom line seems to be that Dippel measures the case on the standard of a "processus ordinarius" with two symmet-

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**183** "Was ferner vorgebracht wird, und ihn eingehändigte Supliquen und Documenta wo es möglich wäre, zu unterdrücken, ist so beschaffen, daß die gegenseitige Parthie selbst Graviret, alß ob die Untersuchung der Warheit scheue, daß auch der autoritat des Königs selbst præjudiciren würde, wan einer von des Königs Unterthanen, Er seÿ so groß als er wolle, verhindern wolte, daß die Klage eines Unterdrückten nicht solte vor den König kommen ...".

**184** "... nur dieselbe alß equitables und Christl.e Hertzen zu bewegen, daß an Ihr: Maytt: kommen zu laßen, was in gegenwartigen Zustande absolute nöthig ist, daß der Konig weiß, und welches ihm nicht ohne des Konigs Autorität selbst zu Kräncken ihm nicht kan hinterhalt werden; bittet also inständigst, darinnen zu thun was die Christl: Pflicht, das Natürliche Recht, und des Konigs interesse Selbst erfordert, und folglich alles, was übergeben an Sr: Maytt: einzuschicken ...".

rical parties and an independent judiciary, while the King's instruction letters to the Commission make of it a mere investigation court of a crime whose existence is long since established.

The strangely patchy layout of the constituent elements of the crime by the Commission, however, is provided by Reventlow himself in yet another long letter to the King the very same day. Obviously, he is not convinced by the three-day interrogation session that the Commission is up to its task, for the overarching purpose of the letter is to make the King grant that the Commission will reach a severe sentence. So, even if there is some semblance of equity between the parties, one party has direct access to the highest judge, the other emphatically not, and it is uncertain whether the Commission knew that Reventlow was able to exploit his direct royal connection. The letter is arguably the most pathetic and whining among all of Reventlow's many diatribes, referring to the *Species Facti* and three no-longer-existing *Memorials* by Dippel, complaining how Dippel is prejudiced in his conviction about the Countess' malice and the central role money plays in their household. But Reventlow obviously suspects that neither King nor Commission has achieved a real grasp of what is at stake. So, to substantiate his claims, Reventlow meticulously lists the facts of the case, Dippel's libel, as he now envisages them:

1. My wife has bought, from the Jew Caseres, some silk for 20 Sh. per ell for which he paid 24 Sh. in Holland, and a quantity of china for 50 Rix-dollars which cost him 300 Rix-dollars in Holland, and has robbed him, as he calls it, for what he owned.
2. that the Countess herself urged her justice broker to ask for gifts from the parties.
3. that the Countess, both in the case of Caseres and in the case of Lieben, has represented the position of Chief President.
4. that the City Council keeps and shares 300–400 Rix-dollars of the money that is collected every year for street-cleaning, which would be a heavy responsibility for me if I had part in it.
5. It is erroneously claimed that the son of Lieben should, Saturday before Easter, have offered 20,000 Rix-dollars as a bail for his father.
6. That an infamous Jewess, who is convicted for theft and handling stolen goods, has bought herself free from caning with money and *consilio abeundi* [that is, accepting banishment].
7. that evil has grown so far that one subjects to a certain man, by whom is meant Andreas Bandau, and lets him falsely declare that he had received two Portugalöser from him, one to the Countess and the other to the Count, and that one adorns oneself with such dreadful lies, which have thus soon shown to be lies and slander.<sup>185</sup>

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**185** 1. Es habe meine Frau von dem Juden Caseres einiges Seiden Zeüg die Elle von 20 ß, wovor er doch in Holland 24ß gegeben und eine Parthey Porcellain für 50 Rthr: welches ihm voll 300 Rthr: in Holland gekostet abgekauft und ihm, wie er solches nennet, das seinige abgeraubet.

So, this is the precise extent of Dippel's crime, according to the alleged victim, and he makes it very clear he thinks the Commission should also know it. This is important for two reasons.

First, this claim is the only extant clear statement of the assumed extent of Dippel's crimes against the Reventlows. None of these claims, however, are present in the original "Species Facti", so, apart from the last one stemming from Bandau, it must be claims appearing in those later "Memorials" by Dippel, or his supplications sent to the King during spring. We have watched Reventlow seized by an attack of anger when discovering such a copy attached in a letter from Copenhagen. So, there were a number of further documents written by Dippel during the spring of 1719 in which the accusations mentioned appeared. We do not know the exact number of these central documents, roughly a handful, but their disappearance has a natural explanation – namely that Reventlow collected them and later used them to fuel the public autodafé at his satisfaction ceremony in September, and that copies in the files of the Commission were destroyed in Copenhagen after the case. It remains striking that in the rich set of case files most central evidence for Dippel's libel is lacking.<sup>186</sup> It is also interesting, now that the alleged victim himself enumerates his complaints, that the list does not

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2. daß Sie selbst durch ihre justitz Mäcklers bey denen Partheÿen umb gabe sollicitiren laßen.

3. daß die Gräfin sowol bey der Sache wieder Caseres als wieder Lieben des Ober-Präsidenten stelle vertreten.

4. daß der Magistrat von denen Geldern, welche wegen reinigung der Straßen iärlich gesamlet werden, alle Jahr 300 bis 400 Rthr: behalten und unter sich getheilet, welche mir zu einer Schweren verantwortung gereichen würde wenn ich darunter conniviret haben solte.

5. Ist fälschlich vorgegeben, ob solte des Lieben Sohn am Sonnabend vor dem Fest auf 20000 Rthl: caution für seinen Vater offeriret

6. Daß eine infamen und, von diebes und diebes hehlereÿ überzeugte Judin den Staupenschlag mit Geld und einem consilio abeundi abgekauft

7. daß die Boßheit so ferne gesteigen, daß man einem Gewißen Mann, worunter Andreas Bandau verstanden wird, subordiniret und derselben fälschlich außsagen laßen, als ob er von ihm 2 portugalöser, einen vor der Gräfin den andern for den Grafen empfangen, und daß man sich mit solchen horrenden Lügen schmücke, welche er also bald erwiesen habe, Lügen und calumnien zu seÿn.

**186** Several times, we have referred to these documents, of which we know that some of the supplications reached the King in Copenhagen. I have sought, without success, to identify them both in the supplication protocols of the Danish Chancellery and various similar oversights over incoming mail and processed cases in the archives of German Chancellery in the State Archives. Dippel's earlier supplications (October 1707 and November 1718) are there, but none from 1719. If they or copies of them were rather archived in the King's Cabinet Archive, they would have perished with the Christiansborg fire of 1794; cf. Bregnsbo (1997). Reventlow's copies of them probably disappeared with the autodafé ceremony in Altona. So, it seems like Reventlow was in fact



seem complete. Dippel's claims about the process in his letters to Holstein and Hirschfeldt (submitted by Reventlow as evidence to the King in April), e.g., are absent; his alleged connection to the Otte case is not there, several of his claims about the Countess' pressure on Caseres, and, most conspicuously, Dippel's accusations of torture and forced perjury are absent. Would that be an indication that those claims were not false?

Second, you can indeed share Reventlow's puzzlement whether the Commission had any overview at all of the defendant's alleged crimes. They are not listed in the King's letters to the Commission, nor in their letters and particularly not in their reports. Relevant documents may be missing, of course, but it is strange to see a high-level speed investigation by a specially appointed Commission of top officials giving no clear indication of the exact extent of the events they are supposed to investigate.

Reventlow thus finds himself in the position of teaching law to the King and his Commission, for he ventures into a strange exercise of Roman Law, relating how slanderers in antiquity were branded with a K [for "Kalumniator"] on their forehead, and goes into referring four Roman legislations which he finds relevant for the final judgment of the case. He concludes by expressing his trust in the King to grant him "... that it will be expressed, in the investigation undertaken, that the slanderer is unable to prove such harsh accusations, that the same will punish him severely with the full-deserved punishment and as a disgusting example for others of his kind ..."<sup>187</sup> Obviously, after his experience with the interrogations, Reventlow does not extend that trust to the Commission. So the bottom line is simple: to have the King put pressure upon the Commission.

Now, on 30 May, the Commission itself submitted its initial report from Glückstadt to the King (I.3). It is a strange document, with its six pages not very long and almost without reference to the wealth of attached interrogation documents collected the week before.

After all the negotiations between Reventlow and Copenhagen earlier in May, you might expect this to be the report on the character and possible truth of Dippel's statements against the Reventlows. The report contains no such thing and rather assumes the character of a halfway account of how work is progressing. They had begun working the week before, on 23 May in Altona after the royal decrees of the 5, 13, and 16 earlier the same month. They had asked Dippel to pro-

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successful in this part of his effort to eradicate any trace of what he saw as Dippel's libel. There is an irony in the fact that we now know their more precise extent only from Reventlow himself.

<sup>187</sup> "... daß bey vorgenommenen unter suchung sich werde geäußert haben, daß der Diffamant solche grobe Beschuldigungen zu erweisen nicht capable sey, denselben ihm zur vollgedienten Straffe und andere seines Gleichen zum abscheülichen exempel der Schärffe nach zu bestraffen ...".

duce something to verify his hard accusations against the Count and Countess; he had not been able to do so, instead he had handed the Commission a sealed, thick document which he claimed contained yet more facts. But as the Commission was instructed by the King to accept no new material and only investigate existing accusations they could not inquire these “noch gantz unbekante facta” without further delay, so the Commission simply refrained from opening this parcel. Instead, they had interrogated all the persons mentioned in Dippel’s *Species Facti* and his other Memorials, and all of those reports had been written up in clear articles. These interrogations had begun with a strict admonition by the Count against perjury while Dippel had also been present, and the Commission refers in some detail Dippel’s behavior during these three days of interrogations, 23–25 May: he was patient, he answered without contradictions, did not misbehave even if other testimony went against him. The Commission is actually ready now to submit a report, but they hesitate, vacillating between two considerations: to proceed in great haste, such as they have been instructed by the King – or to wait and see whether Dippel is capable of producing information which to some extent serves his defense, so that he will not be able to claim afterwards that he was convicted without being heard and without a defense. Even if Dippel himself has appointed some witnesses and participated in interrogations, he remains dissatisfied with the short interrogation period of three days and had expressed, by the end of interrogations, that he would demand an ordinary court case.

So, this leads back again to the new, sealed parcel of documents. The Commission does not know what to do about it, so they ask the King if they should ship it to him in Copenhagen, or whether they should rather break it open and admit the contents to be investigated in the case. As to the much-discussed two sealed suitcases from Hamburg, the Commission reports that they were indeed opened in the presence of Dippel, the Count, and the Countess. They primarily contained chemical equipment and treatises plus an additional 15 letters. The noble couple seized all of the chemical stuff and sealed it, claiming to ship it to the King in Copenhagen. What happened to the letters is not reported; maybe they entered the Commission’s files.

The report does not refer at all to the more detailed contents of many interrogations at the Altona City Hall which they had completed in Dippel’s presence during the preceding week. So, they leave the decision of their further proceeding to the King.

All in all, the behavior of the Commission moves closer to principles of Rule of Law than the wilder, local process in spring. Dippel is now present and active during witness interrogations, and he is free to come up with proofs of his allegations. Other types of defense or protests against the layout of the process, however, are not accessible to him just like he is cut off from the King who, in principle, would receive supplications from any subject of his realm. The appear-

ance of a new mystical, sealed object, potentially containing material which might exonerate Dippel of course blackens this more equitable picture, and it is evident that the Commission finds itself torn between their speed order on the one hand and their regard for a fair process on the other.

## The Mystery of a Sealed Parcel

The King answered in two steps, in letters of 7 and 16 June, respectively. In the former short missive (I.23; drafts in I.2 and V.3), he instructs the Commission to present Dippel with an eight-day deadline to produce new material, so as to potentially exculpate him. After that, the Commission should proceed “... without the least further delay and most-submissively to initiate Your judgement and *ratione poenæ in casum non factæ probationis*”<sup>188</sup> – to determine the punishment in case of the lack of evidence, that is, Dippel’s lack of proof of his allegations.

After only a week, the King, seemingly impatiently when having heard nothing new from the Commission, pushes on (I.24, draft in V.2). Now, the King and the Copenhagen administration seem to be all but tiring out. They wish a swift end to the story, and so they put pressure upon the Commission to quickly conclude the case when Dippel predictably fails to meet the eight-day limit of the former royal decree. Of real news is only that the German chancellery in Copenhagen now seems to have bought into Reventlow’s idea that you should not accept considering any old defense from Dippel. Not all kinds of documents should be admitted in the eight-day window offered, for in that case Dippel would only exploit further utterances to commit new libel and to drag the case on indefinitely, calling further witness interrogations. In a certain sense, the King all but jumps to passing an unprecise verdict of guilt while interrogations are still only halfway. This is also evident from the conclusion that they should, already in their pending report, begin to consider the relevant punishment. So, the investigation Commission is quickly about to grow into a penal court. The King does not at all consider Dippel’s procedural objections in his discussion with Koltemann – if he has seen them at all. Stranger, he does not, in those two letters, answer the Commission’s plea to decide the issue of the sealed package.

Another actor growing impatient now was, unsurprisingly, Reventlow. The day after, on 17 June, he sends a letter in the other direction, pushing on Sehested to squeeze the King (III.9). The letter is not sent from Altona but from “Clash”, the Re-

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188 “... ohne den geringsten weitern Verzug, Eure Sentiment und Rechtliches Bedencken *ratione poenæ in casum non factæ probationis* allerunterthänigst zu eröffnen”.

ventflows' castle of Clausholm in Jutland. So, Reventlow has left Altona for Denmark, probably for summer; he would not hesitate to use this trip to exert his influence with Copenhagen authorities more directly. Now, Reventlow complains that the Commission will only begin working again as late as 20 June, and he predicts that Dippel will not only exploit the eight-day limit to demand further interrogations of certain new witnesses but will also demand this to take place in Hamburg which could only be done with the collaboration of the Hamburg City Council. And they have a six-week deadline and admit for three cancelings for witnesses before finally showing up. Was Reventlow nervous with the danger of Vincelius showing up there, actually beginning to sing? To shortcut such dire prospects, Reventlow urges Sehested to urge to His Majesty to send a decree to the Commission, simply instructing them to immediately proceed to punishment. The King is on the verge of entering upon a large Norwegian journey, and the case must be concluded before that happens. The King as the supreme judge is necessary for concluding the case, so an end cannot be reached if he is up in the mountains. Reventlow is unable to govern the Commission, but he may attempt to make Sehested make the King do it.

The Commission might pull in the direction of a fairer process for Dippel, but did they know that his opponent was in continuous contact with their superior, their instructor, the supreme judge of the realm?

## Dark Depths of Interrogations

Now, the next round of witness examinations was completed during 20–22 June (I.14–21). It is a strange fact that in neither of the two Commission reports of 30 May and 26 June, the many detailed witness interrogations now running up to a hundred pages play any important role. They are indeed appended with the two reports as attachments, but weightings, discussions, and estimations of contrasting testimony are not found, findings from them are not quoted in the reports, and claims or results from there do not appear as premises to the reports' conclusions. Their relation, if any, to the Commission's decisions, seems just to be a sort of general grant that a thorough investigation had been pursued; that the report has a certain weight. But even if their actual legal importance may be minuscule, the witness reports contain an avalanche of interesting information, explicit or implicit, true or false, as claims or allegations, in questions or answers, on the very matter of fact of the Dippel case, some of it highly surprising.<sup>189</sup>

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<sup>189</sup> For the same reason we shall not discuss the interrogations in detail. But we may quote an example, such as the long 21 June interrogation (I.20) of the lawyer Johan Christian Kühn, whom

Actually, it is possible to sketch a sort of worst-case fiction based on allegations or premises found in the interrogations: what if most or all of the information surfacing and circulating here, in questions as well as answers, were true? This, of course, implies bracketing witnesses denying presented claims or keeping tacit when faced with questioning – just synthesizing which assumptions emerge from the sum total of interrogations. At a distance of 300 years, we have little possibility of ascertaining the real facts behind any single claim – but by considering the so to speak worst-case scenario, we get a sort of three-dimensional estimate of the possibility space imagined by the implied actors of what had happened or might happen.

