

Manfred Josef Thaler, Die Domkapitel der Reichskirche vom Wiener Konkordat bis zur Säkularisation (1448–1803). Grundzüge ihrer Verfassung im Vergleich, Frankfurt a. M. (Peter Lang Edition) 2017, 618 S. (Rechtshistorische Reihe, 468), ISBN 978-3-631-71954-1, EUR 116,95.

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Numerable specialist studies have been dedicated to the cathedral chapters of the Holy Roman Empire and a synthesis and overview of this vast literature has long been a desideratum. This book provides a critical examination of this secondary literature, which, as Thaler illustrates, is often contradictory and inaccurate. His elucidation of various points is also informed by his use of printed primary material and papers from the central imperial archives (deposited in the Haus-, Hof-, und Staatsarchiv, Vienna). Thaler's study thus serves as both a detailed reference book, which surveys the unique characteristics of each individual cathedral chapter, and as a comparative study of the overarching, long-term factors that shaped the evolution of these ecclesiastical institutions from the Vienna Concordat of 1448 until the secularization of 1803. In fact, Thaler frequently moves beyond this timeframe to discuss both the medieval origins of the cathedral chapters and their nineteenth-century revival.

The cathedral chapters of the Imperial church have often received more scholarly attention than their Protestant counterparts, as most of them ruled territories (with their own subjects and representation in the Reichstag) and continued to play a crucial role in imperial politics via possessing the right to elect the ecclesiastical princes. However, Thaler has given equal weight to the Protestant chapters and has drawn many interesting parallels, showing, for instance, how both confessions used the institution for providing for aristocratic younger sons and civil servants. Indeed, he shows how the chapters became a confessional battleground during the Reformation, which resulted in the secularization of some and the forced recatholicization of others. The Peace of Westphalia diminished further their numbers by secularizing their lands as compensation for the various warring European powers, yet it also resulted in the formation of mixed-confession chapters, such as those at Osnabrück and Halberstadt.

Thaler discusses Joseph II's ten-year reign throughout the book, as his ecclesiastical reforms led to the foundation of several chapters and new regulations, such as banning non-resident canonries, fixing the number of canons, and reviving the post of *Scholasterie* in order to encourage the further education of the canons. As with the monasteries, the reforms of Joseph II and his successors, Leopold II and Franz II, set the cathedral chapters in the Habsburg monarchy on a firmer footing, which thus helped them to survive the tumultuous Age of Revolution. With less economic and political influence and aristocratic pedigree, the Austrian chapters had historically exercised a much greater social and pastoral role than those in the ecclesiastical states that were finally swept aside by the French revolutionary armies and the near-comprehensive secularization of 1803.



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Thaler provides detailed discussions of the differing roles and types of canonries; the various forms of patronage and rights of appointments; and the multifaceted corporate identities and social attributes of each chapter, which were either exclusively aristocratic or socially-mixed institutions. An impressive aspect of Thaler's book is his ability to place these characteristics and historical developments within a broader international context via examining the composition and evolution of the chapters in France, Denmark, Poland, and northern Italy; indeed, as the Empire contracted, some cathedral chapters were amalgamated into these neighbouring churches. As this book covers a very broad geographical area, it is regrettable that the publishers did not include any maps to aid the reader in better understanding the geo-political and regional inter-relationships between the chapters and the secular princes.

Thaler himself acknowledges that there was insufficient space in this book to scrutinize the personal, economic, and political inter-relationships of the canons and the chapters in depth, given that it covers such an extensive historical and geographic scope. Instead, he regards it as charting in rough outlines the regional differences and long-term historical developments that determined the legal constitutions and internal compositions of these important ecclesiastical institutions, and as laying the foundations for further scholarly research. With its rich detail, statistics, concise summaries, and cogent analyses, Thaler's book more than succeeds in fulfilling this goal and it will become the essential starting point for all future research in this field.



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