As often happens when the best of university study meets with archival research, this volume had its origins in a Hauptseminar led by Prof. Dr. Klaus Militzer at the Ruhr-Universität in Bochum. Though relatively rare in surviving records (since such bookkeeping became administratively useless after a short time and thus was normally discarded), this rich record of municipal expenses for various embassies from Cologne has allowed Militzer to document no less than 125 individual trips for the period 1394–1506/07 (i.e. slightly more than one per year on average). From the Netherlands to Rome, Aachen and Brussels to Vienna, Cologne’s municipal government sent out embassies to negotiate its late medieval trade relations and political alliances – with Bonn, Frankfurt, Koblenz, Mainz, and Liège not surprisingly visited the most.

Written on paper, usually in small folio form, these medieval versions of business expense reports contain a wealth of information about the nature and costs of traveling in the fourteenth century. Written normally in Cologne’s Ripuarian German and containing a generous sprinkling of dialect words (both High as well as Low German), these entries can prove challenging to understand. The forty-page Wörterverzeichnis is immensely helpful in translating the original text into modern German, but most readers will require much page turning between those being read and the back of the book in order to interpret the entries. The currency exchange chart (p. XXXI–XXXII) also serves the reader well, and suggests a remarkably steady rate of exchange of other coinage with the Cologne Pagamentsmark [i.e. Mark guter Pfennige set at the value of six albus] throughout the fourteenth century. The silver Heller, Möhrschen, Tournois, Gulden, Schilde, Kronen, Stüber, Groten and Groschen, and Ducats (in Rome) abound, which gives one a sense of the diversity of communities that trade and diplomacy brought together in this period. Letters of long-distance currency exchange or credit often accompanied embassies (e.g. to Rome, Mainz, Nuremberg, Basel and Vienna) and helped them avoid the risk of highway robbery.

But the most abundant information that can be gleaned from these accounts illustrates the daily routines and needs of embassies while on the road. It will come as no surprise that, just as today, the most significant expenses came from providing food and shelter. Of course the larger the entourage the more expensive the trip, and these varied from a couple of messengers to a large party of high municipal officials and their servants and record keepers. Consumption of meats and spices was strikingly beyond that of the general population, to say the least. Not a single day went by (apart from fast days) that some sort of meat dish was not eaten: beef, oxen, calf, sheep, goat, mutton, lamb,
deer, stag, rabbit, pork (a record survives of a trichinosis inspection before purchase). Fowl were not far behind: chicken above all including eggs, but also geese, doves, ducks, capons, partridges, and to a lesser degree woodcocks, quail, even heron, swan, and starlings. Fish were also consumed every day, from the saltwater variety (herring, cod, kipper) to an amazing variety of freshwater options (carp from fishponds, salmon, pike, crayfish, sturgeon, perch, minnow, trout, and tench). Mussels were desired when one could get them.

Cheese followed meat, fowl, and fish among the proteins (with a curious reference to engelschen Käse in trip 14). Vegetables abound in variety but were less often delineated than the proteins (peas, beans, carrots, rice, turnips, radishes, cabbage in order of preference), while perhaps surprisingly lentils are mentioned only once. Now and again salad is mentioned by the 15th century, but its specific contents remain unspecified. Almost every account mentions the purchase of onions and parsley (needed for the preparation of most dishes), but fennel appears one time only. Fruits (apples above all, then pears, nuts, and seasonal purchase of cherries, plums, strawberries, figs while dates, melons, grapes, peaches are rarely mentioned) and raisins appear constantly in the expense lists. Bread completes the list (though rarely defined beyond white and rye), while delicacies like flatbread, Stollen, torts, cakes, sugarbread, gingerbread, Pfeffernüsse, and buttered bread rolls were clearly eaten with gusto. Generous amounts of wine washed down these feast foods in the south (though only sometimes distinguished as white or red), while beer was naturally the drink of choice in the north (rarely distinguished by type at all). That some vouchers declared expenses for hops and »brewing wood« suggests that some of the ambassadors themselves had a penchant for brewing on the road.

Of course all this rich dining was not for the embassy alone, but rather indicates that it often hosted its counterparts as an extension of negotiations. If the trip took them either up or down the Rhine, for example, the ships were outfitted with such supplies for hospitality in the form of on-board feasts (often with additional local victuals and cooking wood or coal purchased from local inns). Larger embassies brought along a cook and kitchen servants, while smaller embassies hired culinary help on site. Cologne’s ambassadors seem to have had a sweet tooth for pastries of all sorts and candied fruit or anis-flavored confectionaries in particular, which they also gave as gifts. Envoy’s often presented to their hosts a Cologne specialty: the Schöffenkuchen, which suggests the employment of a pastry chef as well.

When the negotiations and feasting ended for the day, our travelers were typically put up in public houses and inns (paid for with slaffgelt) or on occasion were hosted by a wealthy merchant. Inns always charged them extra for both candles and washing water. On their free time these ambassadors went for touchups at the local barber (shaves, haircuts, beard trimming, and baths), and regularly visited the apothecary for relief of various traveling maladies with which any traveler today could relate. To while away the down time there were purchases of chess pieces, playing cards, and game pieces of varying sorts. And even on occasion miscellaneous expenses included restocking the supply of paper, ink, parchment, and sealing wax.

