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‘PRAGMATIC LITERACY’ — SOME REMARKS ON THE WORK:
*MEDIEVAL URBAN LITERACY**

Abstract: Besides discussing articles contained in two volumes of *Medieval Urban Literacy* the author also discusses the purposefulness and usefulness of the concept of ‘pragmatic literacy’ strongly emphasized in Marco Mostert and Anna Adamska’s studies and presented in many articles of this publication.

Keywords: pragmatic literacy, medieval towns, urban administration.

Both volumes reviewed here are the effect of an extensive research project financed by the Nederlandse Organisatie voor Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek (Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research) and the Vrije Universiteit Brussel, and implemented with cooperation of the Institut für vergleichende Städtegeschichte, the University in Münster, the Institute for Medieval Studies of the University of Leeds, the Worldwide Universities Network, the Institute of History and Archival Sciences of the Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń, the Institute for Byzantine Studies at Queen’s University Belfast, and the Fachbereichsbibliothek Byzantinistik und Neogräzistik at the University of Vienna. Its implementation also included several scientific symposia organized in the period 2007–09 in Brussels and subsequent medievalist congresses in Leeds. The whole programme was coordinated by the well-known scholars from Utrecht University conducting research on literacy problems: Anna Adamska and Marco Mostert, who wrote the introductions to both volumes.

The studies presented therein encompass all regions of medieval Latin Europe, but the degree of attention paid to particular regions differs. Only one

* *Writing and the Administration of Medieval Towns. Medieval Urban Literacy I*, ed. Marco Mostert and Anna Adamska, Turnhout: Brepols, 2014, 365 pp., Utrecht Studies in Medieval Literacy, vol. 27; *Uses of the Written Word in Medieval Towns. Medieval Urban Literacy II*, ed. Marco Mostert and Anna Adamska, Turnhout: Brepols, 2014, 453 pp., Utrecht Studies in Medieval Literacy, vol. 28.

article relates to the towns of medieval England, two to the most urbanized and alphabetized region in the Middle Ages — Italy, and as many as fourteen from thirty-two (not counting introductions and summaries by the editors of the volumes) deal with the towns of Central and Eastern Europe (in Poland and Ruthenia, Hungary, Lithuania and today's Latvia), with their late literary activity and a limited source basis. If we add three studies on Dalmatia (or, more broadly, Croatia), two on the south-west border area of Latin civilization (Castile and Aragon) and two on Scandinavian towns, we must state that the main focus is put on the borderlands of this civilization with their specific variations on this phenomenon, not on territories saturated with big towns and their flourishing culture of writing preserved in vast archival and library resources. The only such region discussed in several articles is the broadly understood Netherlands (with Brabant). No study deals with French towns or with Bohemia, although the latter was outstanding in the Central and Eastern Europe with regard to literacy rate and, especially, the preserved written documentation.

This geographic imbalance may have two reasons: the range of scientific contacts of the main coordinators of this research, and, partly, the different impact in different countries of the concept, or even the paradigm, of 'pragmatic literacy' strongly promoted by them. But, in my opinion, it also results from a different tradition of research and determination in transgressing it. The new studies on literacy and the culture of writing, promoted especially by medieval studies centres connected with the universities in Münster and Utrecht, aim at transferring these issues from the position of auxiliary sciences into the mainstream of the history of culture. Nevertheless, not in all countries was the door between these two areas closed, if it existed at all, and not in all countries may we speak about the introduction and expansion in the high and late Middle Ages of writing in social communication as a true and great breakthrough comparable to the upheaval that really took place at that time in the countries situated beyond the Roman *limes*. The intent of the project's authors — to account for the so far marginalized peripheries of the medieval *Latinitas* — has resulted in the marginalization of the proper centres. Their impact on the peripheries is accounted for, to a different but generally minor extent, in the articles contained in these volumes. These studies show many phenomena belonging to the culture of writing, its tools, social communication and so on in an unclear outline and incomplete richness, which sometimes shoehorn them into the models developed in those very centres of urban life and literacy.

