

Journal of Nobility Studies

# VIRTUS

20 | 2013



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## Bondservants to barons

Some recent (and less recent) research on ministerials\*

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In his overview of recent scholarship on the nobility in the medieval Low Countries, Arie van Steensel finds that here, as compared to other European countries and regions, 'relative-ly much research has been conducted on the early history of noblemen and bondservants (*ministeriales*)'. Yet the latest substantial study of Dutch ministerials is not very recent. It was published in 1993.<sup>1</sup> In a college textbook of 2004, Barbara Rosenwein introduces ministerials as 'legally serfs whose services – collecting taxes, administering justice, and fighting wars – were so honourable as to garner them both high status and wealth. By 1300 they had become "nobles" [and] enormously wealthy landowners. Some held castles, and many controlled towns.'<sup>2</sup> The relevance of this group to the history of the Dutch nobility follows from a survey published in 2000, when 86 baronial families were flourishing in the Netherlands.<sup>3</sup> At least 25% were descended from ministerials.<sup>4</sup>

Much of the historiographical debate on ministeriality is in German. English scholarship has stressed the differences between the development of elites in the German empire, where

\* The author thanks Prof.dr. J.M. van Winter for her friendly comments on the first draft of this essay.

1 A. van Steensel, 'Op naar revisie en synthese. Recente trends in het onderzoek naar de adel in de middeleeuwse Nederlanden', *Virtus*, XIX (2012) 11; A.L.P. Buitelaar, *De Stichtse ministerialiteit en de ontginningen in de Utrechtse Vechtstreek* (Hilversum, 1993).

2 B.H. Rosenwein, *A short history of the Middle Ages* (Ontario, 2004) 262-263.

3 T. von Bönninghausen, 'Ruim 290 Nederlandse adellijke geslachten', *De Nederlandsche Leeuw*, CXVII (2000) 160-162.

4 In the Kingdom of the Netherlands (1813-), baronial titles were as a rule granted to families represented in regional 'Colleges of Peers' (*Ridderschappen*) before 1795. In Gelria, Utrecht, and Overijssel, most of these families were of ministerial descent, as are most families qualified in *Nederland's Adelsboek* ('Netherlands Peerage') as 'old Gelrian (or Utrecht, or Overijssel) nobility' (J.M. van Winter, *Ministerialiteit en ridderschap in Gelre en Zutphen* (Groningen, 1962); Buitelaar, *Stichtse ministerialiteit*). *Nederland's Adelsboek* does not record ministerial ancestry as a separate category. Cf. W.J.J.C. Bijleveld, *Opmerkingen over de geslachten, behandeld in het Nederland's Adelsboek* [...] (The Hague, 1949).



Maastricht with the Medieval condominium (I) and the liberties of St Servatius (II) and Our Lady's (III)  
 (Source: *Historische Encyclopedie Maastricht*)

some ministerials became knights and noblemen, and France, where they did not exist. Two major contributions in Dutch are the doctoral dissertations by J.M. van Winter (1962) and A.L.P. Buitelaar (1993). Werner Hechberger's postdoctoral dissertation (2005) sums up the historiography of the German debate.<sup>5</sup> In the following section, I will briefly outline some

5 J.B. Freed, 'The origins of the European nobility: the problem of the ministerials', *Viator*, VII (1976) 211-241; B. Arnold, *German knighthood 1050-1300* (Oxford, 1985); Van Winter, *Ministerialiteit*; Buitelaar, *Stichtse ministerialiteit*; W. Hechberger, *Adel im fränkisch-deutschen Mittelalter. Zur Anatomie eines Forschungsproblems* (Ostfildern, 2005). A highly readable summary of Hechberger's dissertation is Iden, *Adel, Ministerialität und Rittertum im Mittelalter* (Munich, 2004).

