

Fabian Schmitt, Ministeriale des Kölner Erzstifts im Hochmittelalter. Dienst, Herrschaft und soziale Mobilität, Köln, Weimar, Wien (Böhlau) 2021, 426 S., 47 Tab., 2 Diagr., 3 Kt., Abb. (Rheinisches Archiv, 164), ISBN 978-3-412-52372-5, EUR 55,00.

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Doctoral students interested in the history of Cologne have endured a long-term research crisis, and none more so than those in need of access to medieval manuscripts, since the shocking collapse of the Historisches Archiv on 3 March 2009. Though the recently completed new city archive is celebrating its opening with a lecture series from April to May 2022, the process of recovery, restoration, and reconstitution of the original primary source collections salvaged from the mountain of rubble will take many more decades to come (see »[Bergen, Ordnen, Restaurieren – Der Wiederaufbau des Historischen Archivs der Stadt Köln](#)«).

Thus limited to published source collections, doctoral students of medieval Cologne have also been bound as a result to subjects already pursued in these collections, rather than exploring new questions through the many underutilized series of charters and *Schreinsurkunden/Schreinsbücher* of the old Historisches Archiv, which are now either partially accessible or not at all. Fabian Schmitt's revised edition of his doctoral dissertation (Summer 2019 in the Philosophische Fakultät der Rheinischen Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität Bonn), however, has made the most of the present opportunity to revisit the conclusions of older historiography through a creative re-viewing of the published primary sources. In so doing he has made important contributions to our understanding of the fascinating and much-debated social group known in German historiography as the *ministeriales*.

Ministeriales comprised a legally defined social group unique to German history, whose origins are found among the subservient members of royal or noble *familia* – including prince-bishops – who were raised up from this status in the 11th century to a specific service role (*ministerium*) in governance as *Dienstmänner*. The evolving Latin term for such *Dienstmänner* indicates a development in their roles from administrative to military delegated lordship as unfree nobles (the latter possessing a peculiar mix of an unfree legal yet a well-resourced noble social status of *Dienstherren*). From *servientes* to *ministri* and *miles de familia sua* by the mid-11th century (depending on their administrative or military function), to the collective term *ministeriales* by the 12th century, these were *Dienstmänner* in the Cologne archbishop's secular principality (i. e., the *Erzstift* known as *Kurköln*) whose elites eventually took their place among the regional lower nobility by the mid-13th century



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through their development and exercise of administrative and/or military expertise.

Ministeriales had mostly been studied and defined by German legal scholars until social historians of the 1970s challenged the rigidity of legal categories, yet *ministeriales* have not been the subject of any extensive reassessment in Cologne for over a generation. The time is ripe for such a reassessment and Schmitt is to be commended for seeing an opportunity and producing a much-needed monograph. Having begun his study of the *ministeriales* in his master's thesis, Schmitt learned the painstaking prosopographical method from Prof. Dr. Manfred Groten (the master of Cologne prosopography) to produce reconstructions of the social and political constellations in which the *ministeriales* lived and functioned¹. Upon Groten's retirement in April 2015, Schmitt further developed his thesis into the present doctoral dissertation under Groten's successor, Prof. Dr. Andrea Stieldorf².

The extensive opening chapter provides a concise and clear presentation of the voluminous scholarship on medieval *ministeriales*, which indicates how Rhineland research has always lagged behind studies on imperial *ministeriales* and on those in other *Landesgeschichten*. Despite this, however, Cologne's published charters and their witness lists from 1050–1250 provide a useful source base for prosopographical reconstruction of *ministeriales*, their careers, and their families. And thus Schmitt continues the tradition of social historians challenging the older legal histories which assumed that legal categories always represented life lived outside of law codes. This approach certainly makes the *ministeriales* interesting to study.

Chapter two reconstructs the origins and development of Cologne *ministeriales*, while chapter three addresses the issue of their complex admixture of an unfree legal status which was codified with legal guarantees in the shorter and longer *Dienstrecht* charters. In chapter three Schmitt sees in these charters the agency of self-confident *ministeriales*, who had negotiated with the archbishop a secure agreement of their rights as well as their duties and resources, thereby codifying their successes in loosening the original servile bonds to their lord. Indeed, rural *ministeriales* began early to accumulate both fiefs and allodial lands for their service.