An attempt to present research on pragmatic literacy in its broadest spectrum and in the context of the urban writing production in general — accounting also for the richness of contexts of the latter's development in the Middle Ages — has had one more doubtful effect: many of the articles merely recount the results of already published books, articles and doctoral dissertations.

Volume One deals with 'formal' literary production: its types, fabrication, designation, keeping, scribes and notaries. The structure of the tome, com-

posed of three parts, is not very coherent due to both the arrangement and the different character of the studies. In the first part ('Varieties of Administrative Urban Literacy'), the review articles, especially those dealing with the peripheries, discussing the types of towns and their administration and, against this background, their literary production, remain on a rather general and sometimes rudimentary level. They are moreover placed next to the detailed studies. The first group, whose basic goal was to introduce into broader circulation the problems and state of studies which are well known in their home countries, includes the texts of: Inger Larsson, discussing administrative literacy in Swedish towns; José M. López-Vilallby, presenting the development of privileges and urban rights and Castilian law offices; Katalin Szende presenting the state of studies on Hungarian towns and the possible directions of research on their literacy, and Agnieszka Bartoszewicz, who presents the panorama of literacy development in the smaller Polish towns against the background of the situation in major centres and the development of urban planning and an urban system in Poland. With all the differences characterizing the urbanization of these regions, the types of towns and so on, the focus on the role of law and the procedures of authentication of a record/document, on the municipal law office and its scribes, in fact reveal identical mechanisms of the development of administrative literacy and its influence on literacy practice. In a microscale of one region they are analysed, noting differences in chronology and the scale of this literacy, by Jeroen F. Benders with respect to four Netherlands towns (Groningen, Kampen, Deventer, Zutphen).

The detailed studies are much more interesting. Geertrui van Synghel starts with the detailed diplomatic and palaeographic research already presented in her doctoral dissertation (2006) on urban acts of 's-Hertogenbosch and their scribes until the mid-fifteenth century. A statistical analysis of the results of this research has allowed her not only to grasp the dynamics of development of law office production in one of the biggest towns of Brabant, but also to state the near-monopoly, surprising for a big town, in the so called pragmatic literacy of the urban scribes — their 'hands' were identified in the files of other urban institutions. The famous cartulary of this town *Rood Privilegeboek* written down in about 1430–40 is placed by the author at the crossing of pragmatic literacy — to which it belongs to due to its content — and the world of book production, in which it is situated due to its luxurious form: the shape of writing, miniature, beautiful illuminations. Similar problems are also dealt with by Hannes Obermair, who distills here his earlier research on medieval literary production and source documentation regarding Bolzano — the border area town where Italian influence (the notarial office with its procedures of authentication and Latin) maintained by the bishop of Trent crossed with German influences (law, the judiciary, stamping documents and vernacular language in literary production), preferred by the rulers of the Tyrol. The author postulates studying the development of urban literary production from a demographic perspective and in Malthusian categories — the curve illustrating it corresponds to the curve of

economic and demographic trends.¹ The articles by van Synghel and Obermair are a good illustration of the aforementioned phenomenon of these research problems going beyond the already too narrow frames of traditional auxiliary sciences and heading for the history of culture and social history; such crossing of sub-disciplinary boundaries does not, nevertheless, abandon the traditional skills of diplomatics or palaeography.

Certain authors who figure in part two also suggest such an approach ('Urban Archives: Places of Power, Memory, and Secrets'). The most innovative and distant from the classic archive studies approach to the issue of 'the archive' and its birth is definitely presented by Andreas Litschel. But the article on literacy in the late-medieval Lüneburg will not surprise readers interested in these problems, since it is actually an English translation of the earlier publication, which was published in the collective volume prepared by young researchers from Bielefeld University.² Referring to Michel Foucault (and other postmodernists) and his dispositive (*dispositif*) category, they analyse all forms of archiving, storage and transfer of the written traces of social and cultural processes. Litschel, taking as the starting point both institutional archives (centre) and private ones (peripheries), shows them as the places of production of knowledge and access thereto (openness, secrecy) in the broader contexts: exchange between administrative authorities and 'peripheries', that is burgher houses and permanent identities of the office and the kin. The approach of the remaining authors of this part is much more traditional. Hannes Lowagie presents the study of *Diary of Ghent (Dagboek van Gent)*, which is a kind of *aide-mémoire* — a combination of a cartulary covering documents from the period 1447–1515 with a chronicle of conflict with the count of Flanders and the town revolt (1447–53) — resembling (at least to the reviewer) Wrocław's *Geschichte der Stadt Breslau* by Piotr Eschenloer from the same period.