In such a possible world, almost all parties would be engrossed in bribery. Dippel himself would not only have been channeling the infamous two *Portugalöser* in the direction of the Reventlows and extorted payments from Bandau, he would also have bribed the Reventlows to hire Lieben Sr. as a scribe, he would have been involved in the attempt, along with Vincelius, Dencke, and others, to bribe the Hamburger Prehn out of jail, and he would, in some way, be complicit in Vincelius' and Caseres' many-sided businesses with the Ottes and others. The Countess would be a regular collector of bribes and gifts of many sorts, including squeezing tradesmen to accept underprices for her substantial import of luxury

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Lieben Sr. had picked as his representative when he was jailed in the early spring. It brings to light a whole new cast of persons, relations, and accusations, not otherwise appearing in the case files. Another of Kühn's clients, one Hamburger named Prehn, had been imprisoned in Altona, and shortly before Christmas 1718, Prehn's sisters, a certain Krüger, and Lieben's friend Dencke (here: Dänicke) went to the Reventlows to get him out. Krüger and Dencke appear to be the sisters' middlemen or brokers in their relation to the Reventlows. When they left the Reventlow mansion, however, Kühn overheard a crucial conversation between the Prehns, Dencke, and Krüger, in their wagons in the street outside, addressing the payment of 50 gold Ducats – corresponding to five *Portugalöser* – to the Countess, but tempered with the consideration of not offending such a grande Dame by presenting her in bad light. The following inquisition of Kühn reveals the attempt evolving through spring, involving both Kühn, Vincelius, and Dippel in discussing how to proceed in order to ransom Prehn out of jail. The scheme seems to have involved Dencke as a contact to the Countess, but he ended up being dismissed by the others, suspected for keeping some of the bribe sum for himself. Here, a whole new network of middlemen – all the characters mentioned, including Dippel – appears between Prehn's sisters and the Countess. The whole interrogation of Kühn is highly complicated and we cannot go further in that direction here, also because of the lack of other extant sources, but it is safe to say that this interrogation demonstrates that discussions of how to process bribes via structures of middlemen to the Countess would not have appeared exotic at the time. One would like to hear more detail about Dippel's relations to these other brokers. Whether she ever accepted those 50 Ducats and if Prehn managed to escape from prison remains obscure. But one does understand, though, why the Commission was eager to arrange an interrogation of Vincelius.

goods. In exchange for such presents, she would be able to offer services based on her husband's and her own high positions and networks, giving privileged access to documents, permissions, protections, positions, and assignments of many sorts. Protection documents, release of prisoners, influencing the outcome of court cases, sale of high offices, much could be negotiated. Vincelius, of course, already appears as the most suspect candidate for a bribesman in the case files, but in the worst-case scenario he would be closely collaborating on a daily basis with his distinguished mistress, the Countess, in collecting them, and even Count Reventlow himself, the public, virtuous crusader against Altonian malpractice, would have been in on receiving a large sum from the Ottes for the vacant Vice-President position. Caseres would be a spider at the center of the web – or caught between a rock and a hard place, depending on luck, situation, and perspective. He would, with his many connections to Dutch tradesmen, Jewish congregations in several cities, and affluent circles in Hamburg, be able to negotiate many streams of goods, gold, and cash, and would be certain to use some of those streams to extract services from officials, ranging from the everyday protecto-riums for Jews and others to larger catches like the vice presidency. In the local Altona setting, he would be the link between the node of Vincelius and the Reventlows on the one hand and the node of Isaac Israel with his Hamburg contacts on the other. Simultaneously, he would become a victim in the spring of 1719 when the anti-corruption campaign exploded in the face of the instigators themselves, suddenly imprisoned and interrogated, threatened, pressured, and tortured, with his partners in trade fleeing in all directions. The pious and self-righteous Altona City Council would be diverting funds from street-cleaning to spend upon themselves, they would accept bribes to decide court cases – the original complaint by Dippel which triggered the whole calamity – they would artificially prolong court cases to enrich lawyers who would be sure to offer kickbacks, they would take payments for granting access to the Appeal Court in Glückstadt which, in turn, would accept payments for certain decisions. The interrogations by said City Council committee would be rogue – not only would they spare their friends from interrogation while jailing their enemy witnesses in order to influence testimony, but committee interviewers would also fight between each other over which information to put in the reports, and if necessary they would report their own version of events rather than that of the witnesses.

Channeling bribes back and forth in such networks, it would often happen that at a particular node, some informal tax could be deduced from amounts passing through. The next receiver might not know how much the original briber would have paid, so at all points of the network, values might be seeping out to disappear, disseminating suspicion among networkers. The network, however, would have strict means to prevent participants from snitching. Caseres would be

forced to sign false statements against his own testimony, not only by Vincelius trying to exonerate himself, but also by the Hamburg merchant Sentrup and by the City Council committee themselves, finding that Caseres went much too far in revealing bribe practices during the 4 April interrogations and squeezing him in order to protect themselves. He would be maltreated and subjected to torture in the Altona City Hall in order to make him retract his explanations on 27 April, and in the next Commission he sits tacit, having learnt his lesson. A young Jewish girl suspected of being a petty thief would be imprisoned and subjected to thumb-screw torture while she managed to escape caning by bribes and who knows what else.

Was this fiction the truth beneath the Altona surface? Could it be that Dippel's original, tiny pinprick with the Bandau and Lieben cases was but the butterfly triggering a tsunami that would bring parts of these sleazy networks out into the open? There is no reason to doubt the unadulterated character of Reventlow's anger, but what was really the reason he was so angry? Was it facing offensive rumors blackening his reputation and honor as a nobleman – the official version – or was it rather seeing his own household caught red-handed as central players in this putrid network? And, in the latter case: was he angry that his greedy wife's rumored grey-area practices were suddenly brought to light – and if so, was he secretly fuming at her while struggling to protect her name in public? Or had he known all about the shady dealings all along, even participating himself and now mad with rage because Dippel, inadvertently, had come to expose him to Bandau? Was he now sacking Vincelius and prosecuting Dippel, two of his protégés, minions, and network nodes, not because of their misdemeanors, but rather as regrettable, necessary sacrifices he had to make in order to protect himself? Did he fear that Dippel's supplications to Copenhagen would expose him and his wife and that they might face retributions or even worse actions from above if he did not take action? The acceptance of bribes was punishable on life, honor, and property, according to the King's 1708 decree. And did he now throw himself into the prosecution of Dippel not only because he was furious with his old chemist, but also to point out a scapegoat so that all of the scandal could be canalized away onto one person who could then be sacrificed and driven out at a flashy and spectacular event? Was the grand ceremony with public burning of documents not only needed to restore his own tattered reputation but also a way of demonstrating that bribe and slander were finally driven out of a city now again pure?

Altona was an exceptional place at the time. It was basically one large grimy construction site drawing craftsmen and investors from near and wide, particularly from Hamburg, as showcased by Dippel's two selected processes with the Hamburgers Bandau and Lieben. It was Hamburg's Wild West, attracting not only



money, initiative, and talent of many kinds but also fortune hunters of no fewer kinds, bankrupt debtors, innkeepers, prostitutes, petty thieves, smugglers, fraudsters, criminal gangs, all the way up to grey-zone big financiers like the Ottes. Thanks to the relative freedom of faith, there was a rare zoo there of different churches, confessions, and sects able to escape persecution, especially if they kept a low profile, each of them constituting its own secluded microcosm, networks with long-range contacts to fellow believers near and far. It was a free port and open city housing an ever-changing flux of goods, money, sailors, merchants, dissidents, refugees, shady figures from Hamburg taking time off or hiding in the liberty of the neighboring city *all-too-near*, some of them donning pseudonyms. The capital Copenhagen with central authorities was far away. Only in 1754, a formal office of Chief Constable was introduced in Altona.<sup>190</sup> Much was possible there. It would not seem improbable if bribery, nepotism, and corruption saw opportunities in such an environment. We have no possibility of deciding upon the truth of each and every one of the many small and big allegations kicked around in the Dippel case files – and in the Commission interrogation reports in particular. But it would not seem *prima facie* strange if at least some of them were correct. It had been Reventlow and his rogue spring committee of Heinrichs who had opened this bag of fleas, all but exploding back in the face of themselves and the Reventlows.

The new formal Commission, however, chose to ignore all that, even if it may be found in its own interrogations. But it was also not a part of their royal Commissorium.

## A Punishment on the Edge of Summer

The Commission's immediate 23 June report would hardly satisfy Reventlow or the King (VI.3). The letter is basically a plea for extension of the deadline of the final Commission report which seems to have been set one month after work began. Still, it contains a few interesting details. The overall subtext is that the Commission hesitates to accept Copenhagen's increasing pressure. This appears from a detail such as when they relate the Commission's communication to Dippel of the eight-day deadline to prove his pronouncements, they refer to their own letter to him as "... ein weitläufftiges Scriptum" – a long-winded piece of

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<sup>190</sup> Cf. Ljungberg and Jakobsen (2023). Even when this office was introduced one generation later, Altona seems to have been considered an unruly place; an argument marshaled for the creation of the office was "the Altonian disease" (*ibid.*).

writing. This cannot be but irony. The King's recent, impatient letters to the Commission had warned several times against allowing Dippel to submit "weitläufige" counterarguments. It seems to be an indirect way of saying that in legal matters, long and detailed documents could hardly be avoided, thus discreetly claiming some degree of Rule-of-Law principle as against Copenhagen's breathless demands for swift justice. Furthermore, the letter is interesting in that it refers to the fact that witness interrogations are not yet finished, arguing that Dippel's co-defendant Vincelius has escaped to Hamburg and the problems of the Commission trying to locate and interrogate him there have caused delay. They also refer to the fact that Dippel, all of sudden, has willingly appeared for the Commission with a defense; this, however, is not a document found among the case files. They promise their final report by the next ordinary mail – and it would actually be shipped only three days later.

This, then, is finally the Commission's much-awaited conclusive report on the Dippel case (26 June, VI.4). The first half of the long report again apologizes for the delay which seems to be caused by the inability of the Commission to approach a number of witnesses: Vincelius who had fled, but also the local Dutch reformed preacher (Jacob Denner?) who has reported sick, and the Jew Steffens. Another batch of witnesses have been proposed, probably by Dippel, but are now in Hamburg, refusing to appear in Altona but proposing they might be questioned by the Hamburg City Council: the broker Stallbohm, the pietist Rosenbach, Prehn and his sisters – all of them potentially good witnesses from Dippel's point-of-view, the first two of them were present during the conversation on the fateful two Portugalöser. The Commission states they have not gone further with these interrogations in order not to protract the case, but they make sure to ask the King if they should rather proceed. These would probably be the witnesses which Dippel complained that he was not allowed to call. The Commission mentions the recently conducted seven further interrogations attached to the report but does not refer to their results in what follows.

The decisive part of the report relates how Dippel has now actually handed in a written defense (not among the case files), but while his imputation against the Reventlows as it appears in this defense depends on mere hearsay, the Commission jumps to the following conclusion:

"... as his submitted articles show that he has based and founded the whole of his accusation on mere hearsay, and consequently hereby has done too close and too much to His High-Countl. Excellence zu Reventlau and his Mrs. Consort: And then the law decides that such a slanderer should not pass unpunished, but must be punished justly for it, so that others will

be deterred by it, and not so easily are moved to *temerarias denunciations*” – to reckless denunciations.<sup>191</sup>

Dippel’s defense is not appended along with the other attachments, and it is also not resumed in the report, so we do not know what was in it. But it is dismissed by the Commission as mere “hörsagen”, hearsay. Even if this characterization is summary, it is simultaneously very mild, when you think of the judgments of Reventlow and his committee. It is hard not to see this lenient characterization of Dippel’s crime as an indirect way of saying that the claims about the Reventlows’ corruption were not at all Dippel’s invention but just repetitions of rumors that were circulating in the city. So, Dippel should be punished after the law for promoting rumors, also in order to deter others from doing the same thing. No particular legal paragraph nor article is mentioned, nor is the blasphemy charge.

On this basis the Commission finishes by proposing, after mature consideration, the following argument for punishment:

After the case and all its circumstance have been carefully considered by us, our most-submissive and humble meaning is that Chancellery Councilor Dippelius, because of such outpoured and unproven special accusations, is liable to give to His High-Countl. Excellence zu Reventlau a public Christian excuse in the local City Hall, and the same to Mrs. Countess in her home, and then, because of his in no way justified behavior, to stay another four weeks after the publication of the verdict in the arrest kept until now, at his own expense ...<sup>192</sup>

He should not be released, however, before he has signed a declaration under oath to abstain from any further offense to the noble couple in the future. The commission meticulously weighs the length of the arrest penalty with considerations pertaining to that it might well have been longer, but that Dippel on the other hand also has to pay for the work of the Commission, and it should also be balanced by the fact that he has already been under arrest for a period under

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191 “... indem seine übergebene articuli sattsahm darthun, daß er seine gantze defension auf bloßen hörsagen gesetzt und fundiret, folglich Ihrer Hochgräffl: Excellence zu Reventlau und deßen Fr: Gemahlin zu nahr und zu viel hierinnen gethan: Und dan die Rechte verordnet, daß einem solchem Denuncianten es nicht ungeahndet hingehen müßte, sondern billig desfalls zu bestraffen seyn, damit andere dadurch abgescheldet, und *ad temerarias denunciations* sich nicht so leichte bewegen laßen”.

192 “... nachdem die Sache mit allen ihren Umständen von Uns reiflich erwogen, Unserer aller-unterthänigste unmaßgäbliche Meinung dahin, daß der Cantzeley-Raht Dippelius wegen solcher ausgegoßenen, und nicht erwiesenen speciale Beschuldigungen Ihrer Hochgräffl:en Excellence zu Reventlau eine öffentliche Christliche Abbitte auf hiesigen Rahthauße, wie auch der Frau Gräffin in Dero Behaußung zu thun schuldig, sodan seiner in alle Wege nicht zu justificirenden Betragen halber nach publicirung der Urtheil annoch auf Vier Wochen in dem bishero gehaltenen arrest auf seine eigene Kosten zu continuiren ...”.

conditions where much in his incarceration has been not a little unpleasant and disrespectful.<sup>193</sup> It is a surprisingly cool deliberation, taking into account both the motivation for punishing and the fact that the convict has already been imprisoned for months. The Commission clearly signals that this be their final say, for they simultaneously return to Copenhagen writings shipped to them as evidence, just like they inquire again what they should finally do with the still-sealed parcel of papers handed to them by Dippel.

The punishment for spreading gossip, then: a public apology, four more weeks under arrest, and payment of the legal expenses. That decision would hardly satisfy Reventlow who now had to realize that he could not, despite his direct line to the King, control the Commission. So, back to scratch.

