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## **Episcopus. Wissen über Bischöfe im Frankenreich des späten 8. bis frühen 10. Jahrhunderts**

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Theo Riches

'Suggestive?', 'methodical?' and 'witty?' are words rarely applied to the same book, but Steffen Patzold's study of Carolingian ideas about bishops demonstrates all three qualities. Granted, Patzold's tome cannot hide its origins as a *Habilitationsschrift*: it is a 660-page brick of a book, of a size and weight that might see it confiscated at airports alongside liquids and sharp objects. But for all its magnitude, the text itself is clearly and elegantly written, spiked on occasion with the wry and ironic tone Patzold favours for discussing arguments with which he does not agree. This is as close to a page-turner as a *Habilitationsschrift* is ever likely to get; perhaps all historians should follow Patzold in having a touch of journalistic training early in their careers. Moreover, Patzold's receptiveness to international currents of research, already visible in his doctoral publication, *Konflikte im Kloster*, makes this second book a testament to his ability to absorb disparate influences and combine them with a truly sharp analytical gaze.

Patzold takes as his subject the Carolingian episcopate as a group and, more especially, what contemporaries 'knew' about the responsibilities and rights of that group and its constituent individuals. While much of this 'knowledge about bishops' was drawn from older traditions, Patzold sees a systematisation take hold in the 820s that reached its apogee in the synods called by Louis the Pious in 829. The Paris synod in particular developed a coherent vision of what a bishop was supposed to be and do, and it is the legacy of this 'Paris

model?, as Patzold calls it, that he then examines in a wide range of 9th- and early 10th-century texts. But Patzold does not just want to sketch what the Carolingians thought about bishops; he also wants to claim that this knowledge translated into power. For this claim he relies on a theoretical framework developed from the ideas of Barry Barnes, Mark Haugaard, Anthony Giddens and Achim Landwehr, whereby a 'shared distribution of knowledge?', in Barnes's words, is what allows an actor to act in such a way as will be accepted and not resisted by others: a person has power to the extent and in the ways that others 'know' he is powerful and therefore shape their actions in response (which then, in turn, confirms his known power). In particular it is the 'categorical' knowledge, i.e. knowledge which orders the perceived world, that Patzold sees as key. Patzold wants to replace the old German concept of *Herrschaft* with this idea of knowledge-as-power, as well as use it to reassess study of medieval rituals as not just 'staging' power but constituting it.

After setting out the historiographical background, theoretical underpinning and plan of the book in the first chapter, Patzold spends the second chapter showing that his questions are worth posing. He demonstrates that knowledge about bishops was fundamentally different c.900 than it had been c.800 by offering a series of 'before' and 'after' snapshots drawn from a range of comparable sources, such as the *Annales regni Francorum* as opposed to Regino of Prüm's annalistic *Chronicon*, or the synods of 813 as opposed to that of Trosly in 909. Patzold argues that between these dates a new theory was developed of how bishops fitted into the arrangements of the kingdom. This theory granted them a responsibility and role separate from and complementary to those of the king and the secular magnates; the bishops' greater autonomy and their relationship to the other powers were then expressed in a newly important vocabulary of *ministerium*, *auctoritas* and *adiutorium*. The details and chronology of that change are what the rest of the book is then about.