¹ Fabian Schmitt, Die Ministerialen in der Politik des Kölner Erzbischofs Engelbert von Berg (1216–1225). Herrschaftspraxis und soziale Mobilität, in: Alheydis Plassman, Michael Rohrschneider, Andrea Stieldorf (ed.), Herrschaftsnorm und Herrschaftspraxis im Kurfürstentum Köln im Mittelalter und in der Frühen Neuzeit, Göttingen 2021 (Studien zu Macht und Herrschaft, 11), p. 21–49.

² See <http://histrhen.landesgeschichte.eu/2019/02/ministeriale-im-koelner-erzstift/> (26/04/2022).

Mittelalter – Moyen Âge (500–1500)

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Chapter four takes the prosopographical path to reconstruct two exemplary administrative *ministerialis* families: von Eppendorf and Bachem. The von Eppendorf family rose to prominence through the heritable office of the Cologne *Stadtvogt* or city bailiff for several generations, while the Bachem family did so through the heritable office of *Kämmerer* or chamberlain/treasurer of the *Erzstift*. These ministerial officials functioned as the lynchpins between archbishop's court on the one hand and his cathedral city and *Erzstift* on the other, given both their exercise of the archbishop's regalian authority in these locales as well as their daily presence in the archbishop's court. Though the Bachem family did not have as many branches nor held their administrative office as long as the von Eppendorf family, both operated as the leading ministerial dynasties of the 12th–13th centuries, with the von Eppendorf even fashioned as *nobilis* in archiepiscopal charters. They appear regularly in the witness list of the archbishop's charters throughout this era. Schmitt rightly notes that the receipt of these offices was not a moment of *Aufstieg* for these families, who must have had some prior stature to play such influential roles. And their quick securing of heritability locked out these major offices from other urban *ministerialis* families for generations.

Chapter five delineates the probable origins of rural *ministeriales* from the *servi casati* on the *Erzstift's* rural estates. They rose in the *Hofverband* through service in the office of *villicus* (steward), and by the 13th century were styled *miles* holding fiefs and sometimes accompanying the lord archbishop out of area on campaigns. Though evidence for this subgroup of *ministeriales* is very thin, origins stories of such *Dienstherren* are identified on the manors of Alfter, Altendorf, and Wormersdorf during the 12th century. More evidence survives, however, for administrative *ministeriales* at the archbishop's court, where they held the offices of marshal, butler/cup bearer, and seneschal/steward. These offices provided ample opportunity to serve as intimate counselors to the archbishops while also rubbing elbows with the regional nobility, and during the 12th century these *ministeriales* converged with the nobles to become the third pillar of the archbishops' lordship along with the nobility and the *Priorenkolleg* clergy. Indeed, the exercise of their delegated authority was most pronounced during the regular and sometimes lengthy absences of the archbishops when on imperial or papal business and when the archiepiscopal seat was vacant. These court officials did not, however, overshadow the *Stadtvogt* or the *Kämmerer* and always followed them in charter witness lists, as chapter six makes clear.

Chapter seven provides the thickest and most interesting analysis of administrative *ministeriales* who held the regalian offices of toll masters, mint masters, and supervisors of the substantial market activity in the city of Cologne. These officials have been the focus of much debate for well over a century regarding the extent to which their own efforts to gain autonomy from the archbishop's lordship could have overlapped with those of the patrician merchant elites during the 12th–13th centuries. Previous



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scholarship had struggled with discerning whether or not these regalian *ministeriales* became intertwined with the patrician families and thus joined them in concerted assertions of autonomy from the archbishop's direct authority as city lord (i. e., both groups thus seeking »emancipation« from varying degrees of unfree status and dependency on the archbishop's lordship).

Previous prosopographical studies in the post-World War II era had confirmed a substantial role played by regalian *ministeriales* in such emancipation efforts, thus making the legal boundary more porous than earlier legal historians had allowed. Yet Schmitt's key contribution to this debate is that the *ministeriales* who held these regalian offices came not from the archbishop's court *familia* but rather were actually members of the patrician burgher elite who held these offices as *ministeriales auf Zeit*. Persuasive 12th-century case studies of the toll masters Gerhard Unmaze and Karl von der Salzgasse make clear that earlier scholars had the issue backwards: it was not a matter of *ministeriales* joining merchant elites in resisting traditional lordship authority, but rather wealthy burgher *optimates civitatis* joining in the office of *ministerialis* for a limited time, thus bringing to bear their pre-existing wealth, social status, and administrative skills and in exchange gradually removing these regalian offices from direct control of their city lord. In fact, Schmitt might have made more of Unmaze's receipt of the toll master's office in the context of his additional role as money-lender to Archbishop Philip of Heinsberg in 1174 *pro necessitate ecclesie et honore imperii*³. Mixing personal business with public financing was widely commonplace among the patrician burgher elites of the city, and wealthy merchant-bankers like Gerhard Unmaze had been financing their archbishop's Italian campaigns since the pontificate of Rainald of Dassel. This municipal reality is so patently obvious with regard to mint masters that Schmitt leaves them completely out of this book as patently not *ministeriales* but burgher elites, yet their interactions with the archbishops were no different than the likes of Unmaze and von der Salzgasse. No sources survive for market managers who could have been either *ministeriales* or merchant elites, though adjacent