positions, especially in the controversy between Knut Schulz and other scholars about ‘urban ministerials’. Some fresh light on the latter issue is shed by a recent Dutch doctoral dissertation.<sup>6</sup> Although its author focuses on the land holdings of a collegiate church in Maastricht, the cameo appearances of ministerials in his sources open new perspectives on their bonds to the church and/or the city. The dissertation cursorily mentions an epic composed in Maastricht around 1175 by a poet who is often believed to be a ministerial himself: the *Life of St. Servatius* by Heinrich von Veldeke.<sup>7</sup> Veldeke was commemorated in 2005 and 2006 in several books and exhibitions as a son of the ‘Renaissance of the Twelfth Century’. The role of ministerials in the transnational courtly culture of that era is still a matter of debate. Veldeke’s own ideas on the social status of ministerials will be discussed in the final sections, where I will also attempt to reassess his cultural background.

### German and Dutch research before 2000

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Until 1950, most German studies of ministerials were on legal and institutional matters. Karl Bosl’s postdoctoral dissertation, published in 1950-1951, represents a shift of paradigm. Bosl’s analysis repositioned ministerials as individual agents of state authority rather than as a legal collective with a complicated *status aparte*. Suddenly they appeared everywhere in the medieval German empire, even in the upcoming urban elites (the ‘urban patriariate’) of cities like Trier and Cologne, where the terms *civis* and *ministerialis* in different sources would often refer to one and the same person. In his doctoral dissertation of 1968, a prosopography of ministerials in Trier, Knut Schulz identified a group of ‘urban ministerials’ as a driving force in the city’s political development.<sup>8</sup> Although Schulz later differentiated this category into ‘citizens of ministerial origin and mentality’ and ‘knighthoods and urban nobilities of ministerial origin’, Josef Fleckenstein and other critics still dismiss Schulz’s interpretation, arguing that urban nobilities were defined by a common ideology of knighthood rather than by a shared history of serfdom. H.R. Derschka found that although archepiscopal ministerials in Cologne coexisted and cooperated with citizens in many ways, their role in the city’s political development was hardly significant. In sources from Constance, there were even fewer traces of an elite that could qualify as ‘urban ministerials’.<sup>9</sup>

6 R.A.W.J. Hackeng, *Het middeleeuwse grondbezit van het Sint-Servaaskapittel te Maastricht in de regio Maas-Rijn* (Maastricht, 2006).

7 K. Vivian et al. (eds. and tr.), *The life of Saint Servatius. A dual-language edition of the Middle Dutch legend of Saint Servatius by Heinrich von Veldeke and the anonymous Upper German Life of Saint Servatius* (Lewiston etc., 2006).

8 K. Bosl, *Die Reichsministerialität der Salier und Staufer* (Stuttgart, 1950-1951); H.R. Derschka, *Die Ministerialen des Hochstiftes Konstanz* (Stuttgart, 1999) 14-15; K. Schulz, *Ministerialität und Bürgertum in Trier* (Berlin, 1968); idem, *Die Freiheit des Bürgers. Städtische Gesellschaft im Hoch- und Spätmittelalter* (Darmstadt, 2008) 12.

9 E.g. J. Fleckenstein, ‘Die Entstehung des niederen Adels und des Rittertums’, in: idem (ed.), *Herrschaft und Stand. Untersuchungen zur Sozialgeschichte im 13. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen, 1979) 17-39; Derschka, *Konstanz*, 441-460, 505-506.

Where does Dutch scholarship stand on these matters? Van Winter, who largely followed Bosl's prosopographic approach, was able to demonstrate the existence of urban ministerials as a constitutive element in several cities in Gelria, most notably in Arnhem. As the vast majority of the Gelrian nobility was in fact of ministerial ancestry, it cannot come as a surprise that the 'urban nobility' in these Gelrian cities had a comparable background. Buitelaar found similar conditions in Utrecht, in the Middle Ages an episcopal see under the archepiscopate of Cologne, where an elite of urban ministerials, including the city's burgrave, rose against the bishop at four occasions in 1122, 1133, 1151, and 1159.<sup>10</sup> This may be the best example yet of the emancipation of bondservants into burghers, but the question remains whether 'ministerials' in such different cities as Cologne, Constance, Arnhem and Utrecht should be compared at all. One very early German authority on the subject, Eike von Repgow, himself a ministerial, complains in his *Saxon Mirror* (ca. 1200) about the confusing diversity of ministerial statutes in different jurisdictions.<sup>11</sup>