Sarah Rees Jones in her study, referring mainly to the secondary literature, notices two periods in the history of urbanization and of the towns of England, in which the dynamics of growth of urban literacy dramatically accelerated: the twelfth to thirteenth century, when towns organized their life around market squares, and major centres received their first town halls and public buildings, and after the 'Black Death', when these buildings obtained high rank and were erected also in smaller towns. Nevertheless, her application of the dynamics of the growth of urban literacy described in such a way to the rest of Europe is problematic.

¹ Hannes Obermair, *Bozen Süd — Bolzano Nord: Schriftlichkeit und urkundliche Überlieferung der Stadt Bozen bis 1500*, Bozen, 2005, vol. 1: *Regesten der kommunalen Bestände, 1210-1400*, vol. 2: *Regesten der kommunalen Bestände 1400-1500*. It is a pity that a publishing house which prices its publications so highly has limited itself to printing scanned diagrams (pp. 57, 59, 60).

² Andreas Litschel, 'Offenbaren und Verbergen "or dem Archiv". Schriftlichkeit, Sichtbarkeit und Öffentlichkeit im spätmittelalterlichen Lüneburg', in *Archiv — Macht — Wissen. Organisation und Konstruktion von Wissen und Wirklichkeiten in Archiven*, ed. Anja Horstmann and Vanina Kopp, Frankfurt am Main, 2010, pp. 89–106.

Subsequent texts are focused on the issue of secrecy and the secret, something which is rarely accounted for in source-based studies or in research on communication and social relationships. In an article based on sources from towns and rural Swiss cantons, Michael Jucker discusses the question from two perspectives — the keeping and the perception of secrets, both in politics and the practical activity of the authorities, and in the private conduct of inhabitants (family books as secret books) in the past, and their reading by today’s historians. Christoph F. Weber’s analysis of procedures of authentication, secrecy and storage of documentation in Italian communes, superficial and composed of accidentally selected and sometimes misunderstood examples, makes but a minor contribution to these studies. This part is closed with an interesting article by Bastian Walter dealing with the secret annotations (*cedulæ*) attached to the official correspondence of Strasburg, Bern and Basel — allies in the Swiss-Burgundian war (1468–77) — which are often omitted both in source editions and in monographic studies. The author goes beyond a strictly source-based study, analysing the functions and significance of the annotations as tools of manipulation and diversion, especially in during wars and times of political tension, but also in periods of peace — as an information carrier similar to the later pamphlet. In the annex he publishes a letter with such an annotation sent by Strasburg City Council to its delegates in Basel (24 July 1474).

In part three (‘Litterati in Town: Notaries, Schoolmasters, and Schoolboys’) two articles deal with the subjects already mentioned in part one, that is, public notaries. The first of them, by Branka Grbavac, discussing the development of notary public offices in Dalmatian towns (both, under Hungarian and Venetian rule) presents well the influence of Italian towns and of their public notaries. Clerical notaries, dominating until the thirteenth century and working as municipal notaries, from the turn of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries are replaced by secular notaries, initially almost all of them being newcomers, mostly from the March of Ancona and the Veneto (Padua). Much further to the east, in Transylvania, the development of municipal law offices and employment of notaries began much later, in the second half of the fourteenth century. Ágnes Flóra, stating the continuation of the medieval tradition in the sixteenth century, provides a more detailed picture of education, competences, activity and careers of notaries in Sibiu (Hermannstadt, Nagyszeben) and Cluj (Klausenburg, Kolozsvár) in that century.