## A Sentence Without Law?

It may appear as a surprise that the Commission does not at all refer to any legal motivation for their sentence. But we are in a time before any consequent application of the principle of “Nulla poene sine lege”, *no punishment without law*. Sentences could be passed per analogy to existing legislation, or they could be passed based on a more diffuse conviction that an action committed evidently had to be punishable.

To this, it must be added that the Duchy of Holstein was a complicated political puzzle which is mirrored in the many different, often overlapping jurisdictions in the different parts of the Duchy. Legal tradition in Holstein in general was the medieval *Sachsenspiegel*, modified by Imperial Law as practiced by the Holy Roman Empire, but in Holstein’s cities such as Kiel, Rendsburg, Seheberg, and Oldesloe, Lübeckian Law ruled; in Danish-founded Glückstadt supplied by Hamburg Law. But Altona was a special case where Lübeckian Law was explicitly not relevant, because it was part of the old county of Stormarn where the *Sachsenspiegel* had never been introduced, and where there was a special “Gräflisches Holstein-Schauenburgische Hof-Gerichts-Ordnung” – a Comital Holstein-Schauenburgian Courtly Legislation. In Altona, this was the Law, along with Imperial Law, such as expressed by the decrees of Frederik III for Altona in 1665 – while adding that the “long-winded” Schauenburgian process ought to be abbreviated in Altona (Schmid 1747, 148ff).

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<sup>193</sup> Reventlow thought that he paid to keep Dippel locked up under luxury conditions; the Commission rather that his arrest was unpleasant and derogatory. This could be dependent on viewpoint, but it might also be that Dippel had been moved to the less convenient City Hall custody when more space became vacant with the release of Lieben and Caseres. The case files do not report whether Dippel changed arrest during his almost five months of imprisonment in Altona.

A comprehensive Holstein history of law with reprinted versions of different Holstein legislations in five volumes (Cronhelm 1750, explicitly bracketing the special case of Altona) presents Schauenburg Law, which has no maximum penalty for libel and blasphemy, unlike neighboring Ditmarschen, which had a distinction, in libel, between mere invective and invective claimed, without success, to be proven; the former is punished with considerably smaller fines than the latter (Cronhelm 1750, vol. V, 99). Libel is addressed in a number of imperial decrees in the seventeenth century, appended to Sleswick-Holstein legislation, always as part of a group of offenses under some *de minimis* threshold given by the size of the expected fine, offenses which may not be appealed, reduced, nor involved in supplications (Cronhelm 1750, vol. III, 95, 112, 117). This is repeated in a decree of Schauenburg law enacted in Glückstadt 1694 where the *de minimis* threshold is 50 Rix-dollars (valid also for Altona; Cronhelm 1750, vol. IV; 115). It is interesting that after Reventlow had taken over the Altona city government 20 years later he decreed, on 5 February 1714, a related rule comprising libel:

... in the future I shall, in your city Altona, in order to avoid and abbreviate unnecessary long-windedness and processes, appoint one of the City Council members every year who, with a citizen treasurer and under participation of the local city steward, will judge cases not exceeding 10 Rix-dollars. Therefore, in accordance with this most-gracious decree in such court cases under which small libel, invective, and slander cases also belong, but where penal cases remain under the city court, [...] the council member shall have the first, the steward the second, and the present treasurer the third votum in the case.<sup>194</sup>

So, this addresses the appointment of an “under-court” speedily deciding the outcome of simple complaints under a 10 Rix-dollar limit. The first City Council member appointed in 1714 was one of the four Heinrichs, Joenssen. It is even added that these judges are obliged to do all they can in order to reconcile the conflicting parties in a reasonable way, so that the case may be settled and closed without any sentence (158). Both in Schauenburg law and in Reventlow’s own city rule, then, the tendency is that libel is taxed as a trifle which would typically trigger a smaller fine and which can ideally be solved by a negotiated reconciliation

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194 “... daß hinfüro in Dero Stadt Altona, zu Vermeidung und Abkürzung unnöthiger Weitläufigkeiten, und Processe, Ich einen von denen Rathsverwandten, und einen Kämmerreiberger jährlich zu benennen habe, welche mit Zuziehung des allhiesigen Stadtvoigts in Sachen, so nicht über 10. Rthlr. betragen, ohne Appellation erkennen sollen. Demnach nun in Conformité sothanner allergnädigsten Verordnung zu solchen Gerichtssachen, worunter auch die kleinen Injurien, Schelt- und Schmähssachen zwar mit gehören, die Bruchdingung aber dem Stadtgerichte vorbehalten bleibet [...], und der Rathsverwandte das erste, der Stadtvoigt das zweite, und der p.t. Kämmerreiberger das dritte Votum soll zu führen haben” (Schmid 1747, 156).

between parties, an out-of-court settlement. Reventlow, however, would not see things this way when he found himself the target of libel.

Proper penal cases, covered by Emperor Karl V's "Carolina" or "Peinliche Halsgerichtordnung" of 1532 would, by contrast, be processed in Altona publicly by citizens gathering under open sky, Frederik III had decreed in 1665; later it was specified to a sort of selected jury of citizens gathering in the City Hall (Schmid 1747, 148, 168). Here belongs libel in the more severe meaning of the word: the untrue, public claim that named persons should have committed a crime. About this, Karl's law, article 110, had the following.

The penalty for written, unrightful, penal **slander**

Who unrightfully ascribes an innocent person vices and crimes in slanderous writings, in Latin called *Libell famosus*, which he disseminates and does not, after the decree of the law, sign with his given name and family name, which truthfully has been established, may the perpetrator be punished on life, body, or honor: the same wicked offender must, after the discovery of such a misdeed, as the law states, be punished with the punishment, which he himself has attempted to impose on the offended innocent person by his evil, untrue, slanderous writing; And even if the alleged infamous act actually proves to be true, the disseminator of such an offense must still be punished after the law and the evaluation of the judge.<sup>195</sup>

It is interesting that the punishing of the offender with the same penalty that he tried to impose upon the innocent should *also* be executed in case the offense actually proves to have been true. This must refer to criminalizing anonymity in such claims: if you want to publicly claim that somebody has done something criminal, you must do it openly, under your own name. Thus, this rule would imply that Dippel should be punished with the punishment relevant for the Reventlows if they actually did receive bribes – that is, life, honor, and property (cf. Eggers 1788, 369ff). Dippel, however, had not presented his claims publicly nor anonymously, so his crime would not fall under this decree. Reventlow, moreover, would hardly venture to subject such a decision to a selected jury of Altona

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195 "Straff schriftlicher vnrechtlicher peinlicher **schmähung**.

Item wellicher jemant durch schmachschrifften, zu latein Libell famosus genant, die er außbreittet vnnd sich nach ordnung der Recht mit seinem Rechtem tauff- vnnd zunamen nitt vnnderschreibet, vnrechtlicher vnschuldiger weise laster vnnd vbell zumysst, Wa die mit Warheit erfundenn wurden, Das der geschmecht an seinem leip, lebenn oder eeren peinlich gestrafft werden möchte: Derselbig bosshafftig lesterer soll nach erfindung sollicher vbellthat, alls die Recht sagenn, mit der pene, jnn welliche Er den vnschuldigen geschmechten durch sein böse vnwarhafftige lasterschrift hat pringen wollen, gestrafft werdenn; Vnnd ob sich auch gleich wol die vffgelegte schmach der zugemessenen that jnn der warheit erfindt, soll dannoch der aussrufer sollicher schmach nach vermog der Recht vnnd ermessung des Richters gestrafft werden" (Karl V 1900, 51).

citizens whose ruling would be unpredictable. And, what is worse, the whole case would be public, only serving to spread the circulating claims about the Reventlows even further. So, it is easy understand why he preferred a secret commission.

As mentioned, it is probable that the Commission, in the back of their heads, would also have had the recent, comprehensive *Danish Law* (1683), the large legal accomplishment of early Danish absolutism. It was not the law of the land in the Duchies, but it had considerably more explicit provisions regarding libel than did Schauenburg law. In *Danish Law*, libel is addressed in Book 6, Chapter 21 “On Cases of Honor”.<sup>196</sup> The articles 6-21-1 to 6-21-7 deal with different kinds of offense. Article 6-21-1 addresses gossip: “If one man accuses somebody else in an inn, mill, smith or elsewhere in a like assembly, then he who has been accused may sue the other for such talk and claims. If he will not maintain it and it cannot be proven, or he says he knows no reason for it, other than what he has loosely heard people say, then the steward should send him home unpunished”. So, if an oral gossipier publicly retracts, he will be released. This might be an inspiration for the mild verdict of the Commission. Article 6-21-2 covers the more serious case in which a person claims that another is, e.g., a liar, thief, or a similar criminal predicate without being able to prove it; in that case the offended suffers damage of his reputation, and the offender is sentenced a liar and should pay a fine of three Mark. Article 6-21-3 generalizes this to cases where the offended is not himself present. The level of punishment, however, is still far from the level of the Dippel case. Article 6-21-5 refers to cases in which an already convicted “three Mark man” repeats his crime, in which case he should be banished from the city. Article 6-21-7 covers libel against a secular or clerical authority or other “honest” people (which seems to refer to noblemen or persons in the rank system), in which case three times 40 units of silver must be added to the three-Mark fine, and if the felon is unable to pay, public whipping at the stake followed by the punishment of “carrying stones out of town” will be the penalty, that is, banishment effected by tying two heavy stones around the neck of the convict who must haul them until being banished at the city gates. Article 6-21-8 covers the most serious cases, to write or publish slanderous pieces or pasquils against honest persons, an act which is punished by the loss of honor and penal labor for life. Reventlow was obviously a secular authority and an “honest man” who found himself under attack for having committed a criminal act, so he would look in the direction of the heavier end of 6-21, while the Commission may have thought about the considerably milder 6-21-1 and -2, maybe because Dippel’s claims were never published. Blasphemy, the offense of God, in turn, was a much more serious crime

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196 *Danish Law*: <http://bjoerna.dk/DL-1683-internet.pdf>.



than offending people; in *Danish Law* it was punishable by execution preceded by torture (6-1-7).

As mentioned, references to any legal basis are missing completely in the Dippel case, in the considerations of the spring committee, in the reports of the Commission in Reventlow's repeated arguments for conviction and punishment, as well as in the King's final decision of punishment later in fall. Once, there is a reference to the King's decree against bribes as of 1708 (in Reventlow's church campaign), but not to libel law. But this was not at all because such legal foundations were missing in Altona. The bottom line seems to be that by handing over the decision to a Commission, legal frameworks lost importance. In absolutist Commission practice in general – and in particular when royal interests were involved – it was not uncommon that there was a rather free relation to legislation.<sup>197</sup> In the present case actually approaching not considering it at all. Such flexibility would probably have added to Reventlow's preference for a Commission. But that turned out not to help him to the desired punishment of Dippel, anyway.

So, the third act of the case had begun with Reventlow's intense letter campaign of April-May, massaging Copenhagen authorities: the King, Sehested, and Franz von Hagen. Reventlow succeeded in pressuring the King to appoint a fast-moving Commission in Glückstadt to investigate and convict Dippel, just like he amped up accusations from libel also to involve blasphemy. The Commission did work rapidly but despite the Reventlows' continuous pressure on His Majesty the Commission, with its mild and weighted conclusion, did not reach a result he would in any way accept.

## Act 4: The Shaping of a Punishment

### Machinations in Copenhagen

Summer break. Now the case enters a new stalemate. No further documents in the whole of July 1719. The Commission's verdict might appear to be the last word. If Dippel was informed about it, he could sigh with relief. A mild sentence has been put forward, soon Dippel might be at large again, his reputation a bit corroded from yet another clash with authorities, at the cheap price of never again attacking his noble counterparts, so that he might continue his lofty mix of alchemy, radical religion, and enlightenment elsewhere. Peace might descend

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<sup>197</sup> Cf. the Danish legal historian Ditlev Tamm (personal comm.)

upon Altona and the Reventlows go back to their comprehensive reconstruction task with all the dealings, negotiations, and activities involved, with or without bribes.

Not so. Early August, things slowly begin moving again. The Commission, seemingly remaining in Glückstadt on the sunny side of the Elbe over summer, received a letter of 1 August not preserved among case files. This letter seems to have been signed by both the royal cabinet in Copenhagen and the Reventlows vacationing in Denmark during summer. This can be seen from the fact that the Commission response of 8 August addresses both of those two sets of dignitaries (V.9). So, now the Reventlows directly collaborated in giving royal orders to the Commission. The main issue remains the unopened, sealed parcel whose destiny the Commission had been repeatedly inquiring about in June. Obviously, the 1 August letter must have criticized the Commission for not having taken the step to break open this batch of writings and taken them into consideration in their June report. Maybe the Reventlows and the King now had the suspicion that the parcel might contain further evidence providing arguments for a harder punishment?

The Commission's answer is understandably irritated now, going into great detail about how the June orders from the King, again and again, had instructed the Commission exactly to consider *no* further facts or writings from Dippel except for what he was expected to deliver by the eight-day deadline in June. The Commission mock-virtuously emphasizes how they would never dream of breaking such a royal decree: introducing further evidence would just have protracted the process into "Weitläufigkeit" – long-windedness, the warning word of the royal decrees speeding up the process in June. No mention here at all, however, of the punishment proposed by the Commission in June – would that issue have been addressed in the 1 August rebuke of the Commission's work? In any case, early August did not bring any decisive conclusion to the case after the summer break.

Again, Reventlow takes action, now back in Altona. On 15 August he is back on high alert with a handwritten note to Sehested (III.10), swiftly jotted down in German with lots of abbreviations and inkspots making it hard to decipher. Reventlow is mad with rage, now that he has learnt about the Commission's 8 August response about the sealed papers. The last third of the letter is concerned with important intelligence about troop and navy movements of Russian, Swedish, and English forces in the decisive phase of the Great Northern war, but Reventlow's own case takes precedence. It is a challenging read, but so much is clear that he strongly protests that the Commission has not broken the seal, that it has still done nothing at all to refute Dippel's rumors against himself and his wife, and he intensely urges his foreign minister friend to conclude the case immediately. Again, the contentious issue of the punishment is not addressed at all, but Reventlow is exasperated.

The week after, Copenhagen authorities begin to awaken after summer and finally answer the Commission's ironic letter from two weeks earlier. The letter only survives in unfinished draft versions (22 August, both versions in V.1). In any case, the Commission is now explicitly ordered to finally break open and process the sealed package, the second of two drafts stating that this should take place in the presence of Reventlow – but this demand has been crossed out again and thus did not reach the final letter. Maybe he now had reasons to prefer Copenhagen to Altona.