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### The case of Maastricht

This said, Arnhem and Utrecht are not the only medieval Dutch towns where ministerials are on record. In 1990, for instance, P.N. Noomen reconstructed the manorial antecedents of the city of Groningen. In 1040, the *villa Gruoninga* was described as a manorial estate with serfs (*mancipia*). Until 1139, *villici* (ministerials) administered the town on behalf of the bishop of Utrecht.<sup>12</sup> The sources on Maastricht are a lot richer. Buitelaar quotes a German reference to *servientes* of the chapter of St. Servatius at Maastricht who were subjected to the city's jurisdiction in 1109.<sup>13</sup> Judged by Derschka's standards, however, this record is rather problematic. Firstly, it is a *falsum*. This is made explicit in R.A.W.J. Hackeng's doctoral dissertation (2006), which has superseded Joachim Deeters' study of 1970 as the standard history of this collegiate church and its *familia*.<sup>14</sup> The latter term must be treated with some caution. *Servientes* or members of the *familia* of a church are not *per se* ministerials of that church, as Schulz has assumed in some instances.<sup>15</sup> In the case of St. Servatius, there is yet undeniable evidence that its *familia* included ministerials. In 1166-1167, emperor Friedrich I (Barbarossa) himself addressed this *familia* in an authentic charter as 'the dean, the entire chapter and the ministerials of the church of St. Servatius at Maastricht'.<sup>16</sup>

10 Van Winter, *Ministerialiteit*, 182-185; Buitelaar, *Stichtse ministerialiteit*, 383.

11 E. von Repgow, tr. M. Dobozy, *The Saxon Mirror. A Sachsenspiegel of the fourteenth century* (Philadelphia, 1999) 165.

12 P.N. Noomen, 'Koningsgoed in Groningen. Het domaniale verleden van de stad', in: J.W. Boersma et al. (eds.), *Groningen 1040. Archeologie en oudste geschiedenis van de stad Groningen* (Bedum, 1990) 97-144.

13 J. Deeters, *Servatiusstift und Stadt Maastricht. Untersuchungen zu Entstehung und Verfassung* (Bonn, 1970) 61-64, 114-15, quoted in Buitelaar, *Stichtse ministerialiteit*, 320.

14 Hackeng, *Grondbezit*, 44, 49, 310-311, nr. 96b.

15 Derschka, *Konstanz*, 447 (the *familia S. Petri* at Cologne), 449 (*servientes* of St. Martin and St. Pantaleon at Cologne).

16 Hackeng, *Grondbezit*, 53, 296, nr. 74a; cf. 301-302, nr. 81 (anno 1176).

But were these ministerials of St. Servatius also ‘urban ministerials’? Can they be identified with the *cives in Trajecto* (‘citizens in Maastricht’) mentioned in the *falsum* of 1109? Derschka would disagree. In his analysis, ministerials who live on the compound (the ‘immunity’ or ‘liberty’) of a collegiate church in or on the outskirts of a city, are not *per se* ‘urban ministerials’.<sup>17</sup> Hackeng’s extensive documentation, presented in a separate sourcebook, leaves no doubt either. Maastricht was legally a *condominium*. Jurisdiction was split between the emperor and the bishop of Liège. The liberties of the collegiate churches of Our Lady (in the old Roman *castellum* on the riverside) and St. Servatius (outside the *castellum*) and the *familiae* attached to these churches were under the exclusive jurisdictions of the bishop and the emperor respectively. The relative limits of these jurisdictions were settled by an imperial charter of 1132. Except for those already in the *familia* of Our Lady, all new residents were considered imperial subjects and parishioners of St. Servatius. According to the *falsum*, such *ministri* were not subject to the city’s urban statute and market law.<sup>18</sup>