To begin with, Patzold continues his 'before' and 'after' comparisons of sources sorted according to their genre (here, historiography and capitularies), but he narrows his focus to the 820s, which he sees as the key period before which the episcopate was not viewed as an autonomous historical factor. Before 820, bishops appear in historiography individually and generally as carrying out some task assigned by the emperor (like embassies). In the capitularies, there is a closer control of bishops in the second half of the 8th century than in the first, but here too they were seen mainly as holders of offices under the emperor, analogous to the counts. But this is Patzold's summary of their position, not that of contemporaries: he notes that at this time there was, significantly, scarcely any attempt to relate systematically various episcopal norms to each other or the bishops to their wider context. Where Patzold does find guiding concepts, they refer to the bishops' power to command (*potestas*, *iussio*) those under their subjection (*subiectio*, *subditio*). The bishops were not supposed to be tyrants and were to act with gentleness towards their subjects, but the latter nevertheless owed them obedience (*oboedientia*). While there were attempts at overarching reform or correction pre-820, the bishops occur as only one of a number of groups giving advice to the emperor on disparate issues in need of attention. These attempts, however, paved the way for the later reform programmes of the 820s. After sketching the atmosphere of crisis that dominated the 820s and encouraged political actors to believe that God needed placating through the moral reform of the Empire, Patzold analyses the key texts of the 820s reform efforts: first the 823/25 *Ordinatio* of Louis the Pious, where the old vocabulary made way for the new keywords like *ministerium*, *auctoritas*, *adiutorium* and *admonitio*, and secondly the synods of the 820s, most especially the 829 synod in Paris (the canons of the other 829 synods, in Toulouse, Lyon and Mainz, do not survive), whose conclusions were shortly afterward summarized in the *Rescriptum consultationis sive exortationis episcoporum ad dominum Hludiwicorum imperatorem*, presented to Louis the Pious in preparation for the final reform council of 829 in Worms. These reforms, culminating in 829, were qualitatively different from earlier ones such as 813. Whereas the earlier reform efforts had simply listed various points in need of reform and proposed alternatives, Patzold argues that 829 created an entire theory of how Christendom was to be ordered. The individual elements of this model were generally old, often from Late Antiquity, but their systematisation was new and provided 9th-century actors with new categories of knowledge with which to order their world. This systematisation was made possible by the maturation of a scholarly culture that had been initiated in the time of Charlemagne: the generation who were responsible for the 820s had been educated in a pre-existing scholarly milieu that had collected together the ancient precedents and learning on which the thought of the 820s would be based. Patzold's discussion does not

however divorce the ideas from their material existence. On the contrary, he is careful to demonstrate how the ideas spread within texts and their distribution, such as via the work of Jonas of Orléans. Finally, in an example of what makes this book so easy to read, Patzold is careful to relate the arguments back to the previous chapter and reminds the reader of what had gone before. He is also careful not to overstress his argument, ending the chapter with some texts from the 820s and 830s that did not reflect the new ideas coming out of Paris.

The subsequent chapter shows how power and assembly politics forced actors to clarify their ideas and at the same time ensured those ideas were spread. Patzold looks first at the rituals associated with the imperial 'crisis' of the 830s, namely Louis the Pious's penance, his reconciliation and Ebo of Reims's resignation. He then examines texts of various genres produced between then and the civil wars of the 840s, including works by Jonas of Orléans, Agobard and Florus of Lyon, and different examples from conciliar acts, historiography and hagiography. It is no coincidence that this genre-based division reflects earlier (and later) parts of the book: repeatedly returning to this structure makes Patzold's argument both methodologically sound and more clearly expressed. The chapter closes with a summary of the 'Paris model' of episcopal rights and responsibilities. The central concept here is that of *ministerium*, the task given both to the king and bishops of caring for the salvation of the people committed to their care. The king and bishops were to work as partners within their respectively delineated spheres and were responsible directly to God, although the bishops' responsibility was somewhat larger since they were also responsible for the salvation of the king. Bishops were required to preach and to practise a Christian life so as to win God's favour, a task based on a series of older texts (most notably Gregory the Great's *Pastoral Rule*) and which the bishops had to carry out, if necessary, through the use of excommunication. Only God, however, could judge bishops. If there is a criticism to be made at this point, it is that Patzold does not always tease out the relationship between power and ideas. It is certainly true that political crises force people to define what they stand for and establish their terms, but it is unclear what this then means for Patzold's conception of how knowledge translates into power.

Now that Patzold has outlined *what* was 'known' about bishops, the rest of the book is devoted to *how* that knowledge was spread. Each chapter concentrates on how the Paris ideas appear in a different kind of source: normative texts (including the distribution of texts related to Paris itself), historiography and episcopal *vitae*. In this way each chapter acts as a control for the other (Patzold is nothing if not methodical). Patzold's study of how the Paris texts spread reveals a subtle understanding of the copying, excerpting and reception of medieval texts. The Paris canons themselves were not widely distributed, even though Patzold follows Wilfried Hartmann in his argument that the very presence of the bishops at the councils is enough to demonstrate the ideas' wide audience. Instead the shorter, more programmatic *Rescriptum*, in particular as spread in the work of Benedictus Levita, played the key role. Looking at the synodal capitularies of this period, Patzold finds the categories of the Paris model (especially that of episcopal *ministerium*, but also e.g. *auctoritas*) cropping again in various synods from the 840s through to the 870s. The notable figure here is the unavoidable Hincmar of Reims, whose 'political testament' at Fismes in 881 is shot through with ideas inherited from Paris in 829. Hincmar, however, introduces his own variation on the Paris model, modifying the previously equal, yet complementary roles of king and bishops to justify instead the superiority of the latter. Other differences become apparent in this chapter: the capitularies of Charles the Bald incorporate the role of the counts under the keyword 'commoditas'; the Paris model was strong in Reims but less so elsewhere and arrives in the East later than in the West. Patzold is also careful to argue that 'knowledge' about the Paris model was not restricted to the episcopacy, but in different 'levels' also reached kings, counts and even, via *capitula episcoporum*, the rural clergy (here another variation becomes apparent, with Hincmar emphasising the importance of Gregory the Great's seventeenth Homily on the Gospels). This chapter closes with a case-study on the fall of Ebo of Reims, in which Patzold subjects his history of ideas to analysis within the contingency of events. Such contingency both explains the usefulness of the Paris model and delineates its limits. The model was not intentionally spread, but instead conflict required the protagonists to find useful ways of framing their arguments, which they found in the Paris model. At the same time, Patzold argues that the results of the conflict around Ebo cannot be reduced to arguments about ideas or the peaceful negotiation of consensus: personal networks, patronage and violence were also