Again, the Commission answers the King with a report, on 29 August (VI.16). The Commission has received the royal instruction of 22 August and once again taken action at great speed. The much-discussed sealed parcel has finally been opened, only to reveal two supplications from Dippel aimed at the King, dating back from early and late May, supplications never reaching their royal destination. No further accusations against the Reventlows were found there but also no proofs of Dippel's original defamations. The former supplication addresses the issues of Lieben and Caseres, and the Commission asks, ironically, if it would not be too "weitläufftig" to go further in that direction. The two have long since disappeared from the story. The latter supplication is, in itself, a "weitläufftig" piece of writing, an appeal to the King addressing the following four points:

1. *relaxationem arresti*. (2) That Your royal Majesty sends out a public proclamation so that one can be granted a final security against Mr. Count and the City Council, and simultaneously be urged with commitment to tell the truth; (3) That what He calls the infamous pasquil is burned; (4) That the Countess is ordered to hand back again the stolen calendar.<sup>198</sup>

Dippel wants out of his arrest; the King should publicly grant his security as against the Count and Council and urge the truth to be told about the case; one of Dippel's own writings may be burned; and the Countess should return a stolen calendar, maybe one of the contentious objects of the Caseres deals or one of the objects seized from Dippel's two suitcases – in any case, a final stab at her supposed greed. The reference to the truth of the case would include Dippel's right to publish his version of events. The "infamous pasquil" to be burned would probably refer to the "Secten-Spiegel" with Dippel's aggressive intro, the publication particularly under attack by Reventlow for blasphemy. All in all, a sort of compromise proposal from Dippel where both parties yield something under a royal

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198 "1. *Relaxationem arresti*. 2. Daß von Eur: Königl.n Maytt: ein publiques proclama machen möge, damit Inderen man von Schluß und Sicherheit gegen den H.n Graffen, und den Magistrat assecuriret, und zugleich mit Commination angehalten werde die Warheit außzusagen; (3) Daß die von Ihm so genandte infame pasquil verbrant werden möge, (4) der Fr. Graffin zu Reventlau zu befehlen, daß dieselbe den entwändten Calender wiederum auß liefern".

grant for a future cool peace between them. The Reventlows are addressed less than courteously, indeed, but in conclusion the Commission finds nothing substantially new in the legendary sealed parcel and concludes by maintaining its report of 26 June, now more than two months before. The ever-growing mammoth in the room, the pending issue of punishment, remains unaddressed.



**Figure 18:** King Frederik IV of Denmark-Norway, Reventlow's brother-in-law, was the target of both direct and indirect pressure during Reventlow's letter storm to the government in Copenhagen. The King ultimately decided upon Dippel's penalty in early September 1719, even if he was subsequently pushed by Reventlow to strengthen the punishment.

This would abruptly be decided, however, by the King four days later, communicated in an official 2 September letter from Sehested to Reventlow, of which V.10 is a draft (Fig. 18). The King had received the Commission report the day before and, on that basis, he has now decided Dippel's punishment:

Thus, His Most-Exalted Majesty has most-graciously resolved that Your High-Comit. Excellence would send the mentioned Chancellery Councilor Dippelium, on Your own expense, [from Altona via Lübeck to the sea] directly hereto after your own judgment well-guarded, Then the same Mr. will immediately be transported together with War Councilor Möller, for the time being an inmate in the Citadel, to the island Bornholm and will let both of them be held captive there; which I consequently have hereby communicated to the information of your Your High-Comit. Excellence, and at the same time I would like to report that your honored letter of the twenty-ninth of last August was sent to me.<sup>199</sup>

There is no surviving letter from Reventlow to Sehested or the King with that date in the files, but it does not seem improbable that Reventlow, in his excited state of mind, would have continued squeezing the government, maybe also insisting the punishment should be increased. It is also striking that the very first letter addressing the punishment decision goes to Reventlow – rather than to the Commission. He was indeed the supreme authority of Altona and should be informed as such, but he was also part in the case, and it is hard not to get the idea that the King now also wished to put an end to the stream of angry letters from his brother-in-law – cf. also his insistence that Reventlow himself pay the cost for the transport of the prisoner to Copenhagen from where Dippel would continue on an already planned prisoner transport. The King wished to have no government expenses from what appears to be Reventlow's own private campaign.

So, this letter finally sealed Dippel's fate. He should be taken to Lübeck and from there sailed to Copenhagen (or another direct route after Reventlow's judgment) in order to be shipped further to incarceration in Bornholm along with another prisoner, War Councilor Möller, who had been convicted the year before after an extensive Commission investigation for having attempted to extract fa-

<sup>199</sup> "So haben Allerhöchstged: Ihr: Königl: May:t allernädigst resolviret, daß, wann Eur: Hoch Gräffl: Excellenz\* besagten Cantzeley-Raht Dippelium auff Ihre eignen Umkosten von Altona uber Lübeck zu Waßer anhero [difficult to see whether crossed out or underlined, FS] gerades Weges nach Ihrem eignen guthfinden wohlverwahret senden ~~xxx~~ wolten, dieselbe Hhn ~~xxx~~ zugleich mit dem eine Zeithero in der hiesigen Citadelle geseßenen Kriegs-Raht Möller, nach der Insul Bornholm transportiren und ~~zeit haben~~ Sie beyde daselbst gefänglich halten laßen wollen; welches ich demnach Eur: Hoch-Gräffl. Excellenz zu dero Nachricht hiemit habe vermelden und anbey zugleich berachten wollen, das deroselben an mich abgelaßenes geehrtes Schreibens vom 29. vorigen Monats Augusti gestern wohl erhalten" Another version of the letter essentially repeats the wording quoted here (VI.14).

vors from the King by presenting false claims.<sup>200</sup> It seems there was already a planned prisoner transport in the pipeline, so the King took the practical decision of simply adding Dippel to that shipment. A note added in the margin, but then again crossed out, read that it should not be prevented that the Commission's sentence could be published.<sup>201</sup> So, it was considered that the Commission's June report should be made public, but this was given up again. That may have been because it was hardly desirable to flash the Commission's lenient proposal in public, but maybe also because it might question the royal letter's claim that Dippel's punishment was motivated by the Commission's 29 August letter finding no further ridicule in the unsealed parcel, so that their 26 June report was still the valid "sentiment" upon which the King's decision would rest. Might be difficult to publicly explain the harsh punishment just for spreading gossip.

You guessed it: Reventlow was still not satisfied. In a long answer to Sehested of September 9 (III.11), again in German and sent from Copenhagen, he rehashes his eternal complaints about Dippel the "gottlose Bösewicht", as if Sehested had not heard similar in abundant variations since April. Reventlow now knows about the Bornholm plan, but that does not satisfy him at all. He presses on: wouldn't Norway be a better place to banish Dippel? Reventlow's most important issues now are two: his own final satisfaction, which he thinks he can achieve only with a public ceremony in Altona in which Dippel's writings are burned at the stake in the presence of their author himself: "... that all his submitted calumnies against me are publicly burned by the executioner in Altona in his presence, and all documents created about it are delivered to me, and it is notified, in the records of the Royal Council, that everything was found false by the investigation ..."<sup>202</sup> The latter was not factually correct, of course, the Commission had never drawn that conclusion. The letter was, simultaneously, an acquittal of himself to the King whose suspicion he still seems to fear: Reventlow claims that there were no Altona citizens who responded to his March encouragement in the churches to report corruption cases to secretary Esmarck, interpreted as a proof that Dippel's accusations are

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**200** The extensive case against Möller from 1713 to 1718 numbers some 1,500 pages of German Chancellery case files (State Archives, TyK, Indenrigske Afdeling, B. XI, "Kommissioner"). The case has not been investigated in detail.

**201** "... nicht diemit solten zu hindern seyn, daß die von gel: Hhl: Commisarien abgelaßete Urtheil ~~zur~~ publiciret und zur execution gebracht ..." (V.10).

**202** "... das alle seine gegen mich eingegebenen schandschriften in Altona öffentlich in seiner presentz durch den Büttel werden verbrandt worden, und alle drüber gehaltene protocollen zuweisen, und mich eingeliefert worden, und in dem protocol vom Königl. conseil notirt werden, das alles bey der inquisition sey unwahr befunden worden ...".

false.<sup>203</sup> In order to strengthen his argument for the burning ceremony, Reventlow adds references to recent satisfaction rituals in which the executioner has burned offensive writings, such as a case about libel against privy councilor Ditlev Wibe, against the City Council of Odense, against a certain Bachmann and Bentzen in Haderslev, and against Christian Erlund in Copenhagen – the post official who had developed the technique of seizing and secretly copying mail in Hamburg.<sup>204</sup> So, the satisfaction ceremony is so urgent to Reventlow that he equips Sehested with this small handful of precedents, as arguments that he may present to the State Council if they would not already be convinced. Reventlow must have remembered these previous cases as rituals which did in fact involve some sort of purifying effect for the offended and their public reputation, for obviously the bonfire in the square is now his top priority.

Reventlow's second demand was a grant that the much-publishing Dippel will not, in any possible future, be able to go public and print his attacks on Reventlow – which is why he wants a guarantee that the promised banishment and imprisonment on Bornholm should be: *for life*. The letter concludes by emphasizing this demand by once again going into Dippel's "Sect-Mirror" pamphlet as the decisive proof that he does not offend honest people only but also God and his Holy Writ – as a decisive argument for lifelong incarceration. As usual, he exploits his personal connection to Sehested to put pressure upon the King.

But better go directly to the head. On 12 September, Reventlow simply gate-crashes a meeting at the Royal Council. He claims they have demanded to hear him about Dippel and that he proved able to convince the gathering dignitaries there to accept his demands – most importantly, the public autodafé planned in Altona but also the further step that Dippel's title as Chancellery Councilor finally be cancelled. We know that the Council was well-informed and had received copies of the Dippel publications deemed blasphemous by Reventlow. The Council accepts every single one of Reventlow's demands. Actually, it is an incredible scene: you may imagine Reventlow bursting in, full periwig, breathlessly excusing to the dumbfound assembly of dignitaries that he is there, then swiftly falling into his classic rant about the godless scoundrel. Or was he rather escorted cautiously into the meeting by Sehested, triggering only the raising of a couple of powdered eyebrows?

Naturally, he knew that the support of the Council would have no effect without royal backup. So, the next day Reventlow continues to write a personal letter

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<sup>203</sup> This claim is contradicted by the claim from the committee's May report that there had been several complaints against Lieben.

<sup>204</sup> The latter three precedents are repeated in the letter to the King a few days later. I have been unable to identify Bachmann and Bentzen.



to the King, sent from Frederiksborg Castle in the North of Zealand (IV.15). It is from this letter we know he has been in the Council the day before. Here Reventlow, skipping all formalities, writes in his own hand directly to his brother-in-law, just calling him “Sire”, no longer any “Most-Luminous Excellency”, writing in hasty, informal French. This is Reventlow’s final move, the crowning of his half-year campaign to frame Dippel. Now, he fears the case will be only slowly processed by the Council and brusquely admonishes his brother-in-law to give the relevant instructions to the Council at great speed before the next mail delivery, so that he himself can execute Dippel’s extradition from Altona. These September 1719 letters show how Reventlow proved finally able to organize, at the top of the Danish power hierarchy in Copenhagen and even short-circuiting the King, Dippel’s final destiny in minutest detail. Dictator for a day.

Two days later, Reventlow’s final personal letter in the case files goes to his brother-in-arms, foreign minister Sehested, in French (III.12). New issues here include the scary possibility that some of Dippel’s *comrades* might continue the defamations of Reventlow after the principle of “calumniare audacter semper aliquid haret”, that you should be cheeky in accusations, for something will always stick – which is also why Reventlow insists again that when archiving the papers of the case it should be explicitly marked by the Council that all accusations against himself are wrong. We can see from the very existence of the file collection on which this book is built that this was one demand in which he did not succeed, nor to have all case files delivered to himself. They remained in the German Chancellery which is why they are now in the State Archives. The most spectacular new idea, however, is that Dippel should, during his transport from Altona to Bornholm, not only be strictly guarded but also be kept in chains on both arms and legs. The argument for this is to avoid escape and further defamations on his part; it is not difficult also to see it as a sort of extra humiliation, icing on the cake for the vengeful Reventlow discovering that while in Copenhagen he has been able to play the authorities as his own instrument.

So, yielding to Reventlow’s relentless machinations in the capital, the King sends his final letter to the Commission on 16 September (V.11), detailing punishment instructions and ordering the Commission to communicate them to Dippel in person. Unfortunately, it is but a draft, and the final letter is not among the case files. But this is the official declaration of punishments, then, in four points:

- 1) Dippel shall lose his title of Chancellery Councilor.
- 2) His writings shall be burned by the executioner in Altona in his own presence.
- 3) The case files shall be submitted to the Chancellery.
- 4) Dippel shall be banished to lifelong imprisonment on Bornholm.

The fourth point should be communicated by the Commission to the Reventlows – as if they did not already know all about it – they must ship Dippel, chained and in secure custody, to Copenhagen, from where he will be transferred to Bornholm for life. The royal decree mentions the Commission report from 26 June as the legal basis of the sentence; the Commission would be in no position to know about all the intermediate machinations of Reventlow in Copenhagen working his old-boys network, triggering the final punishment decisions. But they must have wondered what had happened, in the meantime, to their mild proposal of a four-weeks arrest sentence. There was little in their June report meriting the radical September punishment decision.

Two weeks later, the Commission's final, short reply clocked in at court, sent on 29 September (II.2). They briefly report to have complied with orders. The day before, they annulled Dippel's royal title and sent his old appointment document back to the German Chancellery by mail. They let Dippel's writings against the Reventlows be burned by the Altona executioner in Dippel's own presence. And they had appointed Chamberlain Christian Scheel – the young son of the Countess herself from the Reventlow household – to guard Dippel on the way to Copenhagen, "geschlossen und wohlverwahrlich", chained and secured, in order to be taken further to Bornholm. Already the day before, the Commission reports, Dippel was shipped out of Altona. Mission completed.

The Commission finally expresses their hope that "... We have hereby satisfied Your Royal Majesty's to Us submitted decree and will".<sup>205</sup> They did an effective job. No mention of penal disagreements; it would not be the task of the Commission to argue with their royal superior, the supreme judge of the realm, and they had already gone to considerable length in ironizing royal decrees during the lengthy process.

The very last document among the case files is a laconic receipt of 14 October 14 1719 (II.3) from the Council Room at the Castle of Copenhagen, acknowledging the reception of the case files from the Commission. The receipt states that all of these acts, documents, and letters, including the original investiture document of Dippel's title, have now been burnt and discarded.<sup>206</sup> So, it seems that one part of the royal punishment scheme was never fulfilled: the handing over of all such files to Count Reventlow's mercy. This would explain why there are no surviving copies of many of the documents from Dippel's side of the case, the three Memorials, his supplications, his defense, and the letters from the sealed trunks. What

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205 "... wir Eur: Königl: Maytt an Unß ergangenen Allergnädigſten Befehl und Willen in diesen Fall ein Genügen gethan".

206 As mentioned earlier, a draft of the document has survived from the German Chancellery; here, somebody has attempted to erase Dippel's name.

did survive as the present set of case files in the State Archives, then, would be the acts from the archives of the German Chancellery. Sehested was in charge there and did not burn them, but he also did not – as required by the final punishment – hand them over to Reventlow. Did he wish to signal to posterity how Reventlow had forced his hand?

In all cases, this was the fourth and last act of the Case against Dippel. Reventlow succeeded in putting pressure on both Sehested and the King, so that a very harsh punishment was added to the mild sentence of the Commission: that Dippel had been spreading gossip. Much points to the fact that the wet dream of the Reventlows was really seeing him strung up in a gilded gallows, but banishment for life was probably as high as he was able to reach. His last effort also staged the satisfaction ceremony he had dreamt of: the burning of Dippel's writings in Dippel's own presence as his very last appearance in Altona.

## End Game with Burning Writings

For only the realm of darkness and lies is in need of violence to make valid the alleged truth – or deceit ... (Dippel 1731)<sup>207</sup>

The Commission had, all the way through, acted with an impressive speed. This extended to its final task, executing their part of punishment. The royal decree had been sent to them on 19 September; they would have received it three or four days later, that is, 22–23 September, and less than a week later all had been accomplished, on Thursday 28 September. The case files contain no further description of the execution of the punishment – nor of the long transportation via Copenhagen to Bornholm.