214 Hackeng’s documentation does not only include legal and administrative sources, but also a twelfth-century literary text written by an insider: the well-known poet Heinrich von Veldeke, who according to his own account worked at Maastricht as a ‘servant’ of St. Servatius. His *Life of St. Servatius*, of which the first full English translation appeared in 2006, also contains important observations on his own social status and on the social differences in the Maastricht of his days. Veldeke claims that he was born at Veldeke (some twenty miles northwest of Maastricht) and that he had adopted St. Servatius as his ‘patron and lord’ before he wrote the *Life*. In terms of the charter of 1132, the immigrant Veldeke thus belonged to the parish and probably to the *familia* of St. Servatius, which means that he was either a canon or a ministerial. Hackeng’s records indeed mention one *Henricus ministerialis* who made a donation to the chapter in 1159. This could or could not be Veldeke’s entry ticket to the *familia* of St. Servatius. In either event, it must be duly noticed that the canon who made a record of this gift was also a Heinrich (*Henricus camerarius*).<sup>19</sup>

What does Veldeke, who probably wrote his epic several decades before Repgow’s *Saxon Mirror*, tell us about the position of ministerials? In Book One, he describes the participants of an early medieval synod in a hierarchic order, beginning with bishops and ending with citizens, ministerials, and commoners. Veldeke is obviously describing the social stratification of his own environment. His list more or less parallels the echelons of feudal society according to Repgow. A precedent of these two descriptions is a list of witnesses to the consecration of the Egmond Abbey church in 1143, also in hierarchical order, from the count of Holland down to the *plebs*. The parallels and differences among these three stratigraphical accounts are shown below:<sup>20</sup>

17 Derschka, *Konstanz*, 505; cf. Buitelaar, *Stichtse ministerialiteit*, 316-325, especially *in voce* Van Lichtenberg.

18 Hackeng, *Grondbezit*, 44, 216, 227, 310-311, nr. 96b; cf. Van Winter, *Ministerialiteit*, 63.

19 Hackeng, *Grondbezit*, 54, 294, nr. 69. With the daughter of one Geldulph, Henricus donates a levy from an *allodium*.

20 Veldeke, *Life*, 29 (*burgher ende dienstman*, translated as ‘burghers and servants’; cf. 139: *die burgher*

Egmond Abbey (1143)	Veldeke (1169?-1184?)	Repgow (~1200)
<i>comes et comitissa</i>	bishops and canons	1. the king
<i>virī clarissimi</i>	abbots and monks	2. princely bishops, abbots, and abbesses
<i>nobiles</i>	margraves and dukes	3. laic princes
<i>liberi</i>	counts and freemen	4. free gentlemen
<i>ministeriales</i>	<i>burgher</i> and <i>dienstman</i>	5. middle freemen
<i>multitudo plebis</i>	commoners	6. servants

It appears that Veldeke's juxtaposition of *burgher* ('citizen') and *dienstman* ('ministerial') is rather unique, although his term *burgher* requires clarification. It appears from a rhyme elsewhere in the *Life* that the accent was on the second syllable (*burg'here*), suggesting that it meant the 'lord' (*hêr*) of a 'borough' (*burg*). In Veldeke's epic *Eneide*, however, *burg(h)ere* is consequently used for the citizens of Troy. Does this mean that Veldeke's citizen/*burgher* was also a *dienstman* and that his list is evidence to the existence of 'urban ministerials' in Maastricht when the *Life* was written? That would be likely if this were a late medieval text, for tautologies are frequent in late medieval Dutch – but apparently not in Veldeke's list. In the latter, bishops are juxtaposed with their underlings: the canons of the cathedral chapters, as are abbots with their monks, margraves with their army commanders, counts with the freemen serving them – and burghers with ministerials.

