

H-France Review Vol. 18 (May 2018), No. 119

Sarah B. Lynch, *Elementary and Grammar Education in Late Medieval France: Lyon, 1285-1530*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2017. 192 pp. Illustration, map, figures, tables, notes, appendices, bibliography, and index. \$105.00 (US) (hb). ISBN 978-90-89649867; (eb: pdf) e-ISBN 978-90-4852-902-5.

Review by John Monfasani, The University at Albany, State University of New York.

As its subtitle informs us, this book focuses on late medieval elementary education in Lyon. The rest of France comes into play mainly for comparative and illustrative purposes. Its introduction sets the context by discussing the literature on pre-university medieval education in Europe as a whole, providing a survey of the literature. Chapter one teases out from the documents what can be known about “the administration and organization of schools in Lyons,” with a handy map marking the locales of the schools in the city at various times. Chapter two treats the teachers in these schools: namely, their identity, social status, and education. There definitely was a pecking order, with “[w]riting masters, or *maistres escripvains*,” appearing to have been “particularly vilified. One *Lyonnais* source describes the *escripvains* as ‘miserable wretches who can teach children how to write’” (p. 75). The chapter ends with a discussion of Jose Badius Ascensius (1462–1535), the most famous of all the teachers who ever worked in Lyon. Born in Ghent, active in Lyon in the 1490s, Ascensius would go on to international fame and fortune as a printer in Paris in the first three decades of the sixteenth century. Chapter three gathers the information Lynch could find about pupils in Lyon over the centuries. It is here that she talks about the textbooks used which, it turns out, pretty much consisted of standard fare that one knows from many other treatments of medieval elementary education. Variety enters with post-elementary education, as masters offered different sets of Latin texts for reading, such as Ascensius’s *Sylvae morales* of 1492, which provided extracts from classical authors. Lynch stresses that the home was one of the major *loci* of elementary education, followed by rooms rented out by teachers where they taught paying pupils, and finally facilities provided by various institutions, namely, churches, including the cathedral with its choir school, and eventually the municipal Collège de la Trinité funded by the town council and the city’s eponymous religious confraternity. The book ends with a brief conclusion.

Unfortunately, despite what seems to be diligent searching in the Archives départementales du Rhône and the Archives municipales de Lyon, as evidenced by the nearly three and half pages of records listed in the bibliography, only a modest amount of information is brought forth in the volume. No coherent series of regulations, instructors, instructional material, literary references, or statistical data is to be had. The most that could be gleaned from the archives was a list of 62 teachers in the various schools (of the cathedral of Saint-Jean, the churches of Saint-Paul and

Saint-Nizier, and of unspecified locations) beginning in the twelfth century and ending in the sixteenth, with all but sixteen from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The author never explicitly explains the reasons for her starting and ending dates 1285–1530, though one may surmise that she had in mind the 1285 document issued by the chapter of the cathedral of Saint-Jean formalizing its control of the schools in the city (p. 52) and the 1527 founding of the Collège de la Trinité (p. 63) that confirmed the passage of control of education in Lyon from the cathedral chapter to the municipal council. In between time the chapter and city council tussled over control, with the city council already issuing teaching licenses in the fourteenth century and with the chapter really maintaining continuous control only over its choir school. In addition, independent school teachers plied their trade in the city in this period. Since the secular city elite had different educational purposes for its sons than did the cathedral chapter, the divergence was inevitable. It would have been most instructive if the author had not stopped her narrative at 1530 but continued it to the second half of the sixteenth century when the Jesuits took over the Collège de la Trinité, i.e., when the city council surrendered its lead educational institution to a new religious organization.

The volume opens up with an introduction that offers a general survey of scholarship on medieval elementary education, but one may have doubts about the thoroughness of the survey. Since much good work has been done of late on Italy, the author rightly discusses these contributions. But she has almost nothing to say in the introduction about German developments save for what she cites from one book in English, nor does her discussion of schooling in Flanders go beyond sources in French and English. Next come chapters on the administrative organization of schooling in Lyon, on the teachers, and, finally, on the students. Because of the spotty nature of the evidence, the narrative throughout is impressionistic rather than methodical or of any serious depth. Oddly enough, as already noted, the most prominent figure in the story appears at the very end, namely, the illustrious early printer Badius Ascensius, who worked as a teacher and printer in Lyon from 1492 to 1499 before moving on to Paris.

In sum, the volume under review makes a modest contribution to our knowledge of medieval education, but given the state of the evidence in Lyon, it would seem that not much more was possible. How one justifies the high price for such a slender volume, however, is another matter.

John Monfasani
The University at Albany, State University of New York
jmonfasani@albany.edu

Copyright © 2018 by the Society for French Historical Studies, all rights reserved. The Society for French Historical Studies permits the electronic distribution of individual reviews for nonprofit educational purposes, provided that full and accurate credit is given to the author, the date of publication, and the location of the review on the H-France website. The Society for French Historical Studies reserves the right to withdraw the license for redistribution/republication of individual reviews at any time and for any specific case. Neither bulk redistribution/republication in electronic form of more than five percent of the contents of H-France Review nor re-publication of any amount in print form will be permitted without permission. For any other proposed uses, contact the Editor-in-Chief of H-France. The views posted on H-France Review are not necessarily the views of the Society for French Historical Studies.

