Fiona Vicent:
“Bourgeois Genealogical Diagrams”

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cache 03

SHADOW OF THE TREE

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BOURGEOIS GENEALOGICAL DIAGRAMS
Representative Family Trees

Out of a green grassy patch grows the trunk of a tree, surrounded by three coats of arms which, according to small stone inscriptions next to them, have been given by three emperors to Andreas, Eusebius, and Nicolaus Bischoff, the designated progenitor of the Bischoff family who was born in 1501. Leaves are placed along the trunk, mentioning the names and life dates of Bischoff family members, from the generation of Nicolaus and his siblings up to his descendants born in the first half of the nineteenth century. A close look at the leaves reveals that to some of them, certain capital letters were added. These refer to certain professions, as the legend beneath the tree explains. For example, the letter A refers to doctors, surgeons, or professors, while the letter B refers to printers and book sellers, while the other letters stand for theologians, military men, salesmen, administrators, and politicians. The diagram illustrates the growing of the Bischoff family, and it also provides information about the high ranks and important professions held by Bischoff family members, indicating the family's significance in domains like medicine, religion, warfare, economics, and politics. The Bischoff family tree is not the only genealogical diagram by Basel's bourgeois elite families (the so-called *Daig*) that tries to convey information about status; we can find similar illustrations for other families as well. In general, many of these families produced vast amounts of genealogical material, pointing towards a strong genealogical consciousness.



Hieronymus Bischoff-Bischoff: *Family Tree of the Bischoff Family* (19th c.), after a manuscript of his father Hieronymus Bischoff-Buxtorf [79.5 x 98.5cm], Basel: Staatsarchiv Basel-Stadt PA 818a D 7.