In twelfth-century Maastricht, the status of a *dienstman* was apparently subordinated to that of a citizen. A literary text written around the same time as the *Saxon Mirror* suggests a different state of affairs in Cologne. In the epic *Guote Gêrhart* by the ministerial Rudolf von Ems, several counts, freemen, ministerials and citizens of Cologne are attending an elite wedding. The host courteously addresses the counts, freemen and ministerials as *mîne herren* ('Messires') and the citizens simply as *mîne burger*. At the occasion of this happy marriage the groom, who is the son of a local merchant (his bride is a princess), is elevated (*sic*) to ministerial rank.<sup>21</sup> Literary insider accounts such as Rudolf's appear to confirm Reggow's contemporary observation that the statute of ministerials, and consequently also their status, varied considerably in different jurisdictions.

### Ministerials in courtly culture

The emancipation from an elite of serfs into one of knights, burghers and barons has been a main theme in the social history of ministeriality since Bosl published his ground-breaking research in 1950. He supposed that the Staufian emperors had empowered ministerials in their *familia* to check and balance the powers of the 'old' aristocracy of counts, dukes, mar-

*ende die dyenstman*, translated as 'burghers and serfs'); Reggow, *Saxon Mirror*, 69; Buitelaar, *Stichtse ministerialiteit*, 291.

21 Quoted in Derschka, *Konstanz*, 450-451.





Heinrich von Veldeke portrayed in the Codex Manesse or Große Heidelberger Liederhandschrift, Zürich, circa 1300-1340 (coll. Universitätsbibliothek Heidelberg)

graves and other *nobiles liberi*. Bosl's hypothesis was imaginative, but hardly supported by prosopographic data. The consensus among contemporary German scholars appears to be that the emancipation of imperial ministerials gained momentum after the demise of the Staufian dynasty in 1250. Around that time, some ministerial families also began to adopt the names of the castles with which they were enfeoffed, rather than the names of the manors where they had been serving.

This changing perspective of the political role of the ministeriality under the Staufians has also influenced the discourse of their share in the emergence of courtly culture in the twelfth century. This new culture included such novel literary genres as chivalresque *chan-*



*sons de geste* and minnesongs. Joachim Bumke has argued convincingly that the division between the mentalities and artistic ideologies of the 'old' and 'new' elites, as postulated by some scholars, was really nonexistent. His stance is summed up in his adage: 'Minnesang war Adelskunst'.<sup>22</sup> In this context, *Adel* includes both the old aristocracy (*Hochadel*) and the new, upcoming knighthood (*Ritteradel*). By his own account, Rudolf von Ems was not only a ministerial but also a *knappe* (squire). His colleague Hartmann von Aue refers to himself as a ministerial and a *ritter* (knight). In the early twentieth century, the Flemish priest Polydoor Daniëls even claimed that Veldeke had been a knight, too, because he is posthumously credited as *hêr* in the *Manesse Codex*, an early fourteenth-century anthology of courtly poetry. Daniëls actually had a political agenda. He was using Veldeke's 'noble' status to enhance the prestige of the Dutch language – the language in which Veldeke had written *The life of St. Servatius*.<sup>23</sup> The fact remains that although the legal statute of ministerials at the Staufian court and elsewhere differed from that of traditional 'noble freemen', their mentality and culture was almost indiscernable from that of the old aristocracy. Heinrich von Veldeke, Rudolf von Ems and Hartmann von Aue are attested as the authors of epics and minnesongs. Some ministerials are also known to have commissioned such works.<sup>24</sup>

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Bumke's study of courtly literature and culture, first published in 1989, is still regarded as a standard text on the subject. On the other hand, it is now gradually being recognised that courtly literature was part of a larger cultural movement: the 'Renaissance of the Twelfth Century'. Veldeke's *Eneide*, written in the vernacular but with a classic theme, is a point in case. Since 2000, scholars in Germany (Helmut Tervooren), the Netherlands (Frits van Oostrom) and Belgium (Jef Janssens) have studied Veldeke and his colleagues in their transnational networks as members of an intellectual class for which only provisional names such as *litterati* or *clerici* exist.<sup>25</sup> Tervooren's account is rather factual, Van Oostrom's visionary and Janssens's at times speculative, but they all agree that courtly literature (in the vernacular) and clerical literature (mostly in Latin, the 'language of the Medieval commonwealth') were two sides of the same coin. Intellectual enclaves such as the liberty of St. Servatius at Maastricht, where Veldeke wrote and perhaps taught (it has been suggested that he is the *Heinricus scholarum magister* mentioned in 1173-1176), were breeding grounds where *clerici* became acquainted with the classics and the arts.<sup>26</sup> On certain

22 Hechberger, *Anatomie*, 404; J. Bumke, *Courtly culture. Literature & society in the high Middle Ages* (Berkeley, 1991) 495.

