

Raingard Esser. *The Politics of Memory: The Writing of Partition in the Seventeenth-Century Low Countries*.

Brill's Studies in Intellectual History 208. Leiden: Brill, 2011. xi + 364 pp. \$163. ISBN: 978-90-04-20807-0.

This study is an important contribution to the study of history writing in the Low Countries. Not only does Esser offer her readers a comparative view of urban and regional histories in both the Northern and Southern Netherlands, she also produces an effective analysis of the chorographical genre and its content throughout the seventeenth century. *The Politics of Memory* should therefore attract a public interested in historiography, civic history, memory, and identity.

In every chapter Esser elegantly combines the discussion about the genre of history writing with an examination of the content of each individual work, which makes *The Politics of Memory* a well-balanced study of Netherlandish chorographies in both Dutch and Latin. Particularly Esser's decision to include multiple cities and regions from across the Low Countries stands out. Although several scholars, such as E. O. G. Haitzma Mulier, Henk van Nierop, and, more recently, Sandra Langereis and Eddy Verbaan, studied Dutch chorographies, their focus lay on specific cities, antiquarians or individual chorographies. *The Politics of Memory*, however, goes beyond the interest in a single chorography, author, city or region.

In three parts ("the North," "the South" and "Regional Histories, Regional Variations") Esser analyzes the history writing in both the center and periphery of the Northern and Southern Netherlands. Even though every chapter deals with a particular city, her selection and use of recurring themes creates a successful format for the comparison of her material. These recurring themes include, for instance, the intellectual background of the author, his style, network, method, and presentation. Two authors in particular were important in the development of the Netherlandish chorography in the seventeenth century: Johannes Pontanus and Justus Lipsius. Pontanus moved away from the traditional Italian urban histories in the history of Amsterdam in 1611 by using primary sources and a more critical approach, whereas Lipsius started to integrate artifacts and monuments in his civic history of Leuven in 1605. During the seventeenth century the genre would change even more, because the practice of collecting slowly took precedence over the humanist tradition and the interpretation of existing information.

Throughout her book, Esser discusses the individual authors and chorographies in both the northern and southern Netherlands: the different traditions in which authors worked, whether they were connected in scholarly networks and how they influenced each other. Although religious differences between the north and the south were especially obvious, the authors and their works also had a lot in common. They were members of the urban elite, thought about and discussed the approach and methodology of their work and praised their city or region and its history. In her description of individual chorographies Esser also provides an excellent overview of their content and the author's intention. Her thematic approach ensures that for every city and region themes such as the origins of the

city, religion, immigrants, and the Dutch Revolt are examined thoroughly. Simultaneously she comes to important conclusions about the way northern and southern cities used their past, for example, the way in which the eastern regions in the Dutch Republic emphasized their former glory while the western regions stressed the pride and glory they gained during the Dutch Revolt; or the emphasis on continuity in the history of the southern regions as being part of the Habsburg Empire and the Counter-Reformation while change was advocated in the northern provinces.

Overall Esser's work is a great accomplishment, since she manages to convince her readers of the significance in studying both the genre of the chorography and its content. While her analysis of the genre and the use of history works very well, however, this study does not fully deliver in its promise to provide a better understanding of chorographies "as an arena for the creation of memories and identities" (8). The memories she describes are those of local communities in which chorographies are just one of the many commemorative media available in the civic community. Some of these media, such as plays, sermons, processions, and songs are mentioned, but others such as paintings, stained-glass windows, prints, and even manuscripts are unfortunately left out, even though they could have strengthened her argument, given their presence throughout the Low Countries. Nevertheless, her sharp analysis of the processes of published urban and regional histories definitely make *The Politics of Memory* a must-read for scholars working on civic history of the Low Countries.

MARIANNE EEKHOUT
Leiden University