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William J. Courtenay, *Parisian Scholars in the Early Fourteenth Century. A Social Portrait*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999. 306 pp. £24.49 (pb) ISBN 0521025109 £55.00 (hb) 0521642124.

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This is an important book which challenges the picture of Paris masters and students popularised by Jacques le Goff in his book *Les intellectuels au moyen âge* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1957, 1983). Le Goff saw all the early universities as privileged groups of masters, organised in much the same way as artisan guilds, supported by the newly emerging urban professional classes concerned for the education of their sons. Only gradually in the later middle ages did aristocrats find it worthwhile to invest in university education for their younger sons. As that happened the educated elite began to stress its exclusiveness, to distance itself from ordinary people, to imitate the ways of the courts. Slowly the mores of the upper classes undermined the way of life established by the early teachers, and the medieval university declined into irrelevance. This picture has been very influential. But, as Courtenay points out, while there is enough solid evidence to support the view that fifteenth-century universities educated many men drawn from the upper classes, the picture of the thirteenth-century university as fundamentally an urban institution which offered opportunities for advancement to clever young men of common birth is impressionistic, resting on some striking examples rather than on any kind of sociological survey. The theory that universities were 'aristocratised' in the later fourteenth century therefore needs to be examined further.

Courtenay's major achievement is to have found a document that provides a reasonably accurate survey of the social composition of Paris masters and to a lesser extent students for a precise period in the first half of the fourteenth century. The document in question has been well known to scholars at least since Denifle and Chatelain published it in 1891. But Courtenay has given it completely new significance by re-examining the original manuscript. It is a lesson worth learning that even admirable editors may misunderstand the occasional document. Courtenay has demonstrated that Paris, Bibl. de la Sorbonne, Reg.2.1, ff. 58r-65v, instead of containing fragments of different accounts as Denifle and Chatelain thought, contains the account of just one *collecta* taken from masters and students at Paris to cover the expenses of legal fees between 20 December 1329 and March 1330. The reason why the document has been misunderstood is that the two quires on which it was written were wrongly bound together in the manuscript. Once properly re-ordered, the whole begins to yield its secrets. The edition of the *computus* that Courtenay provides as Appendix 1 to his book, along with his analysis of the text in Appendix 2 and his description in chapter four of how the account was put together, seem thoroughly to corroborate his interpretation.

Once this has been accepted, the *computus* yields a surprising amount of information about masters and the most prominent students in Paris from a considerably earlier date than any other source hitherto available (the only comparable extant account dates from 1464). The first question is, how complete is the *computus*? That then leads to, what percentage of the university population did the roughly 2,000 people mentioned in it constitute? Courtenay has had to draw deeply on different kinds of information to work out his answer. He ingeniously uses the five *taxationes domorum* of the 1290s to argue that the *computus* covers well over ninety percent of the area of Paris inhabited by university men. He therefore concludes that the *computus* itself is probably complete. But no tax collections of the medieval period were so efficient that all liable individuals can be assumed to have been found. About fifty people thought to have been in Paris at the time are not named in it. Courtenay therefore reckons that at least

two-thirds of the secular and monastic scholars connected with the university are mentioned. Then we know that both the poorest students, the canons of Notre Dame and the inhabitants of the Cistercian and mendicant houses were exempted from university taxation. Courtenay thinks there were very few of the first category, and between 300 and 400 of the second. This leads him to a total university population of between 3,000 and 3,500 for the first half of the fourteenth century. Clearly this calculation is not watertight; those who believe that the figure should be much higher have at least some room for manoeuvre. But it is based on much more evidence than previous calculations, so will surely act as the foundation for any future enquiries.

The topographical survey of medieval Paris that Courtenay has produced to argue for the completeness of the *computus* is a valuable contribution to local history in its own right, as is his examination of why the university needed to tax its members at this time - to cover the legal costs of a case against the bishop of the city. More important are the surveys of the social and geographical origins of masters and students that the *computus* permits. Courtenay puts it beyond dispute that there were students of noble birth at the university much earlier than conventional wisdom allows, many drawing on the wealth of benefices in the church while studying. Royal clerks, both masters and students, some subsidised by the king during their studies, were also numerous. On the basis of the minority whose geographical origins can be deduced from the entries, Courtenay argues that most seculars, particularly those studying or teaching arts, came from northern France, even in the period before the outbreak of the Hundred Years' War which is often usually thought to have had the effect of making the university less international, more French. The Midi, particularly the south-west, was poorly represented among those named in the *computus*. On the other hand there was a substantial core of students from Spain and Italy studying medicine or canon law. Courtenay therefore suggests that the "aristocratisation" and the increasingly local recruitment of Paris students and masters normally thought to have changed the university's composition in the later fourteenth century have both been exaggerated. If he is right (and his arguments look solid), there will have to be a serious re-writing of text books on medieval universities. The rather utilitarian motives postulated for those undertaking university education in the early years will need to be reconsidered, as will the conventional emphasis on poor scholars; and the university of Paris will lose some of its lustre as an international institution in the thirteenth century.

The final contribution Courtenay has made is to integrate the information from the *computus* with his already extensive knowledge of individual masters and students of the period to provide scholars with a Biographical Register of those named in the document. This is a major step on the road to providing Paris with a tool comparable with Emden's *Biographical Registers* of the universities of Oxford and Cambridge. Because information about mendicant students and masters is much more readily available than about seculars, the Biographical Register's omission of mendicants will not prove difficult for scholars. In compiling his entries, Courtenay has had an easier task than Emden faced, because he has been able to take the fact that an individual was named in his *computus* as proof of that man's presence in Paris in the crucial period when the *collecta* was taken—Emden often had difficulty with proving associations with either Oxford or Cambridge for his masters. The wide range of Courtenay's reading in contemporary ecclesiastical sources has allowed him to provide details about the lives of many scholars hitherto quite unknown or known only by name. He cautiously avoids the more speculative comments that Emden occasionally indulged in. On the other hand, he makes less use of chronicle material than did Emden. For example, his entry on William, son of the count of Hainault might have gained by reference to the Continuator of Guillaume de Nangis or Froissart for the count's entanglement with the English.

Courtenay uses his conclusion to sum up well the importance of this book. As he says: "Two-thirds of those who belonged to the upper level of the university in 1329-30 are mentioned by name in the document. Moreover, that group is not reflective of just one college or one geographical region but is a representative cross-section of the 'power elite' of the university of Paris in the early fourteenth

century." This book will be used regularly not just by historians of universities but also by those of the French church in the early fourteenth century.

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