23 J.D. Janssens, *In de schaduw van de keizer. Hendrik van Veldeke en zijn tijd (1130-1230)* (Zutphen, 2007) 11-21.

24 E.g. Derschka, *Konstanz*, 451.

25 C.H. Haskins, *The Renaissance of the twelfth century* (Cambridge MA, 1927); Bumke, *Courtly Culture*, 492-493 (on *clerici*); H. Tervooren, *Van der Masen tot op den Rijn. Ein Handbuch zur Geschichte der mittelalterlichen volkssprachlichen Literatur im Raum von Rhein und Maas* (Berlin, 2005); F. van Oostrom, 'Veldekes Umwelt', in: idem, *Stemmen op schrift. Geschiedenis van de Nederlandse literatuur vanaf het begin tot 1300* (Amsterdam, 2006) 117-213; Janssens, *In de schaduw*.

26 P.C. Boeren, 'Vragen rondom Hendrik van Veldeke', *Tijdschrift voor Nederlandse Taal- en Letterkunde*, LXXIII (1955) 241-261. Boeren also noticed that Veldeke's epithet *hêr* in the *Manesse Codex* may have referred to his status as a cleric.

festive occasions, they would put their literary talents to rather more carnivalesque use.<sup>27</sup>

As the dean of St. Servatius was always the head of the imperial chancery, talented *clerici* from Maastricht were likely to end up high in the imperial bureaucracy. A Heinrich von Maastricht, for instance, was imperial chaplain, protonotary and chancellor. He died as bishop of Worms in 1192. In 1167, he had travelled to Rome in the company of two former deans of St. Servatius: Reginald von Dassel and Christian von Buch.<sup>28</sup> Reginald was also the patron of the *archipoeta*, an enigmatic cleric whose satirical ‘Confession’ is one of the best-loved parts of the *Carmina Burana*, the famous collection of courtly and not-so-courtly high medieval poems and dramatic texts retrieved in 1803 at Benediktbeuern in Bavaria.<sup>29</sup> One wonders whether Heinrich von Maastricht may have been the *archipoeta*. An even more dazzling hypothesis is invited by Janssens’s observation that although no Latin texts have been identified as Veldeke’s, the poet must have been familiar with the Roman classics, probably even in Latin.<sup>30</sup> I, for one, would not be surprised if some literary scholar were to prove that the *archipoeta* was Veldeke’s Latin *alter ego*.

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- 27 U. Kindermann, ‘Klerikerfeste’, in: G. Gierzt et al. (eds.), *Lexikon des Mittelalters* (Munich, 2002) 1206-1207.  
 28 H. Seibert, ‘Heinrich I. (von Maastricht)’, in: Gierzt et al. (eds.), *Lexikon*, 2087; R. Knipping, *Die Regesten der Erzbischöfe von Köln* (Cologne, 1985), II, nr. 887; cf. Boeren, ‘Vragen’, 247.  
 29 D. Schaller, ‘Archipoeta’, in: Gierzt et al. (eds.), *Lexikon*, 899-900; C. Fischer and H. Kuhn (eds. and tr.), *Carmina Burana* (Munich, 1974) nr. 191.  
 30 Janssens, *Schaduw*, 71; cf. B.H.D. Hermesdorf, ‘Hendrik van Veldeke in het licht der rechtsgeschiedenis’, in: idem, *Recht en taal te hoofde. Opstellen over de ontmoeting tussen Middelnederlandse letteren en Oudnederlands recht* (Zwolle, 1955) 68-103.



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