Since embassies of municipal secretaries or chancellors never went on foot, surely those comprised of
Cologne’s *Ratsherren* also enjoyed the benefit of conveyance. Horses were the usual means of travel on land, which could prove very expensive: each horse needed fully outfitted at the outset, and repairs to equipment, feeding, stabling, and sickness en route could amount to significant additional expenses. Travelers themselves needed appropriate outfitting for riding in all types of weather (as embassies traveled in every season), and their dress clothes for post-travel negotiations had to be transported while kept immaculate in leather sacks or barrels. Transport was also required for the chests containing protected charters as well as gifts for their counterparts, all safely preserved in their own leather coverings. Depending on the route taken, wagons were employed instead of horses, and often carts were rented to carry chests and clothing. Hence wagoners’ and carters’ fees added to travel expenses. Ships were the natural conveyance of choice for trips to cities along the Rhine, so various shipmen were hired and their ships outfitted for the journey: if the trip were up the Rhine, the embassy incurred an additional charge for horse service so that the ship could be towed against the current. Contracting everything from skiffs to large »market ships« our intrepid travelers could also count on regularly scheduled shipping routes between Mainz and Koblenz or Mainz and Frankfurt to speed them up the river. Overland travel met water passages virtually every day in this region of Europe, so additional fees were incurred for bridge tolls and ferryboat conveyance.

The last two major expenses reported by embassies to the Cologne government were for gifts and safe escorts. *Trinkgeld* played a major role in negotiations and so proved to be a major cost in pursuing agreements and alliances. From the *letzte*, the ritual departing drink at the gates of Cologne, to personal gifts all around, kindnesses and the ritual of mutual hospitality were a foundational aspect of negotiations. Following the dictum »never arrive empty-handed«, Cologne’s ambassadors came heavy laden with golden goblets, gold coins, and jewels – not just for aristocratic and urban patricians but also for their entire entourages from heralds and singers to jesters and doorkeepers. The goodwill of the entourages and the mood of hospitality and generosity created by gift giving worked as much as the feasting and drinking to create an environment of conviviality conducive to successful negotiations. The three trips to Rome in particular make clear how important – and expensive – such giving was in gaining access to those who could grant the privileges sought by the embassy. Finally, in the same spirit of generosity, small sums were constantly given out for alms along the way *umb goitz wille*, especially for the poor and lepers and to priests to say a mass for the success of the embassy: *Item armenn luyden, den malatenn ind dem priester, myssen zo lesen: 6 blaffert* [blaffert being a Swiss coin worth about 4 albus, as this embassy was in Basel at the time]. Safe conduct was the converse side of this coin of hospitality, as protection was needed in those zones where hospitality was distinctly lacking (i.e. where feuds or enemies lurked). Various lords or allied cities provided this travel assistance at a cost, providing anywhere from one man to retinues of five to six armed soldiers depending on need. There are no reports of any Cologne embassy being imprisoned or assaulted, which suggests that these trips were well planned in advance along these lines. Though accounts now and again contain expenses for sharpening swords, the ambassadors were never heavily armed beyond a personal sword.

Accounts of sickness or death while on the road are remarkably few, given the century we are dealing
with here. There are more reports of bad weather hindering travel than sickness, with only a handful of references to anything beyond usual travel illnesses. A broken leg, kidney stones, and the use of Pestpilien to ward off an outbreak of plague in the Netherlands (whatever these pills were, none of the emissaries caught the infection) remain the only accounts unusual enough to mention. There is, however, an array of other curiosities that meet the reader along the way, such as the meal in Basel hosted by a deacon from England who was apparently en route to Rome in 1434 to be consecrated as a bishop – who would not like to know how these parties met up in Basel and what precipitated a shared meal? But perhaps the most striking curiosity was the standard practice among Cologne embassies of hiring a painter to emblazon the city’s coat of arms on the houses where they were sojourning abroad – apparently in an effort to declare the presence of Cologners to the locals. Although one has to wonder how often a local innkeeper refused to allow such a display on his building, the practice is recorded as far afield as Nuremberg, Heidelberg, Basel, Lübeck, Ulm, Maastricht, and Louvain: Item eyme mayre, de wapen zo malen ind bret darzo, 1 Mark, 6 Shillinge. Such behavior was normally reserved for nobility or territorial lords, and one has to wonder what officials in cities like Lübeck must have made of such a display of Cologner pride and self-confidence.

This brief survey only begins to scratch the surface of the socio-economic, religious, cultural, and political information and insights that can be gleaned from this volume. Prof. Dr. Militzer has produced yet another excellent work of scholarship, complete with supporting information in the footnotes, bibliography, and indexes that make the book extremely easy to navigate. Given the incalculable catastrophe that has just befallen the Cologne Stadtarchiv, the preservation of this part of its former medieval collection as an edited publication seems all the more profound. And so we should thank Prof. Dr. Militzer and the Gesellschaft für Rheinische Geschichtskunde for producing a legacy from the Stadtarchiv by including this volume in the society’s »Publikationen« series.