There is, however, a contemporaneous account of the event in the Altona City Hall Square (Fig. 18), related by anonymous eyewitnesses in a leading theological journal – they style themselves as “some servants of the divine word”.<sup>208</sup> Here we learn that the Commission showed up in charge of Dippel; he was handsomely

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<sup>207</sup> *Vera demonstratio evangelica*, 1729, 52.

<sup>208</sup> The reportage can be found in the first theological journal of Germany, initiated in 1701 and based in the stronghold of Lutheran orthodoxy in Wittenberg, the *Unschuldige Nachrichten von Alten und Neuen Theologischen Sachen*, the “Innocent Information about Old and New Theological Subjects”. Titled “Nachricht von denen Straffen/ welche auf Sr. Königl. Majest. zu Dennemarck allergnädigsten Befehl, and dem, unter dem Nahmen Christiani Democriti bekannten Dippelio am 28. Sept. 1719 zu Altona vollzogen worden”, it was authored under the pseudonym “Einige Diener des Göttlichen Wortes”, some servants of the divine word; Leipzig: Verlags Johann Friedrich Braun, 879–885, quoted at length by Rustmeier (1957, 112–13).



**Figure 19:** The construction of a new City Hall of Altona had been initiated by Reventlow's architect Claus Stallknecht in 1714, and the building was still being finished in September 1719 when the satisfaction ceremony of the Reventlows took place in the City Hall Square. It is here we should imagine the henchman constructing his pyre, threatening to punch Dippel on the mouth to keep him compliant, and throwing his writings, one by one, on the fire, attended by the city elite and a crowding mass of Altonians. The building, here depicted in a late nineteenth-century drawing, was lost during the British bombardments of 1943.

dressed in a scarlet robe during the ceremony and he behaved proudly and without fear. The first point of the ritual was that he should hand over the 1707 allotment document of his Councilor title, which he did only after many tergiversations. This took place inside the City Hall. Thus, he was stripped of his title; the document would later be burned in Copenhagen. The next point was the burning of five writings, outside on the square close to the pillory.<sup>209</sup> As this was announced and the executioner undertook his preparations, Dippel remained silent; the executioner was ordered to beat him in the mouth to stop him if he took the word. Then the pyre was built and lit, Dippel's writings were thrown on the fire one by one. After the fire, when taken by the guards back into the City Hall, Dippel would shout out:

<sup>209</sup> The number five here may seem a bit puzzling; Reventlow's blasphemy charge spoke about four printed works, while the libel charge included a number of brief handwritten documents. Maybe some writings were bundled into fewer items.

“Darinnen haben sie ja nunmehr ihren Willen auch gehabt” – *In there they have now also had their will!* –, obviously referring to the Heinrichs of the Altona City Council who had triggered the whole process more than two years earlier. Now, the Commission turned Dippel over to the responsibility of the young Chamberlain von Skeel. Dippel had been permitted to bring one suitcase for his clothes, but as he asked for his rapier this was refused with reference to his upcoming incarceration where no weapons would be allowed for the prisoner. Now, Skeel bade the Commission farewell and led Dippel into an antechamber where a servant would chain him, each arm to the opposing leg. Now, his proud appearance waned, he lost his face color and paled. When he was taken out from the City Hall to the waiting two-horse wagon he would pull together his scarlet mantle, attempting to hide the chains from the onlookers.<sup>210</sup> In the wagon, he was guarded by an officer beside him and two soldiers with loaded guns sitting behind. This would be followed by a further wagon with Skeel and three more armed men. At 1:00 pm, the small procession left Altona in the direction of Rendsburg to the north.<sup>211</sup>

There was no prescribed structure of satisfaction rituals; it seems as if Reventlow and the Commission had been improvising on the base of the precedents mentioned by the Count. But is clear that the ceremony was not only about the extinction of offensive documents – it also marked the dishonor of Dippel as the entrance to his punishment. The noble couple regains its honor, while Dippel loses his, symbolized both by his loss of title, his forced attention to the autodafé, and his final, humiliating chaining. The reportage does not mention which authorities would be present. Most probably there would have been clergy such as Dean Fleischer, the top clerical authority of the City whom Dippel had recently ridiculed in a pamphlet which had already been burned once and now may have nourished the flames once again. The Dean would be able to appreciate the red robe which Dippel was wearing, for that was a more or less direct Bible quote: before crucifixion, the soldiers guarding Jesus dressed him up in a crown of thorns and a scarlet gown, mockingly celebrating him with the call “Hail, King of the Jews!”<sup>212</sup> Maybe Dippel, with Jesus in his heart, would also have appreciated the reference.

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<sup>210</sup> Senckenberg reports that Dippel, during his escape from Berlin, had predicted that he would one day end up in chains (Senckenberg’s diaries, vol. III, 70).

<sup>211</sup> The King’s verdict had spoken of Lübeck as a transit city, but maybe Reventlow had become nervous with letting the procession leave the Danish realm. Dippel was most probably transported from Rendsburg via Funen and Zealand to Copenhagen, sailing from Sleswick to Funen from Aaröund to Assens (Lars N. Henningsen, personal comm.). This is also supported by the fact that he later reported how he, as a free man on his way from Copenhagen, would pass through the same locations that he had been forced through nine years earlier.

<sup>212</sup> Matth. 27.27–31.

Naturally, the Reventlows would have been at the ceremony for their satisfaction, presiding over the whole process, with a surrounding crowd of curious Altonians watching the scenery. The four Heinrichs of the City Council triggering the whole affair years before may have watched the scenery from inside their City Hall.

The case files do not contain any final decree listing the writings burned there. Copies of the *Species Facti* and the Dippel letters confiscated by the spring committee would have been there, those letters in which Dippel called the Countess an “erboßtes Weib”, a wicked woman, along with *Memorials* not found among the case files, maybe with the addition of some of the letters from the two contested trunks and the sealed package finally broken open by the Commission. The worst thing, the affair with the two Portugalöser, was oral and could not be destroyed by fire. This handful of handwritten documents, however, would hardly suffice to make the ceremonial fire flare for more than seconds. So, the purifying flames would probably also have devoured copies of the published Dippel writings attacked by Reventlow for blasphemy in his letters to the Justice Councilor von Hagen in May, and most lately raged about only a few weeks earlier to the King. They were in print, and if they were for sale in Altona-Hamburg or indeed in Copenhagen where Reventlow spent his summer, copies of them may have been among the five burned objects.<sup>213</sup> Whether the authorities present would declare aloud the title of each single object thrown into the fire, we do not know.

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**213** In a review of the Danish version of this book, Olden-Jørgensen (2023) takes as his headline point that my claim that the burning ceremony would probably have included those Dippel publications claimed blasphemous by Reventlow cannot be maintained. He bases this criticism on the correct observation that there is no evidence of what material was burned during the ceremony. This is true, but that also holds for the unpublished libelous handwritings which Olden-Jørgensen claims would have been the only ones burned there. I still, however, find it is most probable that all or some of the published writings claimed blasphemous in Reventlow's May letters to Copenhagen were also burned in Altona in September.

Four reasons: (1) Reventlow addressed Dippel's blasphemy as late as a few weeks before, on 9 September, in the long letter to the King in which he demands that Dippel's incarceration should be for life (III.11). It is true that Reventlow's immediate demand in this letter speaks about “das alle seine gegen mich eingegebenen schandschriften in Altona öffentlich/ in seiner presentz durch d Büttel werd verbrandt worden”, that libelous writings against Reventlow should be burned – plus that all case files should be handed over to himself and the verdict be published (the latter two demands were never fulfilled, though). Later in the long letter, Reventlow would return to which “godlessnesses” Dippel is capable of publishing, picking the example of one published earlier the same year – that is, the the “Sect-Mirror”: “wan er mich auch nicht beleidiget hätte so bin doch schuldig vorzustellen, das wo dieser böse mensch jemahlen wieder in freiheit kommen solte, würde er solche gottlosigkeiten wowerhren die nicht zu erdenken wehren, ja vielleicht selbst das königs hohe persohn nicht menagiren und wovon man auch consideriren wil was er dieses letzte oster fest, in Hamburg geschrieben, als eine vorrede eines buchs secten spigel



It is an interesting fact that none of those documents, which triggered the case and the libel charge in the first place, were public. Despite Dippel's reputa-

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genandt, so wird man sehen, das er sich unterstehet, selbst gegen Gott und sein geheiliges woth zu schreiben, und davon/ ein gespot und zweifel zu machen, lesen diese schrift allein, die er doch geschrieven hat, weile er den caracter vom Könige hat, meritirt und erfordert das er in einem solchem stande gesetzt werde, und nichts lästerliches mehr gegen Gott und sein woth, wie auch andern Ehrliche Leüte ausgeben zu können, Euer Exc. pardonne das ich Sie so weiltläufftig antworten mus". Dippel's blasphemies are presented as the decisive argument for his punishment for life, and I find it probable that the ceremony symbolically inaugurating that punishment would also burn those blasphemies.

(2) It would seem obvious that a public ceremony would carry more appeal to the assembled public audience if including public writings rather than private letters and secret case files only. The eye-for-an-eye tendency in jurisprudence of the time would make it probable that a public ceremony would involve the retribution for public criminal activity (thanks to Charlotte Appel for pointing out this). Reventlow had shipped the four alleged blasphemies to the Council in Copenhagen, required copies to be shipped to the Commission in Glückstadt, and addressed them in several letters. Reventlow himself was ultimate responsible for the event and he would have the final decision of what was burned there.

(3) The report on the event, already quoted, by theologians in the audience, interprets the case as the divine revenge, long overdue, against a blasphemer and a mocker against the Evangelical Church, and they frame their report by quoting Solomon's biblical advice against blasphemers (German "Spötter"). Their only, indirect, reference to Reventlow in the long piece is that those who were Dippel's protectors were forced to bring him to punishment because he also offended them. They remark that the writings burned must no doubt have been "sehr injurieux" (883); this would apply to their offense of God, humans, or both. They conclude their report of the whole ceremony saying "Und das ist der Ausgang, welchen es mit diesem Spötter für der Welt genommen" (885), that is, the outcome that it took with this blasphemer for the world. How would these observers get such a religious impression from watching the ceremony? Did the authorities there explicitly announce the title or character of each piece of writing as it was thrown into the fire? In that case, the reporters' theological interpretation of the event might indicate the burning of material announced to be blasphemous.

(4) The severity of the penalty. The Commission's mild punishment proposal as well as the general level of punishment of libel lie far from the actual decision by the State Council and the King, under pressure from Reventlow and his blasphemy argument. We saw that Reventlow referred to Dippel's published "godlessnesses" as his central argument for extending Dippel's banishment to life; Rustmeier (1957) remarks that Reventlow, in doing so, cleverly played on Dippel's infamous international reputation as a blasphemer, thereby making a much more severe punishment possible.

Intermediary possibilities comprise that *some* and not all of the four blasphemous publications were included in the burning ceremony. A particular candidate would be the *Secten-Spiegel*: this piece, with which Reventlow dwells in the quote above, was not only repeatedly deemed blasphemous by the Count, but also contained an anonymized attack on the Reventlows themselves; it had been published recently in nearby Hamburg and would thus have been for sale in the area – all of this indicating that this publication, in particular, would be among those Reventlow would wish to see burned. So, regarding this publication in particular, I consider it very probable that it was in-



tion – and practice – as a vile pamphleteer, he never went public with his misgivings about Altona jurisprudence nor of the Reventlows. The hearsay libel for which he was sentenced took place in two kinds of non-public writings. One was official documents, such as Dippel's original letter to the King in December 1717 against the City Council, his and Bandau's judicial complaint earlier that year, or his later royal supplications in the case, no longer extant. They were supplemented by private letters and never-sent supplications, such as his pleas to Hirschfeldt and Holstein for help, including further attacks on the Reventlows. Of these, the former would have been the most toxic, for they spread those rumors in top government circles, at the time probably not much less serious than published writings. Some of them are interesting for the additional reason that they show that once a case is up and running, documents submitted by an accused party commenting upon the case may very easily become part of the very crime they are discussing. Dippel's correct claim that the improvised spring 1719 committee prosecution did not live up to elementary judicial standards of the time was immediately added to the stock of libel for which he was arrested – a condition deserving the misused adjective "Kafkaesque".<sup>214</sup> The latter kind is interesting for another reason: at the time, private letters were not private in the sense that claims made there would be inconsequential. There was, strictly speaking, no proper private sphere.<sup>215</sup> Individuals were not citizens with privacy granted by certain rights but rather absolutist subjects, and it was in the immediate, legitimate interest of authorities how their subjects behaved and spoke, also in private letters and conversations. So, Dippel's case was basically a hearsay libel case

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cluded in the ceremony. An additional candidate might be Dippel's pamphlet against Dean Fleischer in which he ridiculed not only the cleric but also those civil servants instrumental in kidnapping children for forced baptism – that is officials from Reventlow's city administration. Reventlow may have been uncomfortable with these attacks on the city administration which he spearheaded, and that pamphlet had already been burned in public once, in September 1718.

In any case, it remains true there is no definitive evidence of what was burned at the town square of Altona in Dippel's presence 28 September 1719. All in all, I remain convinced it is probable that the autodafé also involved published writings by Dippel, deemed blasphemous by his opponent, the practical responsible of the ceremony.

**214** It would take a long time before this condition changed in the Danish realm; in the Michael Brabrand cases of the 1790s, analyzed in depth by Langen (2012), the main reason for Brabrand's final banishment was claims made in legal documents in which he protested his initial arrest.

**215** The development of a private sphere in Altona, cf. Jakobsen (2022) and Ljungberg and Jakobsen (2023).

which only later grew into a blasphemy case involving published writings, also in order to increase punishment.<sup>216</sup>

The bonfire had two different purposes apart from Reventlow's satisfaction and Dippel's dishonor. As to the non-public handwritings, the purpose was simply: to extinguish them. The Reventlows were focused upon removing every single trace of Dippel's incriminating claims about them, and the result is that most of them have not survived. As for published writings, the purpose would be different. Such burnings would sometimes be accompanied by seizing and destruction of remaining stocks of copies, as well as prohibition against owning or selling the books. Reventlow, however, was unable to take such steps, as none of the writings had appeared within Danish jurisdiction. But even given such attempts at containing the circulation of publications, it was clear that it was impossible to trace every single copy of a printed piece or book and remove it from the surface of the earth. The burning of publications, then, rather had a representative, symbolic character: one or a few copies of a book would be burned, symbolizing and communicating the intention of criminalizing and fighting the thoughts and claims appearing in them, warning others from reading, owning, or publishing those books or similar stuff.

How was the punishment conceived of at the time? The innocent reporters in the "Unschuldige Nachrichten" made their reportage the content of a sandwich of religious condemnation both first and last in their article. The Lutheran observers conceive of the whole case as the righteous revenge by God on a "Spötter", a blasphemer, and even ascribes to Dippel a particularly "high rank" among such offenders, because he attacks not only single clerics or religious teachers but the whole of the evangelical church as an institution, its constitution, its cherished dogma, and its means of grace. But now, God's punishment has finally caught up with him. After the description of events on the square, the report concludes with a dire warning to fellow detractors of religion, expressing the hope that Dippel, after a suitable period of atonement, will turn to publishing retractions instead, embrace the evangelical faith, and become a righteous church member. Libel or bribes are hardly mentioned by these observers – the whole case is interpreted

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<sup>216</sup> Dippel much later insisted that neither the Altona nor the Stockholm case against him had anything at all to do with religious affairs (Rustmeier 1957, 113) a claim echoed by Canz (Eröff III, 750). Of course, he was correct in the sense that the Altona case developed from issues of bribery, libel, jurisprudence, and local politics. Rustmeier reasonably rejects Dippel's claim with reference to the fact that Dippel at that point, searching for a haven in Germany 10 years later in 1729, would have a strong interest in downplaying his religious radicality. Rustmeier adds the point that the blasphemy charge was necessary for a hard sentence and to communicate it more widely: Scoring a hit on the libeler, you also struck the much more dangerous heretic.

as the predictable, divine retribution against a heretic. So, even if the local core of the case would have been libel, bribes, and honor, its larger, metaphysical meaning and international, public echo was religious. An infamous heretic and blasphemer met his long-awaited divine revenge.