involved. Ebo himself appears, meanwhile, to have been the perfect *Reichsbischof avant la lettre*.

Yet normative texts demonstrate nothing but norms, so in order to get closer to the practice of being a bishop Patzold looks at the historiography, which at least has the advantage of seeking to describe those norms as they were lived. Again his comparative approach bears fruit as he is able to distinguish the different priorities of different genres and their analytic potential as well as how individual genres changed over time. Thus his examination of annals shows how their centre of production moved from the court to bishoprics and their interest in bishoprics and the locality increased commensurately. Their increasing attribution of various tasks to bishoprics and reporting of bishops' elections, death dates etc. reflects the Paris model in that bishops were being regarded as a group, defined by their office and its responsibilities, rather than as magnates operating at court. This is not to say the annals reflect the Paris model in any simple way: we see in these sources a more nuanced picture of episcopal activity than just the normative one and the East Frankish annals show little evidence of Parisian influence at all. This nuance is also a feature of Patzold's consideration of the *gesta episcoporum*: chronicles of bishoprics based around a series of episcopal biographies. It is hardly surprising that the *gesta* offer us more information than the annals, since the very essence of the genre is to measure an office's incumbents against a set of ideals and Patzold uses them to add extra shade to his 'episcopal knowledge' beyond that outlined in Paris. Thus Patzold finds the *gesta* discussing the usefulness and danger of bishops' noble blood: this theme is new insofar as it is not explicitly present in the Paris model, but it is also a natural development in that it grows from Paris-based concerns about the episcopacy as an office with a set of duties. Patzold spends little time discussing keywords like *ministerium* in respect of the *gesta*, and it would have been interesting to see him talk more about how the principles of Paris might have 'migrated' from their original set of concepts to related questions like that of aristocratic descent. In general, Patzold examines such additions and developments as evidence of the ideas of ministry and office in the underlying Paris model, but here they are not given their own history. Because Patzold concentrates on demonstrating the existence of the Paris model rather than the history of how it later developed, it is odd when his discussion of Notker the Stammerer concedes that there is little evidence for the precise use of the Paris texts, but argues that by this point the model was so well-known there was no need for such precision. Some more explanation is needed if the absence of Paris vocabulary is to be considered evidence of that vocabulary's success. Occasionally it is difficult to tell what evidence Patzold would allow to falsify his thesis.

After looking at annals and *gesta*, Patzold devotes a chapter to the genre of episcopal *vitae* or 'Lives'. This is a potentially fruitful area, since 9th-century episcopal Lives have been, in contrast to later incarnations, little researched. Patzold sketches how the Lives oriented themselves towards the past, how they placed their subjects in a historical context, how they noted those subjects' collegiate relationship with contemporary bishops, and how they were careful to set down an episcopal genealogy. The holiness of previous bishops was then supposed to transfer to the bishopric itself, so that present bishops, however unworthy they might be in practice, would be seen as honourable. Patzold finds various aspects of the Paris model in these Lives: the apostolicity of the episcopal office; the idea of it as an office of ministry over people committed to them, and whose care weighed on the office holder; their responsibility for caring for and protecting those people, in part by preaching to them and being a role model; the balancing of the expectation that bishops be of noble blood by the argument that nobility of character was more important and the lack of any sense that an aristocratic family would own a bishopric. Again, Patzold's argument is at his strongest where he compares. That the Paris model is scarcely present in the eastern Lives shores up his contention that the language matters where it does appear. Particularly convincing, however, is his discussion of how later authors reworked earlier Lives to include the new knowledge. Throughout the book, indeed, it is the comparative approach that bears the most fruit.