The final article in this part, by Marco Mostert, contains considerations summing up the whole volume and, in a way, mentioning the problems that have been omitted. The author strongly stresses the significance, or, one may even say, the breakthrough of the thirteenth century, which brought not only a rapid quantitative increase, but also qualitative growth in urban literacy (a municipal register with logical arrangement, which was gradually furnished with indexes, tables of content and so on), for which, let us add, the Polish towns founded at that time on German law, still had to wait. He goes on to mention the development of

urban education and its connection with the professional training of merchants.

The title of volume two would present its content much better, if next to the noun *uses* was placed another one, namely, *users*. It is divided into four parts, two of which clearly relate to the users, and one to book production and urban chronicle writing. Part one ('Alphabets and Languages: Multi-Ethnic and Multilingual Urban Literacies') is composed of articles presenting cultural borderlands of the east and north of Latin Christendom. Their authors (Andrzej Janeczek on the towns of Red Ruthenia, Anti Selart on the towns of Livonia, Anna Adamska on the linguistic consequences of the rebellion of Cracow Vogt Albert and Jakub Niedźwiedź on Vilnius (Vilna, Vilnia, Wilno)), with the exception of Arved Nedkvitne, interpret the domination of German as vernacular language in the pragmatic literacy in ethnic and ethno-social categories (the domination of German elites), or in categories of separateness (and somewhere also of conflict). In the case of Ruthenia this meant religious separateness. The Norwegian historian Nedkvitne who engages with them in discussion (in the article 'Linguistic Tensions between Germans and Natives in Scandinavia Compared to Eastern Europe') is quite right to criticize strict adherence to the historiographical tradition that highlighted tensions between the newcomers ruling in the towns of Eastern Europe founded on German law and the submitted local population, as this flattens the analysis and interpretation. It is true that he notices the basic difference between situation in Eastern Europe and in Scandinavia, where the separateness of the language of the natives from the language of the Hanseatic merchants did not prevent their mutual communication and where in certain royal legal offices — as in Sweden after 1350 — the native language was used. Nevertheless, he stresses — and one should agree with him — that the most important factor prevailing in the introduction of a given language to the urban secular administration was the language of law and the execution thereof, that is the judiciary.

Part two ('Making Books and Telling Stories: Book Production and Urban Historiography') begins with an extensive article by Eltjo Buringh. It provides a statistical analysis of the role of towns in medieval book production, and is to a large extent the summary of his book *Medieval Manuscript Production in the Latin West: Explorations with a Global Database* (Leiden, 2011). Using methods of quantitative analysis taken from various disciplines, usually far removed from dealing with historical statistics, and on the basis of an enormous database of book production (preserved to our times) he determines the volume of this production in particular countries in the millennium between 500 and 1500. Above all, he tries to make these calculations a convenient and reliable indicator of the level of economic development.

Other articles in this part deal with various problems. J. Antoni Iglesias-Fonseca deals with the book market in Barcelona and the role of booksellers (often Jews and notaries) in book production. Paweł Kras, having stated that Hussite doctrine spread in Poland mainly through sermons and oral instructions, gathers, with noticeable difficulty, pieces of information (from the letters

of the Cracow University professor, Andrzej Gafka of Dobczyn, accused in 1449 of heresy and from the records of the trial of several inhabitants of Kujawy accused of Hussite heresy) relating to the circulation, mainly with clerical participation, of documents connected with the Hussite movement, which was very weak here. Michele Campopiano, using, *inter alia*, the results of his doctoral dissertation on the twelfth-century Pisan compilation *Liber Guidonis*, analyses comparatively the early urban mythography of Pisa, Genoa (Caffaro, *Annales Januenses*) and Milan (Arnulfa *Liber gestorum recentium*). And finally, Iva Kurelac takes readers to Croatia and tries to prove, not very successfully, that the fifteenth-century and the later Croatian municipal historiography developed under the influence of humanist Italian historiography, which radiated here from the beginning of the fifteenth century, mainly from the Veneto.

