
The English blurb of this book mentions that it “is a collection of articles, aiming to provide a comprehensive picture of the lives of those who attended medieval universities.” More accurately, it can be said to give a representative picture of the publication record — in but one of his fields of expertise — of a most prolific scholar. It is published in Brill’s ‘Education and Society in the Middle Ages and Renaissance’ series, which, with 25 volumes published, is rapidly building up steam. This is most appropriate, as Professor Miethke — also one of the series’ editors — has more than earned his laurels as both an editor of three volumes and as an author of various articles for books in this series.

In a way, this volume celebrates the career of Jürgen Miethke as a university historian and assembles sixteen articles, papers, and chapters in books that cover just over a quarter of a century of scholarship on the history of universities, from 1975 to 2001. The author has selected from his long list of earlier publications — well over 150, ranging from monographs, articles, source editions and translations, contributions to encyclopedic works and bibliographies — sixteen articles: two from the 1970s, five from the 1980s, seven from the 1990s and two from the new millennium. Though set in the clearly recognizable Brill typeset, Prof. Miethke has chosen to insert the page numbers of the original publications in margin, which is most helpful to the scholar.

No short review can do justice to sixteen articles that fill a nearly 500 page volume, and this reviewer shall limit himself to broad outlines. The various chapters are roughly organized according to a number of themes. The first theme regards the framework (Rahmenbedingungen) of the university and its constitutive parts. Within this theme, particularly chapter 1 on papal foundation privileges and their function, and chapter 3 on the use and role of the oath in universities are excellent.

The second theme regards the expectations and career possibilities of students and graduates, not so much on the basis of statistical analysis of career data — of which there has been a considerable amount of literature since the publication of the most recent article in this volume — but by looking at the material and legal conditions at universities, and their change over time (particularly chapters 5, 7, and 8). To this section one should also count the classic article ‘Die Studenten unterwegs’ that appears as chapter 6.

A third area concerns relations between the Church and universities. It looks at both their close relations and support they could provide one another, but also examines — sometimes in great detail — the situations in which these relations were strained, e.g. when the Church attempted to employ the accusation of heresy to deal with matters unappealing to it (especially chapters 9, 11-13), with much attention for all key players.
As Prof. Miethke was a professor at the University of Heidelberg (founded 1386) for twenty years, it is hardly surprising that a number of articles deal explicitly with the Heidelberg studium and its suppositi — though his expertise in this field finds its way through most articles, which explains why Marsilius of Inghen, its first rector, and count palatine Ruprecht I, its founder, are among the persons mentioned most frequently in the volume.

All of these articles are at the crossroads of social history on the one hand, and legal, intellectual, political, and religious history on the other, so a number of chapters address several of the themes outlined above. It makes this book a very stimulating read. A further advantage is that several chapters give an excellent overview of the status quaestionis on a number of topics. Chapter 2 on the organizational structures of and within the medieval universities is a very good example. In 26 pages the author gives a clear picture on the issues involved where the (corporate) structures of these institutions are concerned.

Professor Miethke has consciously chosen to neither change the papers, nor to update the literature on the themes addressed in this volume. He wished to leave his papers and essays in their proper historical "place." This choice has both pros and cons. One advantage is that Miethke has left his papers presented at conferences pretty much as they were delivered, which allows the reader to get a glimpse of the performance and with it some of the author’s wit and irony — chapter 5 about the career chances for theology students is an excellent example. As a possible point of criticism, he has opted to leave out recent literature in the footnotes — though this is not applied consistently. While this choice is perfectly legitimate, this reviewer felt that it was a bit of a pity. An appendix to some of the chapters — e.g., the older ones such as chapter 11 on the dealings with Abelard and Gilbert of Poitiers — with some updated information on literature published recently would have been an extra service to the reader. Similarly, a list of abbreviations of German journals would have saved the reader a bit of time. While abbreviations such as HZ and ZHF will be immediately clear to all, VSWG might not be. As this is a collection of articles there are — of necessity — some overlaps and some double quotes, etc.

These are only minor points. Those interested in the history of medieval universities will be very happy to have this collection available. The book carries an index for names, places, and “important” subject matters (though this reviewer thought that this is put too modestly, as the index is almost exhaustive), which is most helpful. This volume is also a Fundgrube for university historians where sources and literature are concerned (a bibliography might therefore have been considered as an alternative to extensive quotations in the footnotes). This valuable collection is sure to be used both widely and often.

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