But what *were* the claims of those offensive writings which may have made Dippel's fall so much dramatic?

## A Mirror Separating the Sheep from the Goats

One was the title copper of Dippel's 1706 *Ein Hirt und eine Heerde* – A Shepherd and a Flock (Fig. 20). Reventlow had provided a small image analysis in his 2 May letter: "... from which it can be seen how he, in the copper, imagines the Holy Supper". The scene, however, is not a version of the Eucharist, nor indeed of a meal. It shows two figures watching themselves in a mirror under the protection of the Trinitarian symbol of the triangle with God's all-seeing eye. This divine mirror shows them for what they are. The crowned lion to the left is busy destroying a large orb, the symbol of worldly power. The lion is one of many symbols of Christ: he is the real king to come. The person to the right, by contrast, is a representative exactly of the earthly powers of state and church: holding a small orb, a cross, and a chalice with a host – hence Reventlow's reference to the Eucharist. But these symbols of princely and clerical powers are carried by a small fool, riding a pig. Only in the eternal, divine mirror, do these characters realize who they are and who is who. Secular and sacred power institutions, for an eternal, divine gaze, are but foolish and swinish while the proper crown and power belong to those fighting these institutions. So, take a look in that mirror and you will discover who you are. You can understand why Reventlow might not have liked to see the system to whose very top he belonged portrayed in this way. His ally and brother-in-law Frederik IV – King, Duke, head of the Danish-Norwegian church – would be the local character ridiculed as the clownish pig rider of the copper and he himself was the representative of the orb in Altona.

This depiction in the copper is supplemented by four chunks of text on each side, adding further theological explanation.

At the bottom, you find a direct instruction of how to read the picture: "Es zeigt wie ers findt der Spiegel dein Gesicht/ Die Tugend sieht sich selbst du Narr erzörn dich nicht!": *It shows how the mirror finds your face/ Virtue recognizes itself, you fool, do not become angry*. Worldly powers should not become piqued when revealed for what they are while really virtuous actors will recognize themselves when checking their appearance in God's mirror. Reventlow would not have been amused by this analysis of the rage of powerful fools.



**Figure 20:** The title copper of Dippel's *Ein Hirt und eine Heerde* – “A Shepherd and a Herd”. The book claimed to present an infallible method to bring together all sects and religions in one truth church and faith and unite them without any syncretism, that is, without any fusion or compromise of dogma. The book was published in Hamburg in 1706, falsely indicating Amsterdam as the place of printing, under Dippel's usual pseudonym of Christianus Democritus.

On the top, a Latin saying: “Nec laudans poscit munus, nec tela furoris/ Horrescit vitrum, dum scandala dira retorqvet”, meaning roughly “He does not ask for praise, nor the weapons of fury/ The glass shakes, while mirroring terrible scandals”.<sup>217</sup> This directly refers to the mirror revealing outrages, while God himself remains elevated over earthly scandals: he does not require praise, nor does he exert angry revenge over his creatures. A small summary of Dippel’s theology, according to which God is love, could never be angry, and is not interested in devotion. God does not punish these scandals; he merely offers the opportunity of understanding whether you are part of them or not – for before God, good and evil cannot hide themselves, as an accompanying poem in the booklet explains.

On the left-hand side, then: “Alles was aus Gott gebohren ist überwindet die Welt und unser Glaube ist der Sieg, der die Welt überwunden hat”. *All which is born by God overcomes the world, and our faith is that very victory over the world.* In Dippel’s radical pietism, personal and pious faith is what would turn believers away from earthly pleasures and concerns in order to aim instead for the highest good.

Finally, to the right: a bible quote: “Matth XV.13 Alle pflantzen die mein himmlischer vater nicht pflantzet, die werden ausgerrüet” referring to the Day of Judgment: all plants not planted by the heavenly father will be rooted out – including, in the picture, all worldly powers, clerical or secular.

The book itself, *Ein Hirt und eine Heerde*, has the subtitle of “... or, infallible method to bring all sects and religion to the one true church and religion”.<sup>218</sup> So, Dippel would present an infallible way of ecumenically uniting all faiths into one true religion. This is possible only by the state giving up the idea of forcing the beliefs of subjects – an idea so prevalent in the protestant state churches Dippel was struggling against. Unity could never be reached by dictating dogma or liturgy. On the contrary, princes should refrain completely from commanding religious principles, and they should cease to prefer some of their faithful subjects over others. In brief, they should introduce freedom of faith and freedom of the press. They should be shepherds for all of their flock. Among Jews, pagans, Turks, and Christians you may find the correct, earnest rejection of earthly concerns and the turn towards the eternal. It is not at all in dogma or theology that princes should lead their subjects, but in their way of life. The book is an early, radical

<sup>217</sup> Olden-Jørgensen, in his 2023 review, makes some corrections of my transcriptions of the copper, for which I thank him. When he claims the first sentence means that the mirror does not ask for praise nor use weapons, however, these would be strange activities to ascribe to a mirror. I take it to refer to God, represented in the picture by the heavenly eye surveilling the scene over his mirror.

<sup>218</sup> “... oder Unfehlbare Methode, alle Secten und Religionen zur einigen wahren Kirch und Religion zu bringen”.



call for full freedom of belief and expression, placing Dippel in the company of contemporaneous characters like Bayle and the British Deists and, on this point, a descendant of Spinozist liberty.

## The Innocent Joys of Jail

Further, Reventlow had pointed out a small four-page pamphlet from the year after, written while Dippel was jailed in Berlin in 1707, titled *Berlinische Arrest-Gedanken* – Berlin Prison Thoughts. It has its background in the infight between Dippel and the Superintendent J.F. Mayer of Greifswald in Swedish Pomerania. On his long-lasting military campaign in the East of Europe, the Swedish King Karl XII actually stood with his army in Saxony not far to the south of Berlin, and the warrior King received Mayer in his camp outside of Leipzig. The King supported Mayer's anti-pietist campaign through many years and in 1706, the bishop published a report of his efforts in *Eines schwedischen Theologi kurzer Bericht von Pietisten* – a small report by a Swedish Theologian on pietists. Here, Mayer defended the harsh Swedish policies against pietists whom he shamed as "impostors and murderers of souls" and encouraged his congregations to fight them. In particular, he attacked the Hal-lensian pietists, Christian Thomasius, as well as Dippel – and concluded the booklet with translations of King Karl's anti-pietist decrees and letters into German. That piece gave rise to controversy and was attacked by both Francke in Halle, the radical pietist Petersen couple, and by Dippel. Francke and Dippel simultaneously seized the occasion to ambush each other in each their rebuke of Mayer.

Mayer had already earlier been attacking writings by Dippel and now Dippel went on the counterattack in his *Christiani Democriti unpartheyische Gedanken über eines sogenannten Schwed. Theologi kurzen Bericht von Pietisten, etc. Nebst einer kurzen Digression von der Brutalität und Illegalität des Religions-Zwangs* the same year – that is, "Christianus Democritus' Impartial Thoughts about a so-called Swedish Theologian's short Report on Pietists, etc., with a brief Digression on the Brutality and Illegality of Forcing Religion". Here, he attacked the orthodox for fighting for their own belly only and for making heretics out of innocent people. This offense made the local Swedish representative in Berlin furious, and he reported it to King Karl XII who took his time between battles to approach the Prussian King Friedrich with a demand that he subject Dippel to the most severe punishment. So, Dippel was jailed in the Hausvogtei, an old tower close to the Berlin Castle, in February 1707, and his pamphlet against Mayer was confiscated, subjected to theological scrutiny, and burned in public, just like his bookprinter was fined with 500 Thaler. Dippel's steady supporter in government, Count Wittgenstein, quickly offered a caution of 2,000 Thaler to set him free. By the arrest,

however, Dippel's private papers had been seized, and among them was a letter in Latin, never sent, from 1705 and addressed to exactly Karl XII. Here, Dippel offered his services as an alchemist to the Swedish King, accompanied by very critical pronouncements about the court in Berlin as his background for preferring Swedish employment. This letter now became known, which was not fortunate in a situation when the Swedes hoped to convince the Prussians to enter the war on their side.<sup>219</sup> This prompted the Swedish representative to tutor the Prussian King in the dangers for state and church inherent in Dippel's teachings, and Friedrich reacted again, issuing a new arrest order. In the meantime, however, Dippel had fled the city. Berlin city commandants were chasing him, and in all public squares of Berlin it was announced, accompanied by drummers, that anyone giving support to the refugee would be liable to the same punishment as him. During his eight days in prison, however, Dippel wrote a small satirical verse, which would also function as a farewell to Berlin. His intensely alchemist period there, discovering Berlin Blue, inventing Dippel Oil, thus came to an abrupt end as he escaped through Swedish-occupied Saxony in the direction of his home turf in Hesse.

The small four-page prison pamphlet was published later in 1707. It does not count among Dippel's major efforts, but Reventlow may have been alarmed by its title that Dippel, now again under arrest in Altona, might continue attacking his arresters in public. Ten ten-line verses, in a strong bisyllabic meter with end-rhyme, the song begins by ironically invoking foolishness itself and its idols to spare no effort in order to chase away a true believer, small and sick as he is – Dippel himself. Next, it calls upon atheists, those wanting most of all to live like animals, to consider whether their fraud does not help to chain innocent believers – like himself. Dippel seems to have experienced the atheist allegation being used against himself but now returning the charge with the hope that atheists will be convinced by the “hot glow of the cross”, as he says. Finally, he invokes authorities, ruling without law and justice, suppressing the righteous and giving in to rude utilitarianism: “For State reason asks not for right/ It has but one rule only, slight:/ **Allowed is what is useful**” – the last line in larger typescript.<sup>220</sup> Authorities, of course, would be the complex of absolutist princes with their orthodox state churches. Now, after ironically addressing these three evil forces, foolishness, atheists, and lawless authorities, he turns to warning them: There is an avenger coming, and he will bring the three of them and their sins to justice in a dark night of misfortune. And even already before that, in their crazy rage, their

<sup>219</sup> These details about Dippel's escape from Berlin have been charted by Kraft (2019) who has the most thorough account of this phase of Dippel's life (83–90).

<sup>220</sup> “Dann Staats-Vernunft fragt nicht was Recht/ Sie braucht nur eine Regel schlecht:/ Es ist Erlaubt was nützet.”



intentions will fail like the blind sinners of Sodoma. You better leave in peace your critics, you better listen to this song – for this avenger may want to govern your state in a quite different way. So, Dippel is envisioning a political revolution of the state. If a free spirit is not guided by any god he will be free like the three of you to ridicule, to wallow in gluttony and in ladies' dresses – but even such things are also in the hands of God. Dippel is really, in this poem, *identifying* the three powers ironically invoked: the foolish atheists are really those in power, indolently languishing in luxury. But you three should know that he whom you suppress, feels a much greater joy suffering, chained in the dungeon, than he would feel with a thousand years of your pleasures. For you have no access to the flood of mercy and the kiss of Sophie – that is, wisdom. The final verse turns into a veritable string of threats: all your strivings are in vain and even your whores cannot conquer innocence. The time has already been decided when this Babylonian strife will reach its turning point – then it will be you who are subjected to taunt and ridicule: actually, you're already half destroyed.

No names are given in this attack, but it is evident it would read as a rebuke to King Friedrich who had given in to the Swedish demands to arrest Dippel. His incarceration is interpreted in the pietist scheme of the Day of Judgment to be imminent, arriving anytime soon. Ironically, this breathless expectation is also what seems to have granted this song a longer life as a sort of radical pietist psalm. We find it, e.g., in the fifth volume of a large pietist songbook in 1744.<sup>221</sup> Those radical pietists must have been singing with all their hearts. Thirteen years later, however, no pietist hymns would be heard at the Altona ceremony where Dippel's writings vanished in the fire.

## You Cannot Order the Moon to Shine

The last two of the writings submitted by Reventlow to political and theological scrutiny in Copenhagen, however, were pretty recent Altona products. Thus, they also open a window into other aspects of Dippel's preoccupations during the period of the case. The first is the small pamphlet prompted by the local event mentioned above: Dean Fleischer's forced infant baptism of sectarian babies in the

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<sup>221</sup> *Geistlicher Würtz-, Kräuter- und Blumen-Garten oder Universal-Gesangbuch Des Geistlichen Würtz-, Kräuter- und Blumen-Gartens oder Universal -Gesangbuchs erster Theil: bestehend in e. Ausw. von 1000 sowohl alten als neuen geistl. Liebl. Liedern*, Homburg 1744: Helweg. Dippel's most famous hymn, however, remains the penitential psalm, "O Jesu, sieh darein und hilf mir Armen siegen" – O Jesus, look inside and help poor me to victory –, which would appear in German hymnals far into the nineteenth century.

central Trinity Church of Altona in August 1718 – giving a bit less rosy impression of the famed religious toleration of Altona. The enormous title page of the seven-page pamphlet gives a compact summary of its mission:

Congratulatory Call To the Worthy and Devout Court Servants of the City of Altona/ After They Recently/ in the Elapsed Excessively Warm Dog-Days of this 1718th year/ by the Present Holy Dean/ and Former Vice-Praesident of Above-Mentioned City/ Mr. Land-Reuther/ have been Ordinarily Installed to Assist in the Holy Sacraments, and have Helped to Perform the First Baptismal Act, August 16, on two Children who had been Forcibly Taken from their Parents. In Full Hope/ Also Soon To Be Admitted among the Sacrament Servants/ Distributed and Sung by the Executioner of the City Mentioned [anonymous, no printer indicated]

Actually, this summary resumes the first pages of the seven-page pamphlet, ironically presenting the executioner's singing celebration of the City Court servants for participating in abducting babies for forced baptism. The overall composition of the pamphlet really combines three genres. After this satirical intro song, another one and a half pages follow with serious theological and clerical arguments against forced baptism, in small print rich with references; and finally, another two pages conclude the pamphlet with a "Species Facti", a more journalistic reportage of how events actually unfolded.