In part three (‘Individuals Resorting to Writing: Memoria and Business’) three articles deal with last wills, and one with the so called family books. In the first of them, analysing the last wills of Transylvanian burghers (mainly of Cluj), Mária Lupescu Makó has showed a research questionnaire which starts with the problems of literacy. Her research is focused on the relation between oral expression and authentication of the last will and its writing down and written (‘official’) authentication. Her article is important for the studies on last wills and last-will practice in the regions in which the impact of Roman law and public notaries was weak (as it was in Polish towns), because it shows how the impact of, first, canon law and, later, mostly of the common law, shaped the form and language of last wills and the procedures of preparing and authenticating last wills. Jakub Wyszumłek, who describes an analysis and ascertainment contained in his doctoral thesis on last wills in Cracow, is much more interested in this documentation as a source for social problems and culture: the model of craftsman’s family and patrician clan or types of devotion. In this sense his text does not really fit the mainstream of research and methodological revival postulated by the editors. A reverse perspective — from cultural phenomenon to the source — is used by Hendrik Callewier with respect to writing production (*necrologia, obituarialia, anniversaria*) designed to memorize Bruges clergy, especially from St Donatianus’ collegiate church. And finally, Karin Czaja refers, as do many other young authors in both volumes, to her doctoral dissertation, considers the fifteenth-century Nuremberg *Familienbücher* as archives. This type of literacy, better known from Tuscany, where it was practiced from the thirteenth century, has its fifteenth-century equivalent also in the towns of Reich. Nuremberg may be proud of the books kept by several generations, such as the *Familienbuch* of the patrician family Rieter, whose consecutive representatives, pilgrims and authors of accounts of their pilgrimages, wrote it down in the form of an orderly cartulary of the family’s property. An analysis of the origin and selection of entries placed in these books, and their function as, on the one hand, the memory tool, and on the other, as running an enterprise, allows the author not to treat them as a kind of memoirs (in Italian: *ricordanze*) and consider them as family archives.

Three articles of part four ('Reading, Seeing, Hearing: The Place of Writing in the System of Urban Communication'), differing with respect to problems and research methodology, have only one thing in common — the titular 'communication'. Dušan Zupka offers a long introduction on multilingualism in the Hungarian Kingdom and the development of literacy and ritual as means of communication. This is followed by a detailed analysis of the major urban ceremonies (religious and secular, connected with selection of clerks and with taking office), and, particularly, of royal ingresses, which are best documented in the sources. After many years of research on these problems, the article looks like a Hungarian 'copy' of images well known to us, which extends the geographical area and provides a detailed chronology of these entrances but does not present any new elements or research proposals.

The study by Katell Lavéant, a researcher of the history of theatre in the Francophone part of the Netherlands, is much shorter. The development of urban literacy contributed to a great extent to the 'registration' (in different forms — from bills, through consent for the performance, and, finally, the description thereof) of many stage performances that have not survived until our times as a written text, which significantly extends the source documentation. The author looks in it for an answer to two essential questions: what do the written sources tell us about the concept of drama in the context and reference to 'literate mentality' (formed by writing), and what was the influence of the level of the actors and audience's literacy on the screenplay and way of performing the drama (including the king's entrance) and on its perception?

Finally, in his long article Andreas Zajic analyses in the categories of the so called 'spatial turn' the strategies of visualization of inscriptions placed in different spaces of Austrian towns chosen by the authorities and elites (not only the urban elites). They are not surprising, and nor is the author's statement about social segregation ruling the arrangement in the space of the church or convent of the grave inscriptions or those of an obituary nature. The cognitive value of this article lies in the richness and variety of discussed examples. Three case studies especially attract our attention. The first one relates to the graphic exposition of the owners dominating in the small or even bigger towns ruled by the prince or another local lord, either on the castle or town gate, with which the municipal inscriptions and other graphic expressions of urban identity could compete but not succeed. The other relates to the political manifesto that arose from the tombstone of three Viennese burghers (including the mayor) beheaded without a court verdict in 1408 at the order of Leopold IV (for their participation in his armed struggle with his younger brother Ernest), placed in 1430 in the central nave of the choir of the church that later became Vienna's cathedral. The text of the inscription recalling these events was composed in a Latin hexameter understood by few. And the third illustrates the clash of the 'gothic' with humanism. The plaque commemorating the flood in Linz in 1501 contains two texts: the rhymed German text engraved in the gothic alphabet, and a Latin epigram engraved in Roman square capitals, probably written by Konrad Celtis.

