

graphical debate is flawless. It is a marvelously vivid study that brings forgotten texts to life and makes us look afresh at many of those we know. It will be read by all concerned with print culture and its role in the emergence of a public sphere.

István György Tóth. *Literacy and Written Culture in Early Modern Central Europe*. Central European University Press, 2000. x + 266 pp. Includes b&w illustrations, 31 tables and 2 maps. £13.95 paper. Review by JAKUB BASISTA, JAGIELLONIAN UNIVERSITY, KRAKÓW.

When I saw the title of this book for the first time on a web page, I felt real excitement and knew that, sooner or later, I had to get access to it. Today's world makes certain things much easier than they were in the times discussed by the author, and several weeks later I could open the discussed work and place it on my desk. The early discussion, and particularly the introduction, were somewhat disappointing. The author sets out to discuss the level of literacy in Central Europe on the base of research carried out in one region of Hungary. I realize that the notions of Central, Eastern, Central Eastern Europe, etc., are far from being precise, but I have problems accepting Central Europe as being limited only to Hungary—even when Hungary was at its largest historical extent. It cannot be assumed that results from one specific region in this part of Europe are applicable to other regions. This book is not about literacy and written culture in Central Europe, but in Hungary, or even more precisely, in Habsburg Hungary. I see no reason for such a misleading title, especially as Tóth does eventually compare the results of his research with available studies for other European countries (including Central European Poland), placing the literacy rates of Early Modern Hungary in a wider European context (203–208). Fortunately, the deeper I carried on with the book, the better my opinion

became.

Like all early modern historians dealing with the question of literacy, Tóth had to face the great challenge of a lack of good source material for his work. All we really possess are signatures and crosses executed on various contemporary documents (48). Even David Cressy, in his excellent study on literacy in Tudor and Stuart England, could supplement himself with much richer evidence. The author is fully aware of these limitations and of the accuracy of his own work based on such sources. The book begins with an analysis of the situation of elementary schools in Hungary. Using among others the results of church visitations to parishes, Tóth recreates the rather gloomy picture of elementary schools and elementary school teachers in early modern Hungary. Schoolmasters who could not read, teachers who were themselves unable to write, and schools without students appear to be realities in those days. On top of this, the author estimates that barely 14.9-18.6 per cent of children attended any school (21). The rest were rarely even given a chance for study. This picture is compared with the situation in other regions of Austria, and the results are not very encouraging.

Having laid down the foundations of his research, Tóth concentrates on the slow advance of literacy in peasant culture (Chapter 2). Here he utilizes scarce testimonies, which unfortunately do not always reveal their secrets. Was someone who signed a document with a cross illiterate (61-69)? And did someone who signed himself necessarily know how to write? What conclusions can we draw from the fact that peasants possessed prayer books (69-72)? Once again we recall England, where Bible possession was obligatory regardless of literacy, and hence can be no proof of literacy. Unfortunately, we are unable to answer these questions precisely, and are forced to make assumptions. The author is fully aware of these limitations and illustrates his work with numerous documented stories that back his conclusions. In Chapters 3 and 4 the

question of literacy among the nobility is analyzed. With it Tóth discusses the importance of oral tradition and its existence among the lower nobility. In the final paragraphs of his work István Tóth compares his findings with the findings of historians regarding other European countries, thus placing his research in a wider European context. Literacy in Hungary comes off poorly when compared with England or the Netherlands, but is much richer and better developed than in Eastern European countries such as Romanian or Ukrainian lands.

Overall we have received a very valuable study, so long as we remember that it does not refer to early modern Europe in general, but only a small fragment. We do not get an exact, precise picture or map of literacy for the discussed territory. What we do get is a very clear and picturesque analysis of what can be said about the ability to read and write in early modern Hungary based on the existing evidence, which is far poorer than in most of Western Europe. Numerous charts nicely supplement the author's conclusions. This work should definitely find its way into libraries and seminars examining written culture in early modern Europe. It is the first of such significance on the subject for a relatively poorly examined part of Central Europe.

Paul M. Hunneyball. *Architecture and Image-Building in Seventeenth-Century Hertfordshire*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004. xiv + 218pp. + 12 maps and plans + 42 illus. \$99.00. Review by MARTYN BENNETT, NOTTINGHAM TRENT UNIVERSITY.

It can be argued that the seventeenth-century Englishman and Englishwoman were obsessed by their image. Twenty-first century celebrities and their obsessions about personal presentation and style are often advanced as modern phenomena created by paparazzi and the constant glare of visual media. Yet this is not an original phenomenon. In the early modern period, image did not merely keep you in the gaze of an easily bored public; it gained a person power, prestige, and social status. The key to becoming gentrified was conducting yourself in a manner becoming a gentle-