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Arjan van Dixhoorn and Susie Speakman Sutch (eds.), The Reach of the Republic of Letters: Literary and Learned Societies in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe (Leiden and Boston: Brill 2008) [Brill's Studies in Intellectual History 168]. 2 volumes: (1) xiv + 255 pp.; (2) vi + 520 pp., ISBN 978-90- 04-16955-5, €149,00.

The thirteen case studies presented in the volumes under review, reveal complex corporate structures of communication between vernacular literary and learned organizations of the fourteenth through seventeenth centuries. The studies expose formalized intellectual gatherings within urban settings that were closely attached to other forms of regional community life, such as confraternities and guilds. From Granada to Freiburg im Breisgau, and from Rome to the Low Countries, the learned were driven to form corporations for different reasons: as part of festive cultures, to satisfy professional objectives, for religious motives. By focusing empirically on the research of goals, internal procedures and political interplay of the various associations, the authors challenge the prevailing assumption that such gatherings owed their rise to Italian humanism. The book shows in contrast that the traditions include urban

conventions in the francophone regions beginning in Arras and Valenciennes of the early thirteenth century.

Out of all the detailed samples, three highly different types of societies reveal the variety captured in this volume: The pre-humanist Consistori del Gay Saber of Toulouse (1323-c. 1484) is one of the many late medieval associations forming around the presentation of vernacular poetry (pp. 17-32); the humanist Roman Academy, founded by Pomponio Leto before 1468 portrays an early model of humanist academies (pp. 181-218); and the professional associations of lawyers in the Southern Low Countries during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries represent later hybrid forms that were joining guilds with confraternities (pp. 337-352).

Starting as an 'informal school of Occitan poetry and language' (p. 18) in the tradition of troubadours, the Toulouse Consistori went public in 1324 with a poetry contest. Laura Kendrick states in her paper that by 1341 a well established form of regulations, centered on modes of contesting, was in circulation. A prize in the open annual poetry contest was now the first step in a graduation process through public examination of the candidates, which led to the 'distinction of bachelor or doctor of joyous knowledge' (pp. 25-26).

Similarly informal, without even the need to establish statutes, Susanne de Beer reveals that one of at least two Roman Academies (p. 189) was founded before 1468 as a regular meeting of citizens craving beautiful Latin verses and Roman antiquity in general. Their gathering place was the house of the university rhetorician and Latin teacher Pomponio Leto on the Quirinal (p. 185). Different from the Consistori, this Academy did not search for an audience among the general public of Rome, nor did it promote festive events or other gatherings accessible to outsiders. The Roman Academy of Pomponio Leto might have remained a non-political entity were it not for the individual involvement of high ranked members of the church.

In contrast to conducting activities and exercises aimed at refining the mind, guilds of learned professionals like teachers or lawyers were founded to strengthen social networks among related professions in a town. The southern Low Countries saw these types of learned corporations increasing only in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, after they had long been established in Italy, since the thirteenth century, and in France, since the fourth century (pp. 338-340). Hilde de Ridder-Symoens argues in her paper that these guilds owe their rise to the cult of Saint Yves as patron saint of law.

A summary appraisal can stress without doubt the quality of the work: papers, introduction and epilogue are well researched in detail; arguments are pondered thoroughly. The synoptic epilogue (pp. 423-463) includes results of the papers into a general overview and state of the art of European traditions. Research on notions and concepts, like ideas of performance (passim), civic virtue (Henk Th. van Veen, pp. 285-308), or indeed, organizational forms like the academy, are carefully based on micro-structures and placed in a variety of societal, geographical and chronological environments. A short allusion to the hidden Leitmotiv, performative cultures, shall serve to depict one great value of this book for the discussion of early modern learned societies. From the beginning, in late medieval civic and clerical behaviour up to a fatal clash in the Florentine Academy of Umidi in 1547 (Inge Werner, pp. 257-284), to interurban contests of the Chambers of Rhetoric in the Northern Netherlands in 1606 (Arjan van Dixhoorn, pp. 119- 157), to festive activities in the Academies of the City of Granada in the seventeenth century (Francisco J. Álvarez, Ignacio García Aguilar and Immaculada Osuna, pp. 309-336), a major part of the papers presented center their argumentation on public performance. Notes on the Florentine Umidi even show the importance of entertainment and public viewers for the functioning of the academy: performance dates for a poetry presentation were altered and then cancelled, because a street acrobat lured

away the audience (pp. 257-259). Corporations of the learned thus played their part in urban event culture.

The notion with the most ambiguous interpretation lies in the title of the work: The Reach of the Republic of Letters. As a description of the underlying European web of learned Latin speakers and with it, the fruitful thought of overlapping bilingualism in early modern civic society (p. 13), the title does not, with exception for the discussion in the Epilogue (pp. 442-452), sustain the major threads of argumentation in the papers. Though, taken as a formal aid to confine the period of time and social group the notion 'Republic of Letters' is very helpful to allude to the learned as a main group and actors in all the research papers. The papers provide not only examples for the organization and visibility of the learned groups in urban settings, but also of their partly vernacular partly public output, in the forms of poetry, oration and social actions like teaching, helping the poor, and not least, feasts and festive events. They reveal, through example, individually diverse and highly complex interconnectivities, qualities that would be lost in a mere collection of data.

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