The volume is closed by the summary of the whole content of *Medieval Urban Literacy* by Mostert and Adamska, who postulate extension of these studies to the rural reality.

In many ways both volumes look more like a publication of conference materials than the results of a research project subordinated to the leading idea. They are characterized not only by great versatility of both subjects and methodology, but also by an unequal scientific level; in certain articles we can see considerable efforts to adjust one's own research or an already published text to the problems mentioned in the title. Young and relatively young authors prevail, who use this opportunity to widen the circulation of their doctoral or postdoctoral dissertations written in languages not known to a wide public. The English (as any other language, anyway) used in this type of publication — covering a substantial area of the continent and a great versatility of phenomena — contributes, nevertheless, to a flattening of this versatility by using a common, relatively poor terminological matrix. In medieval documents or narrative texts Latin — not without reason — often left room for vernacular expressions, and the seventeenth-century European merchants and English travellers who described the East used to place an obscure word in their stories. One such was *szlachta* (differently spelled), as they stated that the country bumpkins whom they met could not be called *noblemen*, nor they could be named, together with magnates, *nobility*.

In the publication prepared and edited by Mostert and Adamska the articles of the five Polish historians do not attract special attention. This is mainly due to a certain rudimentariness in their reasoning, which is valuable in speeches delivered at international conferences, but in a monographic article it rather emphasizes the basic erudition which the specialists involved are familiar with, than the research problems. None of the Polish authors proposed a novelty in their research questionnaire either.

The discussed volumes give us an incomplete review of the problems, which have been rapidly enriching in the recent years thanks to the dismantling of borders and barriers between the auxiliary sciences and the 'new history of culture' and social history. I believe this results from the fact that the initiators and editors of the volume are embedded in the German research tradition (carrying an enormous burden of diplomatics and positivist source criticism, without going back to Jean Mabillon) and deal with the sources produced in the towns of northern Europe. Opposing this tradition, which Mostert and Adamska consistently do in their studies, is highly commendable, but it also has its limitations. In the introduction to volume one of *Urban Medieval Literacy* they refer to the inspiration which is the most important for them — studies of historians from Münster: Thomas Behrmann and Hagen Keller, who dealt with the north Italian communes in the period of the high Middle Ages and using, above all, documents (diplomas). They also provided the basic corpus of terms and concepts (*pragmatische Schriftlichkeit*) and conceptualization (*Schriftorientierung, Rationalisierungsprozeß*) for studies on 'pragmatic literacy'. This last notion introduced and defined by Keller (as 'any ways of using writing and text, which — by delivering knowledge — directly serve purposeful

activity or direct human conduct')³ indeed — by stressing not only the type (kind) of the source documentation but also its function — significantly extended the narrow limits of auxiliary sciences, but still remained within those limits. Furthermore, such a general definition describes neither what pragmatic literacy is nor what it consists of. The problems discussed in both reviewed volumes are good proof of this. We can draw conclusions from them and from other studies by authors from different countries using this notion that, generally speaking, it relates to documentation (its production, use and storage) of activity connected with conducting business (private or public) within not only economic meanings but also (indeed, often) with the management or administration of a certain area of public life. Literature and scientific works, regardless of their level, are not included in this notion.

