

**Matheus Miller.** *Die Aufzeichnungen des Matheus Miller: Das Leben eines Augsburger Kaufmanns im 17. Jahrhundert.* Augsburg: WiÖÅ,ner Verlag, 2003. ix + 214 pp. EUR 19.80, cloth, ISBN 978-3-89639-381-4.



**Reviewed by** Robert S. Bledsoe

**Published on** H-German (February, 2006)

The ambiguity of the term "Aufzeichnungen" in the title of this publication is exceptionally appropriate, because Safley's work gives us access to a rather curious document. It seems to have begun as an apologia for Miller's early career as a businessman, during which he was excluded from the family business until his father broke from Miller's uncles to start his own company. The text then evolved into a documentation of the most significant events in Miller's life, especially as they related to his family and his status within Augsburg society. Readers seeking numerous anecdotes or a wealth of details about day-to-day life in seventeenth-century Augsburg will be disappointed. However, scholars looking for a document of the interpenetration of the public and the private spheres will find interesting material here, because the text carefully documents Miller's social network within Augsburg society.

Safley first introduced the manuscript presented here to the scholarly world in *Matheus Miller's Memoir: A Merchant's Life in the Seventeenth Century* (2000), a thorough study of the document, which Safley had discovered in the

City Archive of Augsburg in 1987. The text was written on 100 sheets of cheap rag paper cut to a size of about 21 x 16 cm (p. vi). Since Miller was "eine bekannte Figur in Augsburg während des 17. Jahrhunderts, ein reicher Kaufmann und ein frommer Lutheraner, der so gut wie keine Spuren in den Beständen des Stadtarchivs Augsburg hinterliess" (p. vii), it took Safley nearly a decade to complete his research on the memoir. Now Safley has helped make the document available to readers in a publication of the Schwäbische Forschungsgemeinschaft.

The memoir begins with a brief first-person narrative of Miller's life up to his marriage to Anna Maria Warmberger in 1647 (pp. 50-58). It then shifts to a series of entries on his marriages, and the births and deaths in the family; these entries generally include a seemingly ritualized prayer and a list of the accompanying costs. Intermittently the formulaic nature of the entries is expanded to include a description of the event and Miller's response to it. Miller's entry on the death of his first wife in 1654 covers ten pages (pp 70-80). The entries also come to include lists of

New Year's gifts to family and clergy, and information on some of his public activities. One especially notable incident occurs during Miller's service as "Zechpfleger" (a citizen appointed by the city government to oversee the finances of a church). Miller describes what he sees as a misappropriation of funds and an attempt to manipulate the election of the next Zechpfleger to cover it up (pp. 146-152). This section of the text ends rather undramatically with lists of Miller's New Year's gifts for 1681-1685. The text continues from the back (turned upside down) as a list of his and his wives' godchildren. As before, it is not just a list; most entries include the names of the parents and other godparents, as well as a brief description of the events leading to the christening and a prayer asking God's blessing for the child. Despite the disparity of format and information included in the different entries, Miller's desire to map his social network and justify his position in it link all three sections of the text.

Safley has presented us with a well-crafted edition of this manuscript. The volume begins with a brief preface and a 40-page introduction, which is a translation and slightly edited version of the first chapter of his monograph *Matheus Miller's Memoir*. It provides background information on Miller's family, helps the reader understand the significance of the information that Miller gives us about his life, and prepares the reader for the document without unduly imposing Safley's own interpretation of the memoir upon the reader. This section is followed by a brief material description of the document and the editorial guidelines. The text of the manuscript takes up 130 pages of the work. This number is perhaps misleading; throughout the book, text is double-spaced and the annotations, which are in a smaller font, but are also double-spaced, are at the bottom of the page. The annotations, which include complete bibliographical information on Safley's sources, are generally strictly objective. Most give background information on persons mentioned in the text. Other annotations ex-

plain institutions, locations, social and cultural information, biblical references, and unusual vocabulary. The appendix includes three genealogical tables of Miller's family (one each for his extended family, his parent's family and his own), a five-page glossary of words that appear frequently in the memoir, a list of abbreviations that appear in the memoir and the annotations, an extensive bibliography, information on the six illustrations, and an index of persons and places mentioned in the memoir. In all these helpful aids, I found only one error: the third genealogical chart gives the death of his first wife as 28.9.1654 instead of 7.6.1654.

A comparison of passages from Safley's monograph and this edition indicate that Safley has gone back to the manuscript to render a more accurate text. A brief comparison of a passage in which Miller justifies his decision to remarry so quickly after the death of his second wife will suffice to show the type of changes that Safley has made. In Safley's monograph the passage reads:

"Stadt AA, EWA 59, Miller Tagebuch, p. 93: '[...] Denn / mit 6 Kindern alle ledig standes und noch jung und un- / erfahren drei Ehehelten ein Costgeij offene Behauss wegen / der shreibstuben und alles anders bedenken hat nit / gut geheisen ohne Hausmeisterin die sache also angehen / zulossen". [1]

In this edition one finds:

"[107] ... denn mit 6 kindern, alle ledig standes vnd noch jung vnd vnerfahren, drei ehehalten, ein costgänger, offene behaussungen der schreibstuben etc. vnd alles anders bedenken, hatten nit gut geheissen, ohne haußmeisterin die sache also angehen zu lossen, [...]" (p. 138).

We end up with a cleaner and presumably more accurate rendering of the manuscript that includes a more accurate pagination. There is one caveat. Following the editorial guidelines of the series, the text capitalizes only proper names, titles and the beginning of sentences, so we can't be sure exactly how the manuscript looks. However,

the text is an excellent work of editorship. I especially liked having the annotations below the body of the memoir and the inclusion of the glossary at the back of the book. Both facilitate a better understanding of the text. The illustrations, while not essential, are well chosen and nicely reproduced; one can even read the two images of the manuscript that are included.

The edition is an interesting contribution to the growing list of "ego-documents" that have been recovered from this period. Perhaps more than anything else, the publication of this memoir allows us to put Safley's achievement in *Matheus Miller's Memoir* into sharper focus. When doing so, we must conclude that his achievement is truly remarkable. Using a document that is not rich in detail, Safley engaged in a tough hermeneutic game in which he had to establish a framework of expectations for the life of an Augsburg merchant, demonstrate how Miller's document both supports and redefines it, and at the same time elucidate Miller's uniqueness. In both works--his monograph and this edition of the memoir--Safley has given us a fine example of the historian's craft by bringing a wealth of general and local knowledge to bear on one document, a document that enriches our picture and understanding of Augsburg in the seventeenth century in unique ways.

#### Notes

[1]. Thomas M. Safley, *Matheus Miller's Memoir: A Merchant's Life in the Seventeenth Century* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), p. 174.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at <https://networks.h-net.org/h-german>

**Citation:** Robert S. Bledsoe. Review of Miller, Matheus. *Die Aufzeichnungen des Matheus Miller: Das Leben eines Augsburger Kaufmanns im 17. Jahrhundert*. H-German, H-Net Reviews. February, 2006.

**URL:** <https://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=11448>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No  
Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.