

Bruno Blondé, Marc Boone and Anne-Laure Van Bruaene (eds.), *City and Society in the Low Countries, 1100–1600*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018. xvii + 303pp. 16 figures. Bibliography. Index. £75.00 hbk. £24.99 pbk. doi:10.1017/S0963926821000341

The highly dynamic urban society of the late medieval and early modern Low Countries has inspired much research, resulting in notable works like *Medieval Bruges* edited by Brown and Dumolyn (2018). However, studies of the general developments of urban society in the Low Countries as a whole are uncommon. *The Promised Lands* by Blockmans and Prevenier (1999) has a wider geographical scope, but this study is limited to the Burgundian period and not exclusively to urban developments. The monumental volume *City and Society in the Low Countries, 1100–1600* therefore is a very welcome addition to the historiography of the Low Countries. In seven chapters, plus an introduction and epilogue, by leading scholars on the urban history of the Low Countries, it covers general developments in economy, social relations, religion, urban infrastructure, material culture as well as knowledge and education between 1100 and 1600.

After an introduction by the editors Blondé, Boone and Van Bruaene, which describes the urban historiography of the Low Countries, chapter 2 by Blockmans, De Munck and Stabel explores the Low Countries' exceptional economic vitality. The urban population of the region grew thanks to a strong rural basis and access to waterways enabling cheap transport; a diverse resilient urban network of many medium-sized towns formed. Corporations, formed by middling groups of artisans, peddlers and shopkeepers, fought for market and production regulations. They argue, however, this did not hinder innovation and growth as is sometimes assumed. In the third chapter, Blondé, Buylaert, Dumolyn, Hanus and Stabel look more closely at the emergence of different social groups and the complex social stratification in towns. Landowning merchants had formed the urban elite since the eleventh century, with middling groups emerging between the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries and an urban nobility in the fifteenth century. These social groups often held highly exclusionary attitudes towards others, and the frequent conflicts between groups are further illustrated in the fourth chapter by Boone and Haemers on governance, discipline and political culture of urban society. An ideological notion of a 'common good' was developed, but who should manage it remained a point of contention. Furthermore, towns were not afraid to demand more autonomy from central authorities. Real violence was rare, however. Instead, deliberations and petitions proved to be powerful tools. The Low Countries also saw a great variety of religious orders and movements. In chapter 5, Marnef and Van Bruaene analyse the function of religion in society. Corporate institutions strongly influenced religion and the authors discern a tradition of townspeople carving out their own spiritual path. One can speak of a 'civic religion' in which the urban self-image was sustained by a religious discourse, albeit one constantly subject to change.

Billen and Deligne dissect the city as a spatial object in chapter 6. They go beyond a description of the practical functionality of buildings, squares and bridges, and describe how spaces came into being as a consequence of local power struggles

and changing social relationships. Around buildings, all kinds of meetings and rituals took place, enabling city dwellers to experience communal identity. The architectural landscape thus reflected the complexity of urban society. Trying to look inside urban dwellings, Baatsen, Blondé, De Groot and Sturtewagen focus on material culture in chapter 7. Economic and social changes led to a growing demand for more and cheaper objects, triggering product(ion) innovations to satisfy demand. The authors convincingly show that a consumer culture was already developing between 1300 and 1600, arguing against traditional historiography which places it in the seventeenth century. Moving away from tangible objects, De Munck and De Ridder-Symoens examine the role of education and knowledge in chapter 8. Urban society increasingly required education, which became accessible to many. A variety of schools existed but learning on the shop floor was the rule. Literacy was exceptionally high and affected intellectual, religious and scientific life. The authors discern a rapprochement between theory and praxis, with some master artisans redefining themselves as practitioners of the liberal arts. Finally, in the epilogue, the editors reflect on all chapters and the legacy of the developments between 1100 and 1600, noting for example that the Dutch Golden Age built on many of these developments.

City and Society provides an excellent coherent overview of urban society in the Low Countries as it developed between 1100 and 1600. Frequently, it stresses the degree to which the urban society of the Low Countries was unique in Europe, with its network of medium-sized towns, strong middling groups, complex socio-religious groups and remarkably high literacy. It spans the current national borders of Belgium and the Netherlands, which have frequently shaped the existing historiography: most examples are indeed drawn from the south, as the authors rightfully note, but examples from the north are given as well. There is a useful index, and each chapter comes with a valuable selective bibliography, making up for the lack of footnotes. The maps are helpful for those less familiar with the geography of the Low Countries. A few more images could have been useful perhaps, especially in chapters on buildings or objects. Nonetheless, for anyone interested in the Low Countries or pre-modern urban history more generally, this book is a must-read.

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Julie Hardwick, *Sex in an Old Regime City: Young Workers and Intimacy in France, 1660–1789*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020. 288pp. £22.99 hbk.
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In this ‘pre-modern history of quotidian sexuality’ in early modern Lyon, Julie Hardwick interrogates an ‘archive of reproduction’ consisting of records relating to pregnancy, abortion, infanticide, child abandonment and maintenance payments to reconstruct the intimate lives of young people in their late teens and early