The notion of a "Glückwünschender Zuruff" was a standard sub-genre of congratulations at the time, and in the executioner's song, in Alexandrine meter, Dippel celebrates the glorious effort of the Court servants in the event. It takes place in self-revelatory irony, as the rude introduction shows:

Here I come, your friend, to honor you exalted/  
And show my goodly happiness to those/  
Who grows their state and rank plus perquisites/  
And squeeze the altar for their bribe themselves.<sup>222</sup>

The singing executioner honors, with great joy, the Court Servants for elevating their city, their rank – as well as their bribes, extorting their salary from the Church. Thus, this pamphlet would have been playing directly into Dippel's recent feud with the City Council about bribes the same summer. The pamphlet claims the Court servants were commanded to participate in the baptisms from the Vice President's office, and as the City Council functioned as first instance court, this would also be a strike back at the Council. The insult was aggravated by the fact

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222 "Hie komm ich fast entzuckt/ ihr Freunde euch zu ehren/  
und meine grosse Freud denen zu legen dar/  
Die ihren Staat und Grad, samt Sporteln jetzt vermehren/  
Und selbst den Stecken-Lohn erpressen vom Altar."

that the hymn celebrating the servants is sung by none other than the executioner who was then probably the person with the lowest status in a town. He was “dishonest” not in the sense of untruthful, but without honor. His work was seen as lowly, dirty, sinful, and despicable, if necessary, and the hangman himself a person few would like to be associated with. Dishonesty was infectious.<sup>223</sup> But now – this is the satirical trick of the song – the executioner offers to the Dean his excellent services for extending forced belief even further. It is a godly office indeed! he exclaims. When you grab the kids, it could be no sin, for you force the unknowing to the salvation of their souls. I hope I shall soon join your efforts, the hangman sings, but you must extend it also to the old and dying who are in lack of baptism and supper, thereby losing their God. They too must be driven to the sheep-stall. But here, you will be in need of my help, for you cannot bind the hand and feet of heretics or break up their maw. That is the office of nobody but me and my assistant, so that they can be forced to ingest the Holy Supper for the sake of their poisoned souls. Only one thing offends the executioner: that the number forced to believe is much too small. Also, the *Schwärmer* – that is, enthusiasts, mystics – confidently await our bludgeon. So, I must become a preacher!

Dippel effectively pours scorn on the highest clerical authority of Altona, Dean Fleischer, comparing his recent efforts to the lowliest of the low, the executioner. To those who would be in need of further theological underpinnings, the executioner concludes with a Luther reference, and the whole pamphlet began with Luther quoting Matth. 10/11, claiming that the soul is beyond the control of human hands and stands under God’s reign alone. For is he not crazy who would order the Moon to shine when he wanted? That is: humans can do nothing to achieve salvation, for themselves or for others. This is doubly ironic: the Dean is the very head of the Lutheran church of Altona, Dippel is known as a leading international *Schwärmer* and detractor of Lutheranism – and now he employs Luther against the Lutherans. Long scholarly quotes from Luther serve to emphasize three theological teachings: That no one in the New Testament is bound to sacraments by God. That even the church or the priesthood could not force anyone to sacraments. And that it is but unreasonably and gross idolatry to believe that sacraments in and of themselves would contribute to salvation or make people better. So, the anti-Lutheran Dippel plays out Luther himself in the face of Lutheran orthodoxy.

From satire over theology to journalism: the “Species Facti” finally resumes what had really taken place, adding a further twist to the tale. Dean Fleischer had appeared at the home of the glassmaker Gerhard Grevenburg asking why he would not let his children be baptized. The Dean threw around foolish fantasies and in-

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223 Cf. Krogh (1994) and Harrington (2013).

sults and commanded the Court servants recruited from the Vice President's office, two midwives, plus the gravedigger into Grevenburg's home in order to grab his kids by force. The eldest was a toddler of two years now, but the younger infant was only three days old and lay being breastfed by Grevenburg's wife. The intruders tried to convince her that her husband had ordered them to seize the kids – unsuccessfully. So, the children were forcibly abducted, taken up to the church and baptized, the gravedigger serving as their godfather. In the meantime, their father was kept back in the Dean's house being scolded by the Dean's sister. The eldest child suffered a horrible shock by the strange event, Dippel claims, and may – reason at that age still being weak – come to fear such ceremonies in the future, just like the mother was scared about the well-being of her children but finding no God protecting her. Two days later, on 18 August, the father was called to appear before the Consistorium – the clerical court – and when he, in the presence of the Vice President, took out his own copy of the New Testament it was quickly confiscated by the Dean – as if it would be better for him to convert without possessing the Writ, as Dippel says. Or did the Dean seize the book as his salary for baptism? The glassmaker was ordered to leave the city within four weeks if he did not return to church to receive instruction by the young pastors there. As Grevenburg was on his way home, the gravedigger came up to him and demanded a salary for serving as a godfather. What further happens, only time will tell, Dippel concludes.

Dippel's recruitment of three very different genres combines into an effective pamphlet, heaping scorn on the heads of the Court servants, the clergy, and the other participants in this strange event, adding theological argument and finally provided a factsheet. Little wonder that the Dean felt offended, nor that the pamphlet would be burned at the stake – by the real-life executioner. There are no documents among the Dippel case files pertaining to this small event, only scattered references like in Reventlow's anti-blasphemy letter in May.

The event took place by late summer 1718 while Reventlow was not in Altona, but he seems to have adopted a neutral stance in the case. Other pamphlets had appeared attacking how the newly hired vigilant Dean went against Altona privileges and liberties, and Reventlow himself sent a missive to the King in which he advised him to "... point out the limits of his office so that he will not again do anything against the city's privileges, but in this and similar cases which have to do with *jura Majestatis* and *forum Civile* [sovereign rights and civil legislation, as opposed to clerical law], in my presence as well as absence, must have my accept before he acts".<sup>224</sup> So, the Dean received a reprimand from his secular superiors.

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<sup>224</sup> Jakubowski-Tiessen (1983, 134ff). The King followed Reventlow's advice and, supported by the Theological Faculty in Copenhagen, on 8 October he gave Reventlow the authority to summon

Simultaneously, Dippel's pamphlet was publicly burned. But still it may not be improbable that this pamphlet, appearing around September 1718, also played into the germinating estrangement between Reventlow and Dippel. After all, the Court servants ridiculed in the pamphlet came from the Vice President's office, that is, directly under the command of Reventlow himself. Now, Dippel's mocking had arrived at an office near him. Was this the point where Reventlow began to hedge his bets, considering that the City Council might be, after all, better partners in his reconstruction of city administration than his unpredictable alchemist?

## A Political Theology of Altona

The final document attacked by Reventlow for blasphemy seems to have appeared around Easter in the tumultuous spring of 1719 when Reventlow and the City Council were busy waging their anti-corruption campaign and Bandau launched the two *Portugalöser*. So, it might offer a window into Dippel's considerations at the time when he would have written it, presumably during February–March 1719 (III.11). It is a considerably longer text, a 35-pages theological treatise in small typescript, appearing as the introduction to a reprint of another *Schwärmer*, the mid-seventeenth-century Berlin minister and official Lorenz Grammendorff's *Apologia* of around 60 learned pages, ripe with Bible quotes, all of it under the title *Hell-Polirte Seckten-Spiegel* – Blank-Polished Sect-Mirror. In Reventlow's May letters, this is really the Dippel text that makes him most livid, speaking about utterly offensive expressions and blasphemies presented in a godless way, pretending it is an absurdity to rely upon the efforts of Christ, calling the Holy Writ the so-called Bible – Reventlow had even cared to underline the worst passages to guide critics. It was also the booklet that prompted a parodic revenge in the shape of the *Gecken-Spiegel* which Reventlow also submitted to the Council in Copenhagen.

Dippel's text is indeed a small theological treatise in and of itself rather than an intro to Grammendorff, and it would later be reprinted as such.<sup>225</sup> He speaks a bit – “after a long silence” – like a *guru* that has, for some time, been starving his

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the Dean and instruct him to avoid repeating his action. The King also ordered him to let the executioner burn several pamphlets against the Dean, among them Dippel's. Fleischer filed a protest to the King and asked for more precise information about the liberties granted for Altonians, but existing regulations remained unaltered.

<sup>225</sup> In the *Vera demonstratio evangelica* (1729), the text was renamed and in a certain sense elevated under the ambitious title of *Christ. Democriti Grundriß zu einem Systemate Theologico* – Christianus Democritus' Foundations of a Theological System. In the 1747 version of Dippel's col-

fans. Indeed, it was quite a while ago now that he had established his theological credentials, summing up his efforts in the field in the 1,200-page big-hit volume *Eröffneter Wegen zum Frieden mit Gott und alle Creaturen* coming out in 1709 collecting all of his publications from the previous decade, a volume also testifying to a considerable readership.<sup>226</sup> Since then, he had stayed in the Netherlands until 1714, becoming a medical doctor and publishing his dissertation in Leiden in 1711. Now, finally he is back in his home playing field. It presents a sort of easy-read version of Dippelian theology but also featuring certain novelties. That theology, however, was never just a pietist specializing on the most sacred issues, rather, Dippel's theology is the entrance gate also to his general metaphysical understanding of the world, including the political issue of how it ought to be organized and the medical issue of how its inhabitants should be nudged in the healthiest direction to inhabit that world. From the point of view of our days when theology, politics, law, and medicine appear as different and distinct academic subjects pertaining to independent social institutions, it requires some effort to understand the overall interdisciplinary view of world and humanity that Dippel is presenting.

Just like in the Berlin song, he will attack “atheist defamers” as well as “the confused Babel of childish obsessions”, that is, disbelievers and superstitious believers alike. He will show to them the firm ground which he has himself found only after much roaming around. The basic idea is that true believers become a part of the inexhaustible GOD himself by driving out all darkness from themselves, a process which is at one and the same time an issue of theology, of politics, and of medicine.

In order to understand this, some misconceptions must be cleared away, e.g., about holy writings. They are testimonies about God, indeed, but they are authored by human beings. That was the idea that had so enraged Reventlow, and it was a heretical viewpoint at a time in which the Bible, to most people, was still directly seen as God's revealed word. Holy writings have been written in order to teach others about experiences of God, not by means of speculative truths or philosophical notions but by showing the acquaintance of earlier initiates with “den Sachen selbst”, the things themselves. But to take them as canonical books and the only gateway to GOD is an error because GOD has never ceased and never will cease to live in the hearts of humans. This, not the book, constitutes the primary channel between the deity and his creatures. This fact has only become alien to

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lected works, it was furthermore equipped with a detailed content overview to establish its systematic character (Eröff II, 573–97).

<sup>226</sup> The later three-volume version of the book in 1747 was even considered a project which would save the book printer Haug from pending bankruptcy. The Pietism scholar Hans Schneider speaks about Dippel as one of the top bestsellers of the eighteenth century (cf. also Hannak 2008).

us because of the Fall, but GOD still remains the same old GOD, so we can be just as virtuous chalices of him today as were the very first believers. So, Dippel goes directly against protestantist scripturalism.

This leads Dippel to reinterpret GOD's four elementary qualities: he is *infinite* because all creatures emerge from him; he is *omniscient* because he knows his own infinite essence, and none of his creatures can be concealed to him, he is *omnipotent* because he is the highest good which is also why he could never use force or violence to communicate his intentions. The fourth of GOD's perfections is the most important to Dippel: *love*. From eternity to eternity, that is really what GOD is, so he could never become mad, vengeful, righteous, or insistent if you do not follow his will. The Holy Writ itself unfortunately has been accommodated and changed by people who falsely believe that God gives laws for his own sake, requiring obedience, that he has created humans in order for himself to be honored or feared by them as if he were some sort of great monarch. This is also why people may be deceived to obey all sorts of middlemen using masks who treat people as cows or children to be led: the clergy. Such is the blindness of the teachers of sects – among which Dippel counts the established churches of his time. Thus, it is no wonder if clever people now suck the principles of atheism directly out of such misunderstood religion itself. So, Dippel really sees atheism and Protestantism as variants of the same thing – underpinned by the belief in determinism and the lack of human free will in both of them.

All living creatures have senses and are dependent upon things outside of themselves – if not, what God created would just have been further independent Gods. Life is thus always, by its very nature, hungry and guided by desire, but our fundamental error is to believe that this desire could be satisfied in the material world only. Life and spirit are one and the same thing which is indestructible; it is rather matter which is temporary, fragile, and perishable. But people must lift their gaze from this world: “... for the enjoyment of all the pleasures of this world/ the lust of the eyes/ the lust of the flesh/ greed and arrogance/ never satisfy the hunger/ it is always *plus ultra*” – that is, a demand for more.<sup>227</sup> The desire for this world can never be satisfied, and the more you get the more you want. In such passages, attacking the insatiable lust and pleasures of this world, its stinginess and arrogance, Dippel sounds as if speaking directly to the wealthy Reventlows. The slash signs are Dippel's own standard punctuation, instead of commas and periods, creating a rant-like text flow without clear beginnings and ends, a style that he began developing already in his early writings. GOD has created us

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227 “... denn der Genuß aller Lüsten dieser Welt/ der Augen-Lust/ Fleisches-Wollust/ Geitzes und Hochmuths/ stellen seinen Hunger nimmer in Zufriedenheit/ es heisset immer *plus ultra*”.



insatiable, indeed, but we should learn to direct this desire to God himself and the eternal things.

And why is it that we do not know this? This is really because God has decided to pull a trick on us: he has temporarily drawn himself away from us during some time in order to test us, in order to reveal our own lack to us only to lead us so much firmer back to eternity. Humans are individuals with each their individual desire who must be so addressed, and this is why the Spinozist solution does not work: "... for if it was not so/ but rather just ways or modifications and theatrical imaginations of one single being/ and there was only one single active principle in nature", then creatures would be superficial shadows without real existence.<sup>228</sup> But if you are not willing to ascribe to creation its own works and properties like its own special well-being and pain, blessed or unblessed, then there would be no drive nor freedom in creatures. If God had constructed the active principle in creation in the way which the foolish Spinoza or the stupid-clever Malebranche and the other "pre-determinants" are busy trying to prove, then he would also have spread the receptive principle of all passions and unpleasant feelings out in all of nature: creation would become a monster, composed from all sorts of joy and pain, "immer selig, immer unselig" – in one word, a GOd whom Dippel would be completely against. Indirectly, Dippel is here addressing the burning issue of Early Enlightenment, the Theodicee: how could an omniscient and benevolent God have created a world ripe with evil? Dippel's solution is twofold: humans possess free will, so they are at liberty to introduce evils of all sorts in God's creation, to the extent they strive to satisfy their needs in the material world only. Furthermore, God himself has – during the test period mentioned – partly pulled out of his own creation as a sort of shock therapy to nudge humans to choose differently. This is also why Dippel is particularly furious with determinism rejecting freedom of the will, in Luther, in Spinoza, in Malebranche, because liberty is essential to the spirit, and humans need liberty so as to be able to make a choice against sin. To an orthodox protestant onlooker, Dippel's position here would be committing the terrible heresy of "semi-Pelagianism", the idea that individuals themselves may voluntarily contribute to their own salvation, if not by deeds then by choosing their faith and work on their own spiritual transformation.

But sin is not merely a privative and negative effect of things not achieved; it has a decidedly *positive* existence which is the active seeking of joy in deceptive and unreachable things – so there would be sins even if there were no laws

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228 "... denn wenn dieses nicht so wäre/ so wäre es viel vernünftiger/ mit Spinoza zu sagen/ daß die Geschöpfe kein Wesen/ sondern nur Weisen oder modificationes und theatralische Vorstellungen eines einigen Wesens wären/ und nur ein inziges Principium activum in der Natur sey".

against them.<sup>229</sup> Good laws, by contrast, are there for the sake of medication, they work as a sort of “*consilium medicum*”, medical advice. All the major evils in the world, hunger, illness, war, poverty, fires, floods, storms, even death, are not re-venge inflicted by an angry God, rather they are benefactions instigated by God’s love in order to lead us back onto the right path, away from the world and on to something higher – tough love, as they say.

So, to Dippel, the proper punishment for sin is not at all something intended by God; on the contrary, it is already inherent in sin itself. Punishment is really nothing else but the very lack of satisfaction of the elementary drive of the life spirit, not an evil inflicted by any devil or hell. It is our basic lack which makes us fight one another like dogs, making societies into nests of miseries and punishment. This is all our own fault and we could do better.