This documentation has been for a long time used for different purposes and analysed by different methods; it also attracted attention as a historical source worth studies called in Polish — following the German term *Urkundenwissenschaft* — primary source studies. Such scholars as Jack Goody (starting with *Literacy in Traditional Societies* published in 1968, through *The Domestication of the Savage Mind*, from 1977, to *The Logic of Writing and the Organisation of Society* from 2000), Pierre Bonnassie or Pierre Toubert,⁴ to remain in the circle of studies on the earlier Middle Ages, have not only revealed the enormous research and 'image-creating' potential of these sources — do we have to recall the great reading success of *Montaillou*?⁵ — but also formed the way for a new heuristics, one not related, however, to old-fashioned diplomatics. I think that it is not without reason that the term 'pragmatic literacy' (*écriture pragmatique*)⁶ has problems with appearing in the language of French his-

³ 'alle Formen des Gebrauchs von Schrift und Texten, die unmittelbar zweckhaftem Handeln dienen oder die menschliches Tun durch die Bereitstellung von Wissen anleiten wollen', *Pragmatische Schriftlichkeit im Mittelalter. Erscheinungsformen und Entwicklungsstufen*, ed. Hagen Keller, Klaus Grubmüller and Nikolaus Staubach, Munich, 1992, p. 1, Münstersche Mittelalter-Schriften, vol. 65. See also the distinction between the literary manuscript and the written text treated as belonging to 'pragmatic literacy': Richard Britnell, 'Pragmatic Literacy in Latin Christendom', in *Pragmatic Literacy, East and West, 1200-1330*, ed. Richard Britnell, Woodbridge and Rochester, NY, 1997, p. 3.

⁴ Pierre Bonnassie, *La Catalogne du milieu du X^e à la fin du XI^e siècle: Croissance et mutations d'une société*, 2 vols, Toulouse, 1975; Pierre Toubert, *Les structures du Latium médiéval: Le Latium méridional et la Sabine du IX^e siècle à la fin du XII^e siècle*, 2 vols, Rome, 1973, Bibliothèque des Écoles françaises d'Athènes et de Rome, vol. 221.

⁵ Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *Montaillou, village occitan, de 1294 à 1324*, Paris, 1975.

⁶ This term is opposed by French historians also because of its indeterminacy and the treatment in these studies — after all — of the issue of literacy as a marginal and not a primary cultural context. Moreover, the word *écriture* in French (*scrittura* in Italian) is deprived of the significant ambiguity carried by the terms *literacy* or *Schriftlichkeit*. Joseph Morsel, 'Ce qu'écriture veut dire au Moyen Age... Observations préliminaires à une étude de la scripturalité médiévale', *Memini. Travaux et Documents*, 4, 2000, pp. 3-43, proposes to replace it with the term referring to literacy, skill and situation of using writing: *scripturalité*.

torians formed in the circumstances of the domination of 'Annales' school (or of Italian historians following their footsteps), in spite of the great tradition of diplomatics as a discipline or even art originating from the Bollandists.

So in the two discussed volumes I did not find the clear opening to research originating from other schools, including those represented by the aforementioned scholars, searching the ways leading not exactly to the modernization of the auxiliary sciences of history or bringing them closer to the history of culture but to turning them — at least with respect to the problems of literacy — into just one of the methods (not disciplines) of the new history of culture. In other words, to make them more involved in the problems of literacy and less in those of writing. This comment relates to the majority of articles.

Therefore, the major contribution of *Medieval Urban Literacy* to the research is juxtaposition of versatile and differing regions and variety of questionnaires, which provide an opportunity not really for comparative studies, but for an in-depth methodological reflection and for searching inspiration. This publication is also important for Polish studies on literacy and writing, which eagerly adopt terminology from this new trend, but are less eager (if at all) to notice the need to renew these issues and to create a new approach thereto.

(Translated by Elżbieta Petrajtis O'Neill)

Summary

Besides discussing articles contained in two volumes of *Medieval Urban Literacy* the author also discusses the purposefulness and usefulness of the concept of 'pragmatic literacy' strongly emphasized in Marco Mostert and Anna Adamska's studies and presented in many articles of this publication (*Writing and the Administration of Medieval Towns. Medieval Urban Literacy I*, ed. Marco Mostert and Anna Adamska, Turnhout: Brepols, 2014; *Uses of the Written Word in Medieval Towns. Medieval Urban Literacy II*, ed. Marco Mostert and Anna Adamska, Turnhout: Brepols, 2014).

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