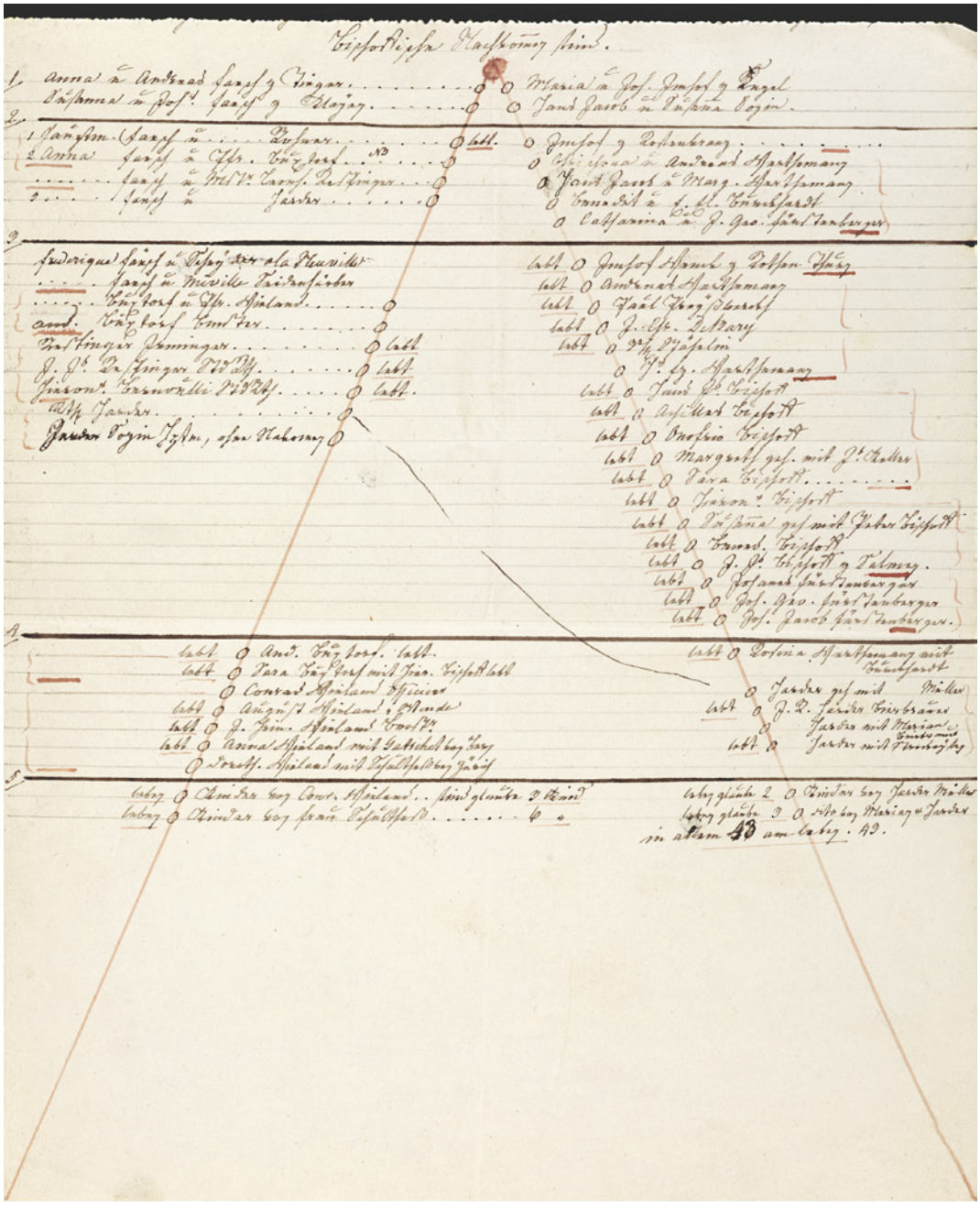


Detail from Hieronymus Bischoff-Bischoff: *Family Tree of the Bischoff Family* (19th c.), after a manuscript of his father Hieronymus Bischoff-Buxtorf [79.5 x 98.5cm], Basel: Staatsarchiv Basel-Stadt PA 818a D 7.

The tree's leaves mention the names and life dates of the descendants of Nicolaus Bischoff, the designated *"Stammvater"* of the Bischoff family. Some leaves bear the inscription of capital letters – these refer to certain professions. A different hand added lines (mostly with red colored pencil) to separate the generations from each other.

BOURGEOIS GENEALOGICAL DIAGRAMS
Relating Living to Dead

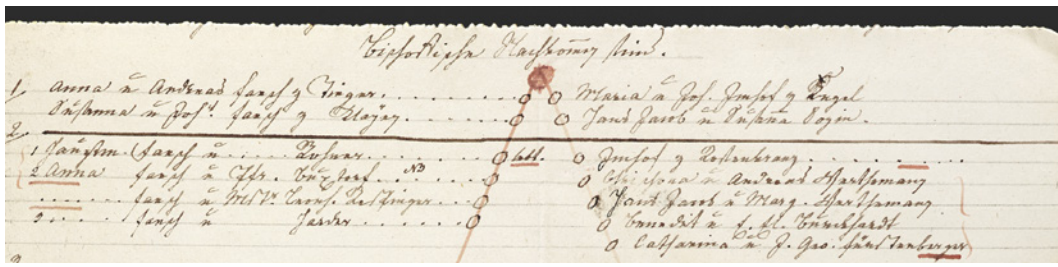
While the Bischoff family tree with its trunk, branches, and leaves looked rather arborescent, imitating the appearance of a biological tree, another diagram concerning the Bischoff family stands in stark contrast to it. This other diagram is reminiscent of the shape of a triangle; its composition does not resemble the graphics we would most often associate with genealogy, such as family trees or pedigrees. Like those genealogical diagrams, it tries to convey information about who relates to whom with lines that connect descendants with their ancestors, but besides that, this diagram here remarks who was still alive when the diagram was composed – its lines relate the living to the dead.



Hieronymus Bischoff-Buxtorf: *Bischoffische Nachkommen sind* [Bischoff Descendants are] (ca. 1810s) [22 x 27cm], Basel: Staatsarchiv Basel-Stadt PA 818a D5.