So, God is no sovereign demanding obeisance. He brings his laws to our understanding in four ways: (1) immediately, by radiation from GOD himself to our understanding and inner sense – everybody receives this internal message, as no one can hide from GOD; (2) mediately, through the service of holy and good spirits, communicating them through ideas of understanding or in stories, figures, and pictures which humans may pick up when awake or asleep; (3) even closer, it may happen through such persons themselves obeying faith, fighting the world and its desires through “*Wercke und Worte*”, deeds and words; and (4) finally, it may take place through writings and dead examples left behind by those people who were once themselves parts of the highest good. The four message types are listed in order of decreasing efficiency, so the latter is the least effective way, functioning only if supported by the first one.

Desire for earthly things must be given up and renounced, but the problem remains that “... the road to life is so difficult/ and the decision to seek the eternal/ so weak/ even if the spirit has sufficient conviction ...”<sup>230</sup> It is not at all easy, and fallen humans are also in our time called to order and happiness through carnal and crude laws or rules to live by, but such legislation is unable to discover and attack depravity in its very root but may only, secondarily, contain it in its fruits and its cruder outbreaks. Then, in order to attack the root cause, GOD assumed a wholly alien shape masking and transforming himself into an earthly Regent and Sovereign, appearing as a state or a republic as the highest good for a people. Dippel is not quite clear whether this is a part of God’s ploy to leave the world for a while in order to wake up believers, or whether it is a power technique of Princes

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<sup>229</sup> Here, Dippel implicitly argues against Paul’s legalist conception: “Sin Is not Imputed Where There Is No Law”, Romans 5:13.

<sup>230</sup> “... der Weg zum Leben so schwer/ und die Resolution, das Ewige zu suchen/ so schwach/ obschon der Geist Überzeugung genug hat”.

to pretend to be deities. Probably both. In any case, in the present situation Princes rule the people only

... because they were among all other peoples the most stubborn/ most timid and most ruthless/ and thus most in need of the conduit of such a perfect sovereign; just as even to this day they may rightly be called of all the peoples in the world/ although they have been beaten and bred for so long/ the most inexperienced/ the most sordid and vicious people/ among whom the few good ones distinguish themselves.<sup>231</sup>

Among these stupid people, the ruler of our time lives in darkness and governs only through primitive animal affects, promoting his laws with thunder and lightning, with revenge and punishments until the third and fourth generations. Dippel does not make explicit who are these stupidest people of all, but the implied reference is obviously contemporary Europeans succumbing to and even celebrating princely rule. This is Western self-criticism. Here, Dippel goes into a somber analysis of current court life and the exercise of princely powers with which he had, after all, some firsthand experience. In such societies, GOD no longer appears as the highest good but merely as a worldly regent. Instead of finding GOD people would find, in the space between themselves and the prince, a court which only now and then displays the prince in the dark and foggy corners of a residence palace, surrounded by a swarm of courtiers, priests, and Levites who must be paid by the people to function as house servants of the sovereign. Among them a few top figures, ministers, and Privy Councilors sometimes converse with the earthly, alien deity and communicate his will to the people, produced by prophets and priests of the temple adorning it all with mystical light and right.<sup>232</sup> Such a regent will also wage war against other people to extend his territory and ruin them with sword and fire. Dippel's times are painted black in this picture of contemporary European politics.

Now, which images would a people governed in this way form about their GOD? Dippel finds that such fallacious identification of God with a worldly ruler was already prompted by erroneous biblical imagery. People who read the Bible literally and form their conceptions from there err violently and are, in fact, even more stupid than people back then when they would have been more able to look through the pictures.<sup>233</sup> Here, Dippel – like others among the more or less radical

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231 "... weil es vor allen andern Völkern das hartnäckigste/ tummeste und boßhaftigste/ und also der Conduite eines so vollkommenen Souverainen am allermeisten benöthiget war: gleichwie es noch auf den heutigen Tag vor allen Völkern in der Welt/ ohngeachtet sie so lange geschlagen und gezüchtigt sind/ das allerungeschickteste/ sordideste und lasterhafteste Volck mit Recht kan genennet werden/ die wenige Gute under ihnen ausgesondert", P. 26 [unpag.]

232 P. 25–27 [unpag.]

233 P. 27–28 [unpag.]

pietists – really draws acutely political implications from his theology. All of the reigning princely power structure of Europe is attacked. The contemporary investment of the more or less absolutist princes with divine qualities as power grants is analyzed by Dippel as the fundamental error of the time. It has contributed to the actual confusion that not only is God somehow seen as an earthly prince, making laws for his own sake and pressing them upon his subjects with anger and violence – but, mirror-wise, real-life princes acting the same way become invested with divine qualities, effectively acting as if God’s representatives in this world.

Dippel’s theology and world view evinces a remarkable constancy over the years. But here, an important development is palpable as compared to the *Fatum Fatuum* of 1708 where we saw him rejecting the Spinozist idea that religion is but a fraudulent political instrument of the powerful while Dippel rather celebrated Princes and their necessary legislation with a Hobbesian argument. Now, Dippel actually takes over the idea of organized religion as deceit – not as a general theory valid for all times, but valid for Europe in its present state where God has withdrawn and the princes of the continent rule as impostors through fraudulent religion.

It is this whole construction of political theology, in its many different versions over the European map of his time, which Dippel aims to reconstruct with his doctrine of GOD’s love and the denial of his anger. Dippel claims that a new, strict separation between GOD and the princes is necessary. Simultaneously, however, Dippel is not marshaling a strict two-world dualist metaphysical system locating the highest good in the beyond only; rather, he thinks this highest good may already be realized in this world, not through regents or sacraments but through pious believers and their ongoing spreading of self-denial in smaller ideal networks and grouplets able to recreate the earthly world. This reads as a call for sedition. It approaches a sort of hippie-like small-group anarchism for the awakened, and radical pietist groups of this stripe were indeed already in the process of establishing themselves in isolated safe havens like the Berleburg of Count Wittgenstein, with all the enthusiasm, passions, and intellectual fertility of such communities, but also with all of the emerging rivalry, schisms, informal power struggles, and self-established pocket dictators of sectarian social structures. Dippel himself would end up joining such communities in Berleburg 10 years later after his long Scandinavian detour.

Dippel concludes his treatise with sketches of his own Christology and interpretation of the Day of Judgment. Both differ considerably from orthodox Lutheranism. Christ is a mediator between GOD and human beings, a doctor curing us with true beatitude, he is GOD’s wisdom dressed up as a human person. We shall be saved, not through good works, however, but through indispensable medicines

delivered to us by Christ. Dippel does not speak metaphorically here; he thinks that medicine and theology are truly intimately connected. So, Christ is a doctor for the soul – not at all a pretext for never-ending disputations over his nature, debates that may gradually change him into a devil by claiming his standards are so high that nobody could ever obey them, or developing eldritch theories such as the idea that he has been suffering God's wrath in our place. So, he is really a medical assistant for our spiritual change in this life, a sort of role model on the path of self-denial.

In the next life, by contrast, we will not change at all. We shall remain exactly the same persons as we have already developed and settled to become in this life, suffering from the very same deficiencies and sins, but then finally, by Judgment Day, the godless will be locked up with those whom they have been tormenting in this world. It is these very victims who now appear as their devils, making their tormentors discover the deep reason of their misery and finally force them to turn to eternal blessedness. Justice at Judgment Day will not be an affair between God and his creatures, but an internal affair between humans – Christ will be there and serve as judge but only in his capacity as a human being. Then, finally, the pack of godless will become ever more ashamed and convinced of their own misery:

... and the ungodly are to be reprimanded for their neglected duty towards him and his members, but the good are to be rewarded for their obedience which is of no use to themselves, in the exercise of love towards him and his members. And all of this to the end that the swarm of the wicked may become all the more ashamed and convinced of their misery and through the painful feeling in the fiery lake will bow all the sooner to GOD and His love, until finally all evil is dismissed by judgment and justice, death itself is swallowed up in victory, and GOD, as the supreme good, will be all in all.<sup>234</sup>

So, in the end, Dippel's Last Judgment is a sort of final, complicated spiritual purge – and all will be saved. *Restitutio omnium*. Here, Dippel would join ranks with more rosy characters among Enlightenment philosophical anthropologists of the Rousseauist rather than the Voltairean stripe: all humans really prove to be noble deep down, when all is said and done. This is a radical departure from the large protestant denominations, according to which only a tiny percentage of humans would be saved, a tenth or maybe a thousandth – this fraction has already

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234 "... und den Gottlosen ihre unterlassene Pflicht gegen ihn und seine Glieder verweisen, den Guten aber ihren, ohnedem ihnen selbst nützlichen, Gehorsam, in Ausübung der Liebe gegen ihn und seine Glieder noch à part belohnen. Und dieses allein zu dem Ende, daß der Schwarm der Gottlosen desto mehr möge beschämet und ihres Elendes convinciret werden, und sich durch das schmerzhaftere Gefühl in dem feurigen Pfuhl desto eher unter Gott und seine Liebe beugen, bis endlich alles Böse durch Gericht und Gerechtigkeit abgethan, der Tod selbst in dem Sieg verschlungen, und Gott, als das höchste Gut, alles, und dieses in allen sey" (p. 36 [unpag.]).

been beforehand determined while the large, lost majority can do nothing at all to reach salvation. Here, Dippel offers a more optimistic view.

What else will happen at Judgment Day with the resurrection of the flesh, the renovation of the world by fire, and so on, Dippel is in no position to say; only time will show, not any of our preconceived ideas, as he says. He does know, however, that Judgment Day will also cover other similar globes in the universe, a doctrine to which he will return later to prove mathematically – so he promises. Dippel generally insisted that there is life and spiritual beings of many different sorts both on the suns and planets of the universe and they also fall under the jurisdiction of Judgment Day.

So, in one grandiose movement, Dippel introduces love as God's essence, the human goal in the beyond, Christ the medical doctor and Judgment Day as a purely human court – all of it oriented towards contemporary political implications. But in the middle of this crash course on Dippelian political theology, Dippel authored a whole passage which may have made Reventlow take note. Dippel intends to give an example of the tendency that human desire makes humans behave as devils to one another when they fight like mad dogs over a bone, when they become envious and furious against one another, behave like animals to each other, making human societies but nests of misery and punishment. For this tendency of one becoming a devil to the other is only increasing. Then the example follows:

A miser/ who among all vicious monsters is the very most deplorable and cruel/ who as a person of authority/ has had the possibility to satisfy his evil desire/ and to rob many/ through beating and suppression of his underlings/ awakes through these acts wrath and revenge in all those/ whom he so offends/ If now such a raptor dies in this miserable condition of spirit/ then his desire and pleasure with his riches remains after death/ then he will always strive to keep it/ to collect and scrape together more/ and will therefore/ among the consorts of the damned look up/ grocers and Jews/ or clients/ from whom he can make some profit/ then he will discover such a madness in those/ whom he has offended/ defrauded/ robbed and oppressed/ and who in their accumulated anger and thirst for revenge against him also made themselves unfortunate/ and built their own hell/ then they will attack this great stingy devil, whom they feared in the world, quite ungraciously/ because he is now their equal/ and has no more executioner servants to his help; every one of them will demand what is his with fury and violence/ the poor servants will demand their withheld wages and the deprived food and drink/ tailor/ shoemaker/ mason/ smith/ carpenter/ merchant/ Jew/ Christian/ and all/ those whom such a type has gagged and robbed by extorted agreements or refusal of the agreed sum/ will conspire together against him/ and inflict on him all sensible insult and distress.<sup>235</sup>

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235 "Zum Eksempel: ein Geitziger/ welcher unter allen lasterhaftesten Monstris das allerabscheulichste und grausamste ist/ der hier dabey Gelegenheit gehabt/ als eine Obrichkeitliche Person/ durch Concussionen und Unterdrückung der Untergebenen seine böse Begierde zu pous-

Here, you find the worst version of the Altona suppression and bribery network painted in detail, analyzed from the top down, with all the involved middlemen caught in the net. The poor servant Vincelius and the Jew merchant Caseres are elevated into general characters here. The example begins with the very pejorative oftentimes aimed at the Countess: “Geitzige”, greedy, stingy, a miser. It would not be strange if Reventlow would here find a portrait of himself and his wife as wealthy misers and suppressors. It might not only be because of Dippel’s radical dissenter theology that Reventlow reacted so allergically against exactly this recent piece of Altona writing – but also because he suddenly might have realized the political dangers in Dippelianism that he had not seen before. I do not mean to imply that such political developments were novel to the Altona version of Dippel’s theology, but it was probably no coincidence that they figured so prominently exactly in his spring 1719 version.

Now, Dippel’s offensive handwritings and, most probably, these four toxic published writings had been burned, the Reventlows receiving their satisfaction in the final scene involving all of the three main protagonists. Whether the Reventlows actually felt satisfied and cleansed when the wagon with chained alchemist slowly rattled northwards we do not know. We shall leave them here, in the City Hall Square of Altona, maybe adding a small speculation. Would the three meet again in Copenhagen in the spring of 1728, eight years later, after Dippel’s dark years on Bornholm and his Swedish adventure, when he was called to the Danish court for his medical assistance? In any case, he would have met the old Frederik IV in the flesh for the first time, the King who had signed his harsh punishment eight years earlier. Much points to the fact that the King hardly had any personal reservations about Dippel – maybe he had just signed the punishment decree in

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siren/ und viele zu berauben/ erwecket durch dieses Verfahren in allen denen/ so er beleidiget/ Grimm und Rache; stirbt nu ein solcher Raub-Vogel in solchem elenden Zustand seines Geistes/ so bleiben doch nach dem Tode seine Begierde und sein Vergnügen bey seinem Schatz/ er wird immer denselben noch bewahren/ mehr schachern und zusammen scharren wollen/ und deswegen& unter dem Consortio der Verdammten/ Krämer und Juden/ oder Clienten auffsuchen/ an welchen er einigen Profit könne machen/ kommen ihm dann in solcher Raserey die vors Gesicht/ so er beleidiget/ betrogen/ beraubt und geschunden/ und die in ihrem gefaßten Zorn und Rachgier gegen ihn ebenfalls sich unselig gemacht/ und ihre Hölle gebauet/ so werden sie den in der Welt gefürchteten grossen Geitz-Teufel gar ungnädig anfallen/ wein er nunmehr ihnen gleich ist/ und keine Henckers-Knechte mehr zu seinen Gehülffen hat; ein jeder wird das Seine mit Schelten und Ungestüm fordern( das arme Gesinde den vorenthaltenen Lohn und das entzogene gebührende Essen und Trincken/ Schneider/ Schuster/ Mäurer/ Schmidt/ Zimmermann/ Kramer/ Jude/ Christ/ und alle/ die ein solcher durch extorquirte Accorde, oder Weigerung der veraccordirten Summa beknebelt und beraubt hat/ werden zusammen gegen ihn conspiriren/ und demselben allen ersinnlichen Schimpf und Plage widerum anthun” (P. 21 [unpag.]).



order to stop the unending stream of demands from his unruly brother-in-law. The development of Dippel's stay on Bornholm may seem to indicate that.

The process had now taken Dippel through a dramatic series of phases in his five-year Altona sojourn. Solicited there as a renowned chemist, arriving as a dissenter refugee, soon rising to the role of royal pietist spiritual advisor, proceeding into reconstruction of Altona city rule, assuming the role of legal consultant, catapulted into a court case, jailed and convicted as a libeler, and now finally sentenced, chained and banished as a blasphemer. He would now really need what he had told the Prussian King in 1707: how much he enjoyed chains and prison on the base of a good conscience.