

Jörg Zedler:

Bayern und der Vatikan

Eine politische Biographie des letzten bayerischen Gesandten am Heiligen Stuhl Otto von Ritter (1909–1934), Paderborn [u. a.] 2013.

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The certificate of acceptance into the diplomatic service of Bavaria in 1887 and the closing of the Bavarian legation to the Holy See decreed by the Hitler regime on 1 June 1934 represent the career benchmarks in the political biography of the diplomat Otto von Ritter.

Born in 1864, Ritter completed his law degree before entering into the foreign service of the Kingdom of Bavaria, which until 1919 maintained six diplomatic missions abroad and three within the German Reich. Ritter's postings reveal the high regard in which he was held from the start by the Bavarian Foreign Office. Initially assigned to the legations in Berlin (from 1889 to 1898) and the Italian state in Rome (until 1903), he assumed his first independent posting in Berne in 1903, before heading the legation in Stuttgart from 1907 to 1909. Ritter's most important post, however, was that of the Bavarian envoy to the Holy See, which he held from 1909 to 1934. Next to Berlin, this was Munich's most important legation, not only because the pope considered Bavaria a Catholic power but also because the two German envoys there – the Bavarian and the Prussian – were formally of equal rank. At all other foreign postings, it was the ambassador of the German Reich who dominated the field. Under the Weimar Republic, the importance of the Roman legation at first continued to grow, since it was the only Bavarian mission abroad that was retained. Moreover, Ritter was the only diplomat of the Central Powers who returned to his pre-World-War-I posting after hostilities had ended. That reveals a great deal about the high esteem in which the Holy See held the state of Bavaria and, above all, Ritter himself.

Against the background of this mutual appreciation, the relations between Bavaria and the Vatican during the first third of the 20th century and their effects on both intra-Bavarian and national issues, as well as on questions of foreign and church policies, occupy the center of this study. The book is divided into three main chapters. The first one analyzes Ritter's socialization and the network of personal relationships that he formed before and during his early diplomatic career. In the process, the significance of private ties for political and diplomatic activity becomes evident and Ritter's personal network is revealed, which he was able to assemble not least because of his noble lineage. The second chapter presents the particular relations between Munich and Rome in the late phase of the monarchy and the

establishmentarian rights of the Bavarian king, which were unique in the German Reich. These contributed to numerous conflicts between state and Church that grew out of the crisis of modernism, conflicts that Ritter was deeply involved in resolving. At the same time, the diplomat sought to effect »atmospheric « improvements: the prince regent's gift of windows for the Sistine Chapel in 1909/1911 and the appointment of a Bavarian bishop to cardinal (a position he had actually intended for Faulhaber, not for Bettinger, in 1914) testified to the success of his efforts. Following Italy's entry into World War I in 1915, Ritter staunchly advocated retaining the German legations to the Holy See in Rome but his plan was vetoed by the Reich Foreign Office. The book's final chapter illuminates the changed relations between state and Curia during the time of the first German democracy as well as the early days of the Nazi regime.

It was thanks to Ritter and Cardinal Secretary of State Pietro Gasparri that the Bavarian legation was retained at all after 1918, less to the efforts of Eugenio Pacelli and not at all to the governments in Munich and Berlin, which had intended to close it down. This was the precondition for the envoy to work on his most important task of the Weimar era, the conclusion of the Bavarian concordat of 1924/1925. Ritter's often-repeated objective was to use this agreement under international law to preserve a residue of Bavarian statehood within the new architecture of the Reich. The pope, for his part, conceived of the treaty from the start as a model concordat, since he expected especially far-reaching concessions from Catholic Bavaria. The intent was to achieve a signal effect for all such subsequent agreements in Europe and Rome extracted accordingly large concessions from Munich. In turn, Ritter succeeded in deflecting French claims on creating a Saar diocese with the help of the Vatican (which would have weakened both the Bavarian and Prussian dioceses in the Saarland and, moreover, influenced the plebiscite that was scheduled for 1935). By this point, the narrow boundaries of Bavarian regional politics had long been transgressed; regional, national, church, and foreign policy considerations became interwoven in the political dealings of all those involved.

In the conditions obtaining under National Socialism, the possibilities for an independent Bavarian church policy narrowed decisively. Ritter attempted – without the approval of Munich and against the will of Berlin – to secure the retention of the legation in Rome. But the same means that had led to success in 1919, and that he once again attempted to employ, failed under the changed circumstances.

The study portrays the diplomat's individual scope of action, his motivation, and his conduct. It succeeds by considering, to an appropriate degree, the overriding political

conditions in the Reich and the state of Bavaria as the parameters that demarcated his actions. By oscillating between individual actions, on the one hand, and church, regional, national, and international political events, on the other hand, the author is able to sound out the opportunities and boundaries encountered by a diplomat representing a *quantité négligeable* – which, in terms of power politics, Bavaria unquestionably was in the early 20th century.

In full awareness of its political weakness vis-à-vis other powers, Bavaria nevertheless attempted to pursue a foreign policy of its own. Relations with the Roman Curia formed a central component of this policy, whose objectives were only gradually, not however substantially, affected by the transformation of the state and governing systems in 1919. The study shows that matters of church policy, which the constitutions of 1871 and 1919 assigned to the individual constituent states (Länder), extended far beyond the religious sphere and into the general political realm, or were instrumentalized for such purposes by the state government.

For Ritter, Reich and Bavarian regional patriotism were not mutually exclusive, as the book's concluding chapter demonstrates. Instead, he considered the strength of German unity to be a product of its diversity. In this view, confident constituent states acted as necessary checks on centralized power and as manifestations of a prospering Germany. As such, it was not a contradiction to serve both Bavaria *and* the German Reich. On another level, the question of competing loyalties only acquired relevance with the fall of King Ludwig III in 1918. Whereas Ritter's allegiance had previously been focused on both monarchy and state, between which he would not have drawn a distinction, thereafter he was loyal to an abstract idea of the Bavarian state that existed independent of any personified representatives. Ritter accepted the new form of state but it was not essential to his service to Bavaria; he became a »republican of reason« (Vernunftrepublikaner). This stance determined not only his relationship to the changing governments in Munich and Berlin, it also outlasted the political caesura of 1933/1934. In that sense, this study also serves as a contribution to the history of mentalities of high-ranking Bavarian civil servants who served during the periods of monarchy, republic, and dictatorship.

When the First *Gleichschaltung* Law of 31 March 1933 and the Law to Rebuild the Reich of 30 January 1934 had taken away Bavaria's status as a state and demoted it to an administrative unit, the story of the last Bavarian foreign mission also ended: that of the legation at the Holy See. What Bavarians had feared in 1871 and 1918 had finally come to pass (at least in the view of Otto von Ritter, who died on New Year's Day 1940): *Finis Bavariae*.