



Stephanie Irrgang. *Peregrinatio academica: Wanderungen und Karrieren von Gelehrten der Universitäten Rostock, Greifswald, Trier und Mainz im 15. Jahrhundert.* Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2002. 310 S. EUR 40,00 (gebunden), ISBN 978-3-515-08085-9.



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Wanderings and Careers

“Unde prodis?–E collegio montis acuti.–Ergo ades nobis onustus litteris.–Immo pediculis.” “Where do you come from?–From the Montagu college.–So you are loaded with knowledge?–Rather burdened with lice!”

If audiences read this book because of its main title, expecting a narrative on scholarly life in the late Middle Ages as it is expressed in the little dialogue from Erasmus’s *Familiarum colloquiorum formulae*, they will be disappointed. In the slightly revised version of her 2001 doctoral thesis at the Freie Universitaet Berlin, Stephanie Irrgang makes an effort to call into question the romantic and popular picture of the traveling student, the *peregrinus academicus*, who leaves home for foreign countries driven by *amor scientiae*, the thirst for knowledge. But those who notice the subtitle of the book will find a detailed case study, based on a thorough reading of many different sources, describing the careers of an academic elite in the fifteenth century.

In the extensive introductory chapters of the book Irrgang points out that the term *peregrinatio academica* is not of medieval origin, but stems from later centuries (p. 39) and that the romantic picture transported by various

songs, poems, and plays has turned out as a myth. Only 20 percent of all students in the fifteenth century studied at more than one university, and only some 2-5 percent moved twice or more; for the majority, travel ended with their arrival at the university town (p. 42). What the author calls “academic wanderings” were affected more by the material requirements for long-distance travel than by the search for the unknown land, *terra aliena*. For those who did change universities, many did it not in order to leave the familiarity of home, but to remain in the circles of an established *familia* of clients and a system of patronage. Moreover, with the founding of new universities during the fifteenth century it became unnecessary to travel to the prestigious universities in Paris, Prague, or northern Italy (Bologna, Padua). Many students were able to stay within the boundaries of their home region—and did so.

Following the last thirty years of pioneering research of Rainer C. Schwinges, Rainer Mueller, and others who have written the history of universities as social history, Irrgang aims to examine the relationship between studies and society. She focuses on a precisely defined group

of people, thus combining a prosopographical approach with the analysis of the academic careers and wanderings. Her main sources are the enrollment registers (*Universitätsmatrikel*), which present a detailed, but not in any sense reliable, picture of academic wandering as far as the universities themselves are concerned (p. 51). But these serial sources do not provide sufficient information about the social backgrounds and motives of the students. So Irrgang complements the prosopographical information with all kinds of additional sources like deeds, testaments, records, account books, annals and chronicles, tax lists, library registers, letters, and even epigraphical sources. In her analysis, the author compares what she calls functional elites (*Funktionseliten*) of two pairs of universities during the first years of their existence: Rostock and Greifswald, two Baltic cities of the Hanseatic League on the one hand, with Trier and Mainz, episcopal cities in south-western Germany on the other. Since the universities of Rostock and Greifswald were founded in the early- and mid-fifteenth century respectively, while Mainz and Trier were founded in its last quarter, the author does not compare the universities for a given year, but instead examines the first semesters after the foundation of each university. So the point of comparison is not taken from synchronicity but from the same stage of development. Her case studies are the most prominent professors of each university: Rectors, deans, chancellors, regents of the houses, and keepers of other functions. Readers and professors with no other institutional functions were not included (p. 25). The groups that meet these criteria comprise ninety-five persons, forty-six from Rostock and Greifswald, and forty-nine from Mainz and Trier. For every individual, a detailed record with all-important data is given in the prosopographical appendix of fifty-five pages.

In two chapters of detailed analysis, Irrgang describes where the professors started their studies, how often they changed universities, where they originally came from, and if they matriculated as single persons or members of a group. She details the social background and the extent

of integration into networks of clients. The succession of benefices held by students before, during, and after their studies allows subtle interpretation of the interaction between the academic society and the related local societies. Irrgang shows, for example, how important the Hanseatic town of Lübeck was as the social and political focus point for both the universities of Greifswald and Rostock (pp. 66-69), whereas Mainz and Trier were in a particular way connected to the local houses of the mendicant orders (pp. 147-153). In analyzing the comparable factors while considering the differences, the author draws a general picture of academic careers during the fifteenth century. She points out that in most cases a change in university did not mean the abandonment of a social network, but rather was a way of maintaining or developing it (p. 170). As Irrgang concludes, the goal of the *peregrinatio academica* was not learning from exposure to a new environment, but rather the establishment and unfolding of social contacts within a local space of communication (*ueberschaubarer Kommunikationsraum*; p. 191).

So this volume establishes a more precise picture of the interaction between the late medieval university and the social and economical framework that surrounded it. It provides detailed information about a well-defined group of scholars and broadens our view about academic careers. One may perhaps criticize Irrgang's use of the term *peregrinatio academica* in the book's title, when she later denounces it as misleading and anachronistic, and her overly harsh criticisms of the methodological shortcomings of the older scholarship, when her own terms are not in any case precisely defined (the vagueness of the term "career" or the exclusion of normal professors from the "functional elite"). The length of the introductory chapters and appendices in comparison to the much shorter analytical pages unbalance the book somewhat, and even basic information about the history of the universities discussed is omitted. Despite these issues, however, Irrgang's book is a sober and exemplary study of the social history of the late medieval university.

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