In the concluding chapter, Patzold summarises the aims of his book as firstly to date, describe and explain the origins of the status of imperial and princely bishops, secondly to sketch the Carolingian view of the episcopacy, and thirdly to measure the value of rituals and symbolic actions for this view. He begins by recapitulating the argument of the book, summarising the elements of the Paris model, the conditions of the 820s that gave rise to it, the contingency of the events of the 830s that allowed it to take root, its practical

use in the Ebo dispute, its appearance in historiography and the various 'levels' of knowledge in different societal groups, and the concerns of ninth-century episcopal hagiography. The rest of the conclusion is devoted to the book's ramifications for our understanding of various topics: the role of the Carolingian bishop; the Ottonian-Salian *Reichskirche*; the function of ritual; the so-called 'New Constitutional History' of Brunner et al.; and finally the *Staatlichkeit* of the 9th- and 10th-century Frankish realm. Thus he points out, for example, that the imperial centre's reliance on bishops, which German historians have traditionally attributed to the *Reichskirchensystem*, is already in the Paris model, but that the latter does not support the idea of the bishops as the king's instruments, or, for that matter, as representatives of aristocratic families: instead they were a separate group, who held office directly from God and had their own rules of behaviour. As regards ritual, contra traditional interpretations of why it became important to the Ottonians – namely a lack of written governmental apparatus – Patzold sees ritual as a mechanism of constituting knowledge and thus power. As he points out, part of the Paris model saw an increasing emphasis on episcopal anointing (and the concomitant downgrading of chorbishops) and the ability of bishops to anoint kings was a key component in Hincmar's argument that the latter were beneath the former in God's order. Carrying out certain rituals expressed but also exercised individual bishops' power. Confession, penance and excommunication became key elements of the political order.<sup>(1)</sup>

Inevitably, there remain unanswered questions. In his introduction, Patzold wants to connect knowledge to power, but it is unclear how this worked in practice. If power is the ability to order your surroundings according to your will, then Patzold's key example of the Paris model in action, Ebo of Reims's deposition, does little to bolster his argument. After all, the case was the 9th century's *Jarndyce and Jarndyce*, dragging on for decades, well after most of the principles were dead; the Paris model apparently contained enough internal contradictions to create as much chaos and uncertainty as it did order. Ebo's case can thus be read as demonstrating the model's ability to justify retroactively whatever power relations had determined anyway, rather than its ability to shape those power relations. Similarly, Hincmar of Reims, for all his intellectual sophistication and his promotion of the Paris model, had only an intermittent grip on power. To a certain extent Patzold seems to deal with this problem by classifying power relations as 'contingency'. Thus Patzold highlights the importance of contingent events in spreading the ideals of the Paris model, in particular the penance of Louis the Pious and the rituals and debates surrounding it, but is not always clear to what extent these events obeyed an already accepted model or to what extent it was the events that led to the model's acceptance. Perhaps this is in the nature of the process: ideas that informed action would have then been confirmed by their successful implementation in that action. But if the bishops' reactions to contingent events are being shaped by their knowledge about what a bishop was, as derived from Paris, the question remains open as to how reactions made under the rubric of 'ministerium' differed from those under that of 'potestas', other than that they were talked about in different ways.

It would however be completely wrong to close this review on a critical note. Patzold's work addresses, in limpid German prose, an under-researched subject that should be of interest to anyone working on the European Early Middle Ages. What we think about the Carolingian episcopacy affects our approach to much of ecclesiastical and political history up to and including the Investiture Contest of the late 11th and early 12th centuries. Not just Carolingianists, but also scholars of Ottonian-Salian politics, the 'feudal revolution', Peace of God and Gregorian Reform should read this book and grapple with its ideas. Patzold's comparative approach establishes how 'knowledge' of bishops changed over the 9th century and his painstaking work tracking the ideas through the textual and manuscript evidence provides a plausible explanation of how this knowledge spread, as well as how various 'levels' of knowledge were established in different groups. This is plenty for one book, and it only remains for this reviewer to look forward to where Patzold takes his ideas next.

## Notes

1. See now also: Mayke de Jong, *The Penitential State. Authority and Atonement in the Age of Louis the Pious, 814-840* (Cambridge, 2009). [Back to \(1\)](#)

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