



Daniela Prögler, ***English Students at Leiden University, 1575-1650: 'Advancing your Abilities in Learning and Bettering your Understanding of the World and State Affairs'*** (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013, 317 pp., ISBN 978 1 4094 3712 3).

In the 1980s and 1990s, there was a surge in studies on early modern universities. Representative of this trend are the contributions of Laurence W.B. Brockliss, Willem Th.M. Frijhoff, Anthony T. Grafton, and Hilde de Ridder-Symoens, whose approaches ranged from intellectual history to statistical studies of attendance patterns and the social composition of the student body. A new generation of scholars is now continuing their efforts, systematically expanding existing knowledge about specific universities and student groups. Such is Daniela Prögler's recent book, a largely empirical work focusing on the English student population at Leiden University between 1575 and 1650. Prögler's study resonates both with the earlier interest in the history of universities and with the more recent focus on migration patterns and transnational religious communities, as illustrated by the work of Peter Ole Grell, a scholar of Anglo-Dutch relations and Calvinist networks in northern Europe – and Prögler's doctoral supervisor.

The book's structure goes from the general to the particular and it includes the following chapters: 1) 'Universities'; 2) 'English students at home'; 3) 'English students abroad'; 4) 'England and the Netherlands'; 5) 'Fame and success of Leiden University'; and 6) 'English students at Leiden'. The introduction is short and to the point, although a broader and more critical discussion of existing scholarship would have been enlightening. The conclusions are a concise summary of the book's findings – here, a wider interpretive effort would have been welcome. The book includes a large set of figures, color plates, and tables as well as an appendix listing the names of all English students at Leiden for the period under examination. The index helpfully differentiates between casual references and more relevant information. Quite impressively, the author made her database freely available online (the URL is mentioned on page 238) – a potential goldmine for anybody interested in the biographical details of the 831 English students examined in this book.

The first five chapters are mostly based on published scholarship and essentially constitute a very long introduction to the last chapter, which condenses the author's original contribution to the field. That is not to say that the first chapters are not useful in their own right. Chapters four and five, especially, provide a much-needed political, social,

religious, and cultural background for the heavily empirical core of the book. The first chapter offers a very general overview of early modern universities; in the process (and perhaps inevitably), it adopts some of the biases of current scholarship that focuses on northern Protestant Europe and tends to simplify the relationship between secularism and modernization. For instance, the Jesuits and the Counter-Reformation are subtly but consistently mentioned in negative terms – although, to be fair, so is the strict Calvinism of Geneva or the southern Netherlands. Chapters two and three are basically a preview of the last chapter, in the sense that they provide largely quantitative information about the social composition and study patterns of English students, both abroad and at home.

Chapter six represents the core of Prögler's research. It is based on a statistical approach to matriculation, recension, and graduation lists as well as the records of the university's criminal court. The author's main goal here is to provide a systematic and detailed classification of the English student population at Leiden between 1575 and 1650 – in that respect, she succeeds admirably. Prögler adeptly discusses (and counts) matriculation numbers, nationalities, social background, duration of stay, ages, and study subjects against the backdrop of the entire student population at Leiden. Additionally, the last chapter offers illuminating perspectives on the attractiveness of Leiden University for English students. In the last section of the chapter, Prögler's differentiation among 'real students, visitors, degree collectors' (226) and other categories within the English student population contributes to a more nuanced understanding of early modern universities. The last chapter also offers a meticulous analysis of the sources used, together with the reasoning involved in assessing them. Cross-referencing with biographical studies and matriculation records available in England proved particularly fruitful, as it facilitated both social background identification and inferences about the students' reasons for matriculating or graduating at Leiden.

Prögler's conclusions are not easy to summarize, as they remain as diverse as the students' social composition and reasons for studying at Leiden. Prögler maintains that English students went to study abroad not because they were 'fundamentally dissatisfied' with Oxford and Cambridge but because of other reasons – including (somewhat confusingly) the desire to be affiliated with a more prestigious university or to get 'the best education available' (233-234). Certainly, compared with Scandinavian students, Englishmen seemed to have fewer reasons to go study abroad, but that should not distract from the caliber and reputation of continental universities such as Padua and Leiden, which must have made Oxford and Cambridge appear somewhat less satisfying in the early modern period. More convincingly, Prögler distills Leiden's success with foreign students to a combination of tolerance, humanism, and pragmatism (the latter was in fact common to most early modern universities, although some were indeed more successful at it than others). For English students in particular, Leiden was an attractive option not only because of its fast growing prestige (and facilities), but also because of geographical proximity, political and religious affinities, and Dutch prosperity.

One of the greatest strengths of this book is its nuanced discussion of university records and the difficulties involved in their correct assessment. Here, several methodological points are worth noting. Prögler makes clear that the ratio of noble to non-noble students was not accurately reflected in university records and was much higher than previously thought. Also, she convincingly argues that the distinction between 'real students' and their companions (servants or teachers) was less important than modern scholarship is inclined to allow; accordingly, Prögler includes companions in her calculations of the student population. Lastly, this book takes the time to demonstrate that over-reliance on matriculation and graduation records leads to distorted estimations of student populations, as there were many students who never matriculated or did so only shortly before graduation.

Qualitative sources, however, receive a less critical assessment in this book. Memoirs and travelogues are famous for their unreliability, as has been pointed out in fields not too distant from Prögler's own area (see for instance D. Christopher Gabbard, 'Gender Stereotyping in Early Modern Travel Writing on Holland', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 43:1 (2003) 83-100). Consequently, the impressions of foreigners should be carefully contextualized, as they were closely related to the background, social environment, and personal motivations of their authors (Prögler mentions the problem on page 76 but does not really go into the matter).

Moreover, the relations between the town and the university are generally presented in a positive light (87-88), leaving aside conflicts and abuses. Prögler's choice can be justified inasmuch as the records of the university court only involve one English student for that period, but such a low number of documented problems may deserve discussion in its own right, especially considering the many conflicts involving German students (see Martine Zoeteman, *De studentenpopulatie van de Leidse universiteit, 1575-1812* (Doctoral thesis, Leiden University, 2011) 97-101; and Willem Otterspeer, *Het bolwerk van de vrijheid. De Leidse universiteit, 1575-1672* (Amsterdam 2000) 276).

Lastly, an examination of the wider significance of the patterns revealed in this book is missing. The author hints at but does not sufficiently explore the connection between humanism and pragmatism in early modern universities. She also circumvents the intriguing connection between Leiden's religious laxity and its persistent popularity with students looking specifically for a Calvinist education.

Minor problems include the unjustifiably long quotes from secondary literature; the debatable choice to use 'divinity' instead of 'theology' for continental universities; the footnotes, which are useful but sometimes confusing in their level of detail; the bibliography, which would be more helpful if it included the authors' life years for early modern sources printed in the modern period; and the rather unfortunate decision to include an awkwardly-sounding quotation in the title.

The above criticisms should not distract from the book's worth. *English Students at Leiden University* may not be groundbreaking, but it is a solid contribution to existing scholarship in the field, most valuable for its empirical data and its careful assessment of

university records, which help construct a more nuanced image of early modern student populations. It is a dense read, but Prögler manages to make her points clear; the summaries featured at the end of each section certainly help. The book requires some prior knowledge of early modern education as well as English and Dutch history; as such, it is most appropriate for graduate students (or advanced undergraduate ones) and scholars interested in the history of universities and early modern mobility and migration.

Felicia Roşu, Leiden University