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Frühe Neuzeit – Revolution – Empire (1500–1815)

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Valentina Lepri (ed.), Knowledge Shaping. Student Note-Taking Practices in Early Modernity, Berlin, Boston (De Gruyter Oldenbourg) 2023, 257 p., 14 col. fig., 13 tab. (Renaissance Mind, 1), ISBN 978-3-11-107260-9, DOI 10.1515/9783111072722, EUR 119,95.

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Matthew Daniel Eddy, Durham

During the mid-1580s the Livonian student David Hilchen (1561–1610) left his home near the Baltic Sea to study law in the German universities of Ingolstadt, Tübingen and Heidelberg. He left a war-torn country where the law libraries had been dispersed or destroyed and the printing presses of Riga and Vilnius were yet to be established. During his time away, he augmented his personal library by implementing a notekeeping regime that empowered him to create systematically ordered notebooks. When he returned to Livonia, these manuscripts underpinned his success as a scholar and legal advisor. To help others accomplish the same task, he wrote notekeeping manuals to impart the information management skills he had learned. Valentina Lepri's *Knowledge Shaping* is filled with similar examples of Central European notekeepers who flourished from the 1580s to the 1630s. In an age when political intrigue impacted the scholarly resources available to students such as Hilchen, scholars learned to seek information both at home and abroad in ways that helped them achieve their personal and professional goals. As amply demonstrated by this book, a key component that underpinned their success was the ability to create, use and disseminate notebooks.

One of the fascinating facets of this book is that the authors foreground scores of hitherto neglected notebooks housed in a variety of special collections ranging from the Esztergom Archdiocesan Library in Budapest to Torún University Library in Poland. The chapters collectively argue that the Renaissance notekeeping techniques promoted by humanists such as Rudolph Agricola, Erasmus and Juan Vives slowly became integrated into the educational, scholarly and administrational world of both Protestants and Catholics operating in Central Europe over the course of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. The authors take a broad view of student notekeeping. In addition to exploring bound manuscripts such as *pecia* and dictates created by learners during their studies, the authors explore annotations and marginalia in a range of genres including orations, commentaries and commonplace books. Such notes were used by a variety of people after their creation and, as shown in Alicja Bielak's fascinating chapter on Michal Zaleski, a Polish student murdered during his Tübingen studies in 1559, annotations even could serve as evidence of heresy practiced by an entire notekeeping community.

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Whereas the work of scholars such as Anthony Grafton, Ann Moss and Ann Blair have explored the integration of Renaissance information management practices within Western Europe, the strength of this volume is that it pays special attention to manuscript techniques related to Hungarian and Slavic language communities. A number of the chapters suggest that the growth of humanist notekeeping skills in these contexts was fostered by the *peregrinatio academica*, that is, the practice of wealthy or sponsored students such as the aforementioned David Hilchen travelling to Western European universities. In addition to learning how to treat a manuscript as an interactive paper technology during their studies, students brought back different genres of notebooks they had made on their travels.

The volume underscores the importance of paying attention to local forms of knowledge creation. The chapters offer a rich picture of common humanist writing techniques such as transcribing, excerpting, epitomising, abstracting, indexing, interleaving, pasting and folding, all of which took on unique meanings for notekeepers with different skills and varying professional goals. The result is a refreshing interpretation of Central European student notebooks that moves beyond earlier studies which treated them merely as vehicles that seamlessly transplanted information from one point to another. Instead, the authors treat student notebooks as artefacts that functioned at the intersection of scholarly thought and material culture. To use a term developed in my own research, they treat student notebooks as »paper machines«, as media devices created and used with specific goals in mind. This approach allows the authors to explore how students from specific Central European locations reacted to the curriculum and notekeeping skills practiced in Western European universities. In a similar vein, rather than treating *peregrinatio* notebooks as evidence of what happened solely in Western European universities, the chapters demonstrate how, once transported back to a student's home country, they continued to function as interactive learning and organisational tools for their original notekeeper as well as other learners for decades.

As might be expected, a significant number of the extant *peregrinatio* notebooks belonged to students who became professors or statespersons and then deposited their manuscripts in libraries upon their retirement. A case in point is the Protestant Hungarian scholar and nobleman Péter Révay (1568–1622). As explained in Gábor Förköli's chapter, Révay's lecture notes from the Jesuit College of Vienna and his commonplace book from the Lutheran Gymnasium in Strasbourg disclose the cross-confessional usage of similar humanist notekeeping techniques. Révay will of course be familiar to historians of early modern Hungary. One of the outstanding features of this volume is that, in addition to focusing on actors such as Révay, the authors conducted a significant amount of archival research to find and interpret a range of student notebooks crafted in Central Europe either by professors or scholars before they became famous, or by everyday, and oftentimes anonymous, students. Unlike printed textbooks

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that describe what students should learn, these student notebooks offer fabulous insight into where they studied and what subjects they were actually learning.

The notebooks show, for instance, one of the primary conduits of humanist writing techniques in Central Europe was the academy and not necessarily the university. This insight resonates with the work of Howard Hotson, who has shown that the curricula of confessionally-orientated Central European academies sometimes rivalled the complexity and diversity of the subjects taught at universities. The diversity was driven by the fact that the status of »university« was a designation that monarchs or other government officials refrained from granting for political reasons relating to their suspicion of interconfessional rivals or minoritized communities seeking to create their own higher education institutions. The result, as the student notebooks covered in this volume clearly demonstrate, was that Central European academies offered noteworthy instruction on law, medicine, theology, and the arts, that is, the four overarching subject areas traditionally taught at universities. Take, for example, the Catholic Academy of Zamość of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth addressed in the chapter by Luisa Brotto. In addition to offering a core curriculum that focused on law and civic humanism, student notebooks reveal that its professors and tutors also taught medicine and that their students learned to diagram various mathematics and natural philosophy subjects with »graphics that require geometrical drawings«.

Reshaping Knowledge is a significant contribution to the history of Central European humanism and its impact upon student notekeeping. The volume offers helpful colour photographs that illustrate a variety of student notekeeping techniques and it includes informative tables that list examples of the kinds of extracts, annotations and marginalia that occur in the manuscripts. It will appeal to historians of humanism and manuscript culture as well as to scholars interested in the history of early modern European media culture.

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