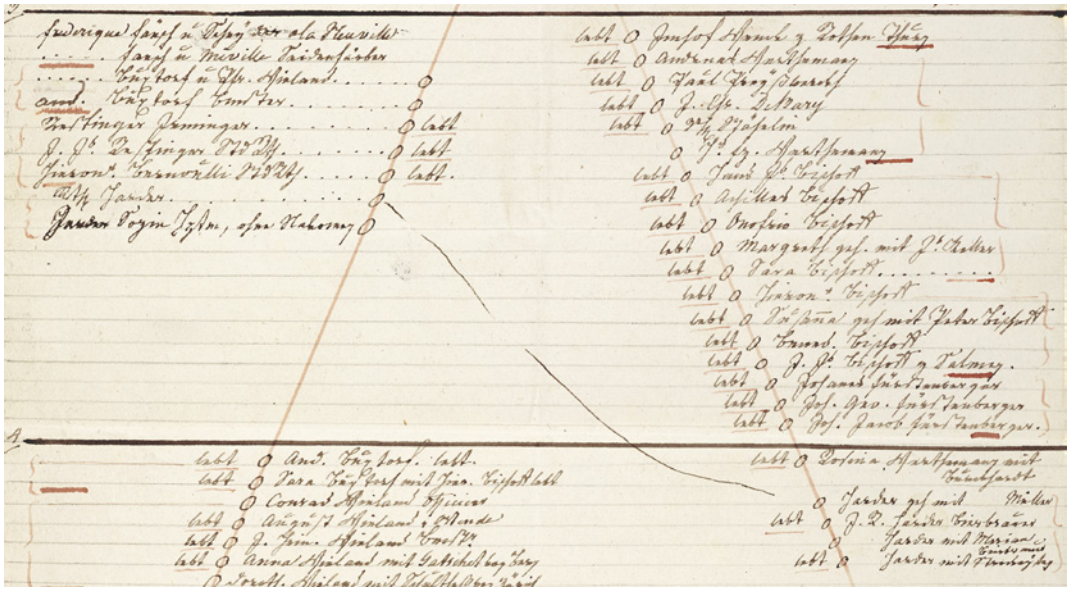
The author of the diagram was Hieronymus Bischoff-Buxtorf (1762–1828). In his younger years, he was trained in commerce and later became an active member of Basel's city council. He was married to Sara Buxtorf, the major's daughter. Hieronymus had a keen interest in genealogy: he engaged in genealogical research and wrote a "Stamm Register der Familie Bischoff in Basel," a textual narrative that explained the lineage of the Bischoff family in Basel.[1] He collected genealogical information from various sources and produced many

notes that must have inspired the conceptualization of the Bischoff family tree and which are still preserved today. Among them we find this triangular-shaped diagram.[2] Entitled *Bischoff'sche Nachkommen sind* (Bischoff Descendants are), it lists the descendants of Hans Jacob Bischoff (1646–1719) and Maria Socin (1654–1695), but this fact is not explicitly mentioned. Only the notes on the backside of the document reveal this information. Hans Jacob and Maria were the great-grand parents of Hieronymus Bischoff-Buxtorf. They are represented by the big red dot at the tip of the graphic, and the four names beneath this dot represent their children: Anna and Susanna Bischoff with their husbands on the left, Maria and Hans Jacob Bischoff with their spouses on the right. They constitute the first generation, as indicated by the number one on the left margin. In the second generation follow the children of these four siblings with their spouses, in the third generation their grandchildren, and so forth. The diagram is basically a register of the generations descending from Hans Jacob Bischoff and Maria Socin. However, the composition of the diagram does not clearly illustrate who descends from whom, at least not at first sight. Only the red braces that group together siblings, paired with a close look at the surnames provide hints to discern the lines of descent.



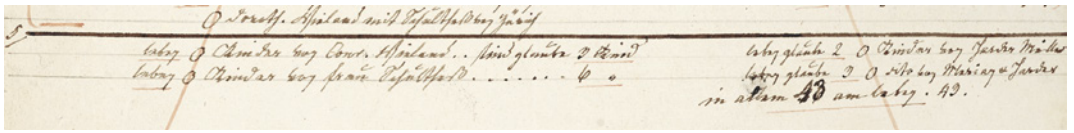
Detail from Hieronymus Bischoff-Buxtorf: *Bischoffische Nachkommen sind* [Bischoff Descendants are] (ca. 1810s) [22 x 27cm], Basel: Staatsarchiv Basel-Stadt PA 818a D5.

Usually, the children follow on the same side of the triangular shape as their parents, but the children born to a certain "*Rath[sherr] Harder*" were inconsistently included at the wrong side, which is why a shaky, diagonal line cuts across the diagram to connect the children on the right to their father on the left. We might assume that Hieronymus Bischoff did not always include all the parents' children: the ratio between the people included in the third and the fourth generation on the right side seems to be out of proportion. It might be that only a few people of the fourth generation were already married and having children at the time when Hieronymus Bischoff-Buxtorf drew the diagram, so that he decided to exclude those without offspring. Or he might simply not have had any more information about additional descendants. Hieronymus Bischoff-Buxtorf himself is also included in the graphic: he can be found at the right side in the third generation. His wife Sara is mentioned in the fourth generation on the left side. In a way, the diagram shows that he and his wife descended from the same shared ancestors, Hans Jacob Bischoff and Maria Socin.



