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Knowledge shaping: Student note-taking practices in early modernity

This compelling collection of chapters delves into Renaissance learning and knowledge construction, with a particular focus on student note-taking practices at universities during the 16th and 17th centuries. From the perspective of information science, it sheds light on the history of collect collecting, preserving, and re-using information by young (or relatively young) individuals engaged in education during this pivotal era, when knowledge was liberated from scholastic constraints but became subject to confessional rules. It was also a time when the culture of handwritten manuscripts and personal study was undergoing significant transformation with the introduction of printed materials.

Notably, the contributors to this volume are scholars from the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology at the Polish Academy of Sciences, who were funded by the European Research Council to explore "student travel and transcultural knowledge production in Renaissance Europe." The volume consists of eight studies that examine methods of learning and knowledge acquisition by students, as reflected in their notebooks or the books they used for their studies.

Two chapters, by Lepri and Viiding, explore instructional guidance on note-taking and study methods given to students. Lepri analyzes general manuals produced by Rudolph Agricola, Erasmus of Rotterdam, and Juan Luis Vives, while Viiding examines advisory letters written by the Riga-based scholar David Hilchen. Hilchen's letters, addressing Livonian, Lithuanian, and Polish students who had to travel to German or other European universities due to the lack of local opportunities for legal studies. It underscores the complexity of preparing for such an academic journey.

The remaining chapters meticulously analyze surviving evidence in the form of notebooks or inscriptions in books, preserved in libraries and archives across Central Europe. These materials are situated within the historical context of the respective country, university, and discipline (where identifiable) and, in some cases, provide insights into the individual circumstances of the note-takers. The chapters also highlight the students' relationships with their teachers, contemporary educational methods. We can also understand controversial opinions and even dissident activities of the students. The interplay between the core texts and additional sources reveals intricate intertextual connections that shaped the knowledge structures of early modern scholars.

Each chapter offers rich historical and cultural details, collectively illustrating how information acquisition and use were deeply influenced by context. The book can be seen as a profound exploration of the environments in which these complex intellectual activities unfolded. While research into note-taking can offer glimpses into these processes, it also provides a rare window into the personal knowledge management practices of the time. However, we can only reconstruct these activities from the fragments that remain, leaving much about the intellectual environments of the period to speculation.

I was particularly captivated by the case of Polish students at the University of Tübingen, as revealed through the manuscripts of Michał Zaleski. An inquiry into his murder led to an

investigation of heretical ideas circulating among the Polish-Lithuanian student community, as implied by the notes discovered after Zaleski's death. It was fascinating to trace how a particular book passed from one reader to another, and how handwritten annotations and marginalia by various readers were deciphered. These notes unveiled radical interpretations of the text and dissenting antitrinitarian opinions among the students. Additionally, they revealed the readers' specific interests not only in the text's content but also in the methods of biblical analysis.

This volume is aimed at professional scholars specializing in Renaissance culture and scholarship, the history of education, books, and religion, as well as those interested in egodocuments and similar fields. While it may not appeal to a broad audience, it will be of great value to those seeking to understand how information and knowledge were treated by learned individuals in different historical periods.

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