The Key to Power? The Culture of Access in Princely Courts, 1400–1750.
Dries Raeymaekers and Sebastiaan Derks, eds.
Rulers and Elites 8. Leiden: Brill, 2016. xiv + 352 pp. $175.

From the outset, early modernists have had difficulty incorporating Europe's princely courts into their larger interpretations of the period. No one has doubted the topic's importance (how could they, faced with *The Courtier*, *Hamlet*, "Las Meninas," and so many other court-centered cultural monuments?), and Jacob Burckhardt devoted most of *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* to principalities; only one of his chapters deals specifically with "The Republics: Venice and Florence." But the princely courts also fit awkwardly into the modernization narratives that Burckhardt himself helped establish and that structured the field into the 1970s. With their social inequalities, despotic politics, and indifference to capitalist modes of production, the courts have no obvious place in genealogies of our own mercantile and democratic world. Conversely, the post-1970 collapse of modernization narratives has encouraged historians to explore court society on its own terms, as a specific social and political formation rather than a way station on the route to our own era. The result has been a flowering of scholarship on the courts, exemplified by the 1995 creation of the Society for Court Studies and its journal *The Court Historian*.

The Key to Power? is a significant addition to this developing historical literature. It includes an introductory overview and ten monographic essays dealing with specific courts, each focusing on the mechanisms by which the less powerful won the attention of the great, or were blocked from doing so. As the collection's title suggests, that line of inquiry is especially appropriate to political history, centering as it does on the influences that shaped princes' decision-making. But the question of access also opens onto wider perspectives, for the politics of access can't be separated from other features of court life. The collection's subtitle emphasizes those wider perspectives by identifying a "culture of access." The term suggests the complex array of resources from which early modern power emerged and through which it was channeled.

The collection's impressive chronological, geographic, and thematic coverage matches that claim. The essays range from the Hundred Years' War through the mid-eighteenth century, and they cover most regions of Europe, including understudied ones like the Ottoman Empire and Scandinavia; only the Hispanic world is missing. Most importantly, the essays address a wide array of themes and circumstances. There are studies of big states and small ones, and (in Florence Berland's essay on fifteenth-century Paris) one examination of nonstate princely houses as well. Audrey Truschke's essay shows us Europeans in Asia, attempting (and mainly failing) to understand the workings of the Mughal court. Ronald Asch explores the intense emotional attachments that often accompanied favor and access; his essay has the further virtue of highlighting the survival of court mechanisms in parliamentary regimes like those of eighteenth-century England and early twentieth-century Germany. Spatial arrangements and architecture provide

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the focus for Michael Talbot's essay on the Ottomans, and Christina Antenhofer's essay combines that interest with a subtle exploration of visual art at the Mantuan court. Jonathan Spangler's essay on France offers a sociology of those who controlled access to the king; they were generally from the high nobility, Spangler shows, but that apparent success weakened connections between the grandees and the provincial nobles, thus weakening the order as a whole.

As the editors explain, the authors have deliberately avoided social or political theorizing, and the collection includes no attempt to compare early modern cultures of access with examples from other times and places. That interpretive reticence extends to some purely early modern issues as well. For instance, only two of the authors directly address the question of princely absolutism, a question that lurks in any discussion of early modern states, and they offer opposing views: Mark Hengerer, in a subtle account of the Habsburg court, dismisses the concept as inappropriate to early modern realities, whereas Fabian Persson (in his equally impressive account of Swedish developments) treats the installation of absolute rule as a fundamental reality. *The Key to Power?* leaves theorizing and comparison to the reader—but its finely crafted examinations of specific situations offer abundant encouragement for doing so.

Jonathan Dewald, *University at Buffalo, SUNY*

La mobilità sociale nel Medioevo italiano: Competenze, conoscenze e saperi tra professioni e ruoli sociali (secc. XII–XV). Lorenzo Tanzini and Sergio Tognetti, eds. I libri di Viella 220. Rome: Viella, 2016. 458 pp. €44.

In recent years, social mobility has been at the forefront of historical research, notably in Continental Europe. Scholars working on the late Middle Ages, in particular, have started to explore the dynamism of medieval society with renewed interest, often drawing from more fluid notions of social spaces provided by anthropologists and sociologists. This has brought specialists to adopt more flexible interpretations of the factors that led to social promotion, while also reflecting on the interplay between individual agency and social structures, and on the performative role of social representations. Italian historiography has been playing a prominent part in this revived interest in social mobility, largely thanks to a national research project of which the volume in question represents but the first outcome (http://prin.mobilitasociale.uniroma2.it/en/).

The volume collects papers that were delivered over the course of one year at the University of Cagliari. The papers were presented at different seminars, but they are all concerned with assessing how and to what extent intellectual knowledge, professional expertise, and technical skills functioned as channels of social mobility. This is evident from the very structure of the book, which is divided into four subsections, each focusing on the theme of a single seminar. In the end, this makes the volume very ac-

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