³ Gerhard Unmaze offered an enormous loan of 600 marks *pura agenti* (i. e. over 140 kilograms of silver) to Archbishop Philip of Heinsberg to fund the latter's participation in Emperor Friedrich Barbarossa's fifth Italian campaign, in exchange for which the archbishop mortgaged the privilege of collecting the tolls due for the city of Cologne for two years. For an additional 50 marks Archbishop Philip also mortgaged a house in his possession located across from the archbishop's palace and adjacent to another house owned by Unmaze, which by 1182 became Unmaze's own property and combined two-house residence in Cologne (known as the Brabanter Hof and Haus zur Krone. Indeed, thereafter Unmaze was styled Gerardus de curia. See Historisches Archiv der Stadt Köln, Haupturkundenarchiv (HUA) 3/26; Sonja Zöller, Kaiser, Kaufmann und die Macht des Geldes: Gerhard Unmaze von Köln als Finanzier der Reichspolitik und der »Gute Gerhard« des Rudolf von Ems, Munich 1993 (Forschungen zur Geschichte der älteren deutschen Literatur, 16), p. 45–46, 66–67.



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evidence suggests the latter, given the rise of the *Richerzeche* as a supervisory institution for guilds and markets. Indeed, court *ministeriales* are absent from the key municipal administrative bodies known as the *Schöffenkolleg*, *Richerzeche*, as well as of the parish/district *Amtmänner* officials, with these magistracies administered by the patrician merchant elites, some of whom also held offices as *ministeriales auf Zeit* as only one office among many in their portfolio. This definition of merchant *ministeriales* widens the scope of ministerial functions and social origins, and resolves a decades long debate as well. Schmitt concludes therefore that *ministeriales auf Zeit* have been inappropriately misidentified as the archbishops' court *Dienstmänner*. Furthermore, Schmitt avers, while it can only be assumed to be »probable« yet not at all provable, said court *Dienstmänner* may have contributed in some way to the wider movement of burgher »emancipation« from their prince-bishop's lordship authority.

Chapters 8–10 move briskly through the rather limited remaining evidence for *ministeriales* who served the prince-archbishops of Cologne as (a) castellans (*Burgmänner*) of Volmarstein, Alpen, Padberg, and Wolkenburg (having been drawn from existing local noble families), (b) marshal over the archbishop's holdings of Westphalia, and (c) urban bailiffs (*Stadtschultheißen*) in Soest (a branch of the von Eppendorf family), Bonn, and Andernach. These offices all provided pathways into the local lower nobility with heritable offices. These chapters remind us that the term *ministeriales* covered a diverse group of offices and functions in both rural and urban settings of the *Erzstift*. Chapter 11 finally offers an analysis of the voluminous appendix of tables and diagrams containing Schmitt's research findings regarding *ministeriales* who appear in the witness lists of archbishops' charters included in published primary source collections⁴. Here Schmitt acknowledges the limited usefulness of this material, given that the archbishop's chancery replaced witness lists with the archbishop's seal during the pontificate of Archbishop Konrad of Hochstaden (1238–1261), which provides the *terminus* for this volume's study. By this time *ministeriales* had become *miles* once again (some even using seals themselves), though not all thereby entered the regional lower nobility. In any case, they surely functioned as a counterbalance to the increasingly unreliable noble vassals of the archbishop, and in return were assured heritable offices as administrators of his territorial principality (*Erzstift*). The witness lists do serve the purpose of identifying those few *ministeriales* who traveled with the archbishop (*Stadtvogt* and the castellans of Volmarstein and Alpen) and the majority who remained local within the *Erzstift* and archbishop's court, though even this distinction is hampered by the fact that many of the archbishop's charters do not indicate their place of production nor

⁴ Schmitt avers that »Die Auswertung der Zeugenliste bildete die Grundlage für alle weiteren Untersuchungen« (p. 321), and if so it would have been better to place this chapter at the opening rather than at the closing of a research monograph.