Detail from Hieronymus Bischoff-Buxtorf: *Bischoffische Nachkommen sind* [Bischoff Descendants are] (ca. 1810s) [22 x 27cm], Basel: Staatsarchiv Basel-Stadt PA 818a D5.

One of the most prominent features of the diagram is the remark "lebt": It seems that Hieronymus Bischoff-Buxtorf explicitly marked those people who were still living at the time when he composed the diagram, probably in the 1810s. At the bottom, he concluded that 43 descendants of Hans Jacob Bischoff and Maria Socin were still alive at that point. Thus, the diagram registers the living (and therefore the people who might be able to provide more genealogical information for him) and relates them via the two lines to their dead ancestors. Apparently, Hieronymus Bischoff-Buxtorf needed more genealogical information, as the data he provided for the last generation, the fifth one at the bottom of the triangular shape, was rather unspecific. Here, Hieronymus Bischoff-Buxtorf did not (or was not able to) provide any names. For example, he only noted "children of Conrad Wieland, there are, I think, three of them."



Detail from Hieronymus Bischoff-Buxtorf: *Bischoffische Nachkommen sind* [Bischoff Descendants are] (ca. 1810s) [22 x 27cm], Basel: Staatsarchiv Basel-Stadt PA 818a D5.

Why Hieronymus Bischoff-Buxtorf drew the diagram in the first place is hard to tell. As there is no text available that would provide any information on how to read and interpret the diagram, we might assume that it was not intended to be read by a larger audience. Besides illustrating the descendants of Hans Jacob Bischoff and Maria Socin, a key feature of this diagram is its emphasis on those people that were still alive in contrast to those that were not anymore and to relate them to each other. Following Fenella Cannell, we can observe how genealogy "reconnects the living to their dead as kin,"[3] as they are placed along the same line that also connects them to each other. The dead may be gone, but they are nonetheless the ancestors of those still living. Another important feature of the diagram is its snapshot character: Hieronymus Bischoff counted 43 living descendants, presumably back in the

1810s. We can only speculate why this was an important observation for him. Maybe he planned a family reunion, or he needed the names of those living people for his further genealogical writings. The definitive motivation for drawing and using the diagram thus remains unknown.

Notes

1 Hieronymus Bischoff-Buxtorf: "Stamm Register der Familie Bischoff in Basel (Episcopius). Mit historischen & biographischen Notizen. Von uralter, vormals verschiedener Abkunft", manuscript, early 19th. c., Staatsarchiv Basel-Stadt, PA 818a D9.
2 Hieronymus Bischoff-Buxtorf: *Bischoffische Nachkommen sind* [Bischoff Descendants are] (ca. 1810s), Basel: Staatsarchiv Basel-Stadt PA 818a D5.
3 Fenella Cannell: "English Ancestors: The Moral Possibilities of Popular Genealogy", in: *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 17 (2011), pp. 462–480, p. 465.

Further Readings

Volker Bauer: "Baum und Zeit Datenorganisation, Zeitstrukturen und Darstellungsmodi in frühneuzeitlichen Universalgenealogien", in: Achim Landwehr (eds.): *Frühe Neue Zeiten. Zeitwissen zwischen Reformation und Revolution*, Bielefeld: Transcript (2012), pp. 41–82.

Mary Bouquet: "Family Trees and their Affinities: The Visual Imperative of the Genealogical Diagram", in: *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 1/2 (1996), pp. 43–66.

Leonardo Broillet, Claire Gantet: "A Ridiculous Science? Genealogical Practices and Techniques in a Society without its own Nobility in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries", in: Jost Eickmeyer, Markus Friedrich, Volker Bauer (eds.): *Genealogical Knowledge in the Making,* Berlin: De Gruyter (2019), pp. 23–46.

Christiane Klapisch-Zuber: "The Genesis of the Family Tree", in: *I Tatti Studies in the Italian Renaissance* 4 (1991), pp. 105–129.

Philipp Sarasin: *Stadt der Bürger: Bürgerliche Macht und städtische Gesellschaft*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht (1997).

Fiona Vicent: "Abstammung zelebrieren: Das 'Erinnerungsfest' zum 400-jährigen Geburtstag des Stammvaters der Familie Burckhardt am 14. September 1890", in Michael Hecht, Elisabeth Timm (eds.): *Genealogie in der Moderne: Akteure - Praktiken - Perspektiven*, Berlin: De Gruyter Oldenbourg (2022), pp. 129–156.