Michael Jebsen 1835-1899: Reeder und Politiker: Eine Biographie has been reviewed by the prestigious Journal of Central and Eastern Germany History [Jahrbuch fur die Geschichte Mittel- und Ostdeutschlands], vol. 55, 2009, pp. 327-330:

"Georg Michaelis, one of the last and least studied Imperial chancellors, is usually seen as one modern German history's "great unknowns". His brief term of office during the turbulent summer and autumn of 1917 is dismissed as a mere footnote in the twilight of the second Reich. Michaelis' 1922 memoirs, published under the dry title For State and People, and a handful of biographical sketches - the best and most important one by Rudolf Morsey - have hitherto offered the most illuminating portrait of this obscure and somewhat enigmatic personality. The conventional, complacent view is dramatically challenged in Georg Michaelis, Bert Becker's extraordinary new biography. The book, a labour of almost fifteen years, is both monumental in scope and rich in detail, leaving the reader almost nothing to wish for. It is the biography of a vastly underrated figure who bestrode the pinnacle of German politics during a tumultuous and decisive period in the nation's history, and who is justly deserving of new interest and appreciation from scholars of modern history. Distilling a vast trove of unpublicised and, until now completely unknown primary and secondary sources in no fewer than 40 different archives and libraries, and family documents, Becker offers a wealth of fascinating new insights that paint a radically new picture of Michaelis, recasting the dramatic life and deeds of one of Germany's most undervalued politicians.

From 1885 to 1889 Michaelis taught German state and administrative law in Tokyo to Japan's future lawyers and government officials - with profoundly important results. Becker, who teaches history at the University of Hong Kong, has thoroughly explored this important chapter in Michaelis' life, demonstrating that this rather junior but extremely ambitious law teacher not only soon learned to adapt to the conditions and needs of his host country but also played a small but nevertheless remarkable role in the creation of the modern Japanese legal system.

Because Michaelis' fourteen-week chancellorship was one of the shortest of all he is generally labelled a political failure. But such an accusation falls short, as Becker amply demonstrates. He argues instead that Michaelis was neither a grossly incompetent administrative officer without any aptitude for political manoeuvring nor a supposedly pliant and supine tool of Hindenburg, Ludendorff, and the Army Supreme Command, as has often been claimed. In common with both his predecessor and his two successors, Michaelis failed simply because the immense difficulties facing the office holder proved even more daunting under wartime conditions than during peacetime.

All this Becker reconstructs in a rather too-detailed but nevertheless excellent biography, written with unsurpassed thoroughness. The author does not shrink from discussing Michaelis' undoubted shortcomings. For political historians the chapter dealing with Michaelis' short term as chancellor between July and November 1917 is naturally the most important and, for obvious reasons, the most comprehensive.
Important documents in Michaelis’ personal archive, evaluated here for the very first time, allow the thwarted chancellor's personal views to come into their own. Other chapters offer revealing information on topics as diverse as the cultural history of the Wilhelminian bureaucracy, the development of Protestant piety during and after the turn of the century, the rural-based life reform movement and the history of German social politics during a memorable epoch. In this fashion, the "forgotten imperial chancellor" does indeed emerge from the shadows - but from a new and dramatically different perspective."