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do we know the method used for selecting witnesses. And indeed we know next to nothing about those *ministeriales* who served in the *Erzstift* yet were never asked to witness a charter nor were eventually raised to the lower nobility by the mid-13th century.

Whether *ministeriales* who mixed service to the *Erzstift* with their own manorial interests, or wealthy patrician merchant-bankers who mixed such ministerial service with their own financial interests for a limited time, social mobility appears to have been a prerequisite for holding ministerial offices rather than a result of having been raised to them. And this dynamic makes much clearer than has been understood before that *ministeriales*, though a legal category of municipal or court administrators and rural unfree vassals, never comprised a closed social class as the *Dienstrechte* charters may seem to imply. The designation of *ministerialis* looks more likely to have quickly become a marker of one role among many others which a person of status could hold, possibly stepping in and out of that role during one's lifetime. Schmitt rightly points out that no individual, let alone a »class« of men or women, was ever bound *auf Lebenszeit* to a service relationship signified by the term *ministerialis*. The original servile functionary of the 11th century evolved into an office-holder who had other roles and pursuits at the same time. »Die Ministerialität war immer in Bewegung« (p. 329), and their historical evolution represents the record of negotiations between *ministeriales* and the archbishops of Cologne as each sought to balance their own private interests and public obligations.

One point of caution may be advised in Schmitt's speculation about *ministerialis* families potentially finding their way into Cologne patrician families, with the von Eppendorf family used as an example. The broad record shows that Cologne's *ministeriales* remained loyal to their prince-archbishop from the 1074 burgher uprising against Anno II and throughout the *Investiturstreit* and *Thronstreit* eras of the 12th century. Even in the midst of the conflicts between patrician factions and the archbishops of Cologne in the 13th century, the von Eppendorf family remained in the archbishop's camp. Indeed, *Stadtvogt* Rutger von Eppendorf and his brother William were killed in the Battle of the Ulrepforte (1268) fighting for the *Weisen* faction allied with Archbishop Engelbert II, directly after Rutger's debt problem led to a brief falling out with the archbishop. Rutger's son and successor Gerhard III von Eppendorf also remained loyal to his lord the archbishop until Siegfried of Westerburg's effectively sidelined him through the purchase of the office of Greve (sub-burggrave), which restored to the archbishop direct appointment power over all future *Stadtvögte*. Only then, when his family's heritable status was threatened at the hands of his own *Stadtherr*, did Gerhard III von Eppendorf seek to leverage support from Cologne's patriciate: he swore an oath to support the interests of the citizenry on 5 May 1288, only one month before the inevitable and fateful Battle of Worringen that permanently expelled the archbishop from the city. Schmitt himself recognizes that the von Eppendorf family's efforts to assimilate into the patrician burgher elites of



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the city after 1288 did not go well⁵. In sum, there is no evidence to support the conclusion that any *ministerialis* families transformed themselves from functionaries of the *Erzstift* into members of Cologne's patrician elite.

One could also quibble with the perfunctory bibliographical listing of Anglophone scholarship on Cologne's urban history without making any use of it in the text itself⁶. But having over the years at least once been quite chagrined at not proofreading my own bibliography for accurate authorial attribution, this reviewer is compelled to be gracious.

Fabian Schmitt has provided a much-needed update to the history of *ministeriales* in the Cologne region, and he has added his own useful reassessment of the evidence using the prism of a reconstructed prosopography via archepiscopal charter witness lists. He has thereby moved the historiographical needle forward, as any research monograph is supposed to do. This volume should be consulted by all pursuing similar studies in other parts of the German-speaking Europe as well as by any scholar who seeks a methodology to reassess traditional legal history in light of social and urban history approaches to life lived beyond legal codes. *Ministeriales* remind us that legal codes are only a starting point for discovering how medieval folk actually lived their lives.

⁵ »Obwohl Gerhard und seine Nachfolger in den nächsten Jahren ihr Heil auf Seiten der Stadt suchten, ist die von Hegel behauptete enge Bindung an sie doch nie gelungen« (p. 125).

⁶ Schmitt cites one of my own books in his bibliography, though clearly not taken from the book itself but rather from Hugo Stehkämper's review of it, in which my name was quite inexplicably mangled: Hugo Stehkämper, England und Köln im Hochmittelalter. Eine methodisch bemerkenswerte sowie gehaltvolle Neuerscheinung zur Kölner Stadtgeschichte von Peter J. Huffman, in: Jahrbuch des Kölnischen Geschichtsvereins 72 (2001), p. 195–210. Had Schmitt actually used the book rather than the review he would easily have seen the odd miscue and not perpetuated it in his volume.



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