

Thesis Completed

Dylan Reid. *Literary Aspects of Urban Culture in Rouen, c.1500–c.1640*. M.Litt. thesis, University of Oxford, 1995.

In the century after 1450, the cities of France experienced a period of prosperity and autonomy, which led to the development of a thriving urban culture. In Rouen, one of France's largest cities, this urban culture was highly developed. This thesis examines Rouen's urban culture and places it in its historical context, with reference to the social, political and religious environment. In the process, the thesis addresses two important questions—the nature of the relationship between popular and high culture within the city, and the relationship between the provincial culture of Rouen and national cultural developments.

Before about 1530, Rouen's culture can be described as communal. All of the different forms of cultural activity shared the same basic mentality. With continuing prosperity and new cultural and technological developments, different aspects of Rouen's cultural life developed in different directions. Rouen's festive life developed into a thriving popular culture centred around the *Abbaye des Conards*, which was made up of artisans and merchants. Initially operating fairly freely, it developed a symbiotic relationship with Rouen's *Parlement* during the religious wars, before declining due to internal and external factors.

Rouen's high culture had been centred around the *confrérie de l'Immaculée Conception*, which, since the end of the fifteenth century, had held an annual contest of devout poetry. Although dominated by Rouen's elite, it had a wide appeal, and attracted poets of national reputation. While it remained traditional after 1530, some of its poets experimented with new styles on their own. Meanwhile, the influence of the Renaissance inspired a dynamic period of other cultural activity, which was reflected in royal entries and supported by the printing industry.

With the advent of the religious wars, this dynamic and innovative period ended. However, Rouen's elite embraced the basic lessons of classical education, and applied them to those cultural forms which suited their conservative mentality. When the wars ended, this blossomed once again into an active cultural life, well suited to the new social and religious situation.

This thesis includes a great deal of information of interest to scholars of confraternities. The introductory chapter looks at those confraternities which played a role in Rouen's festive life, and discusses how this role was integrated into Rouen's urban culture. The chapter discussing popular culture reveals that the carnival society of the *Abbaye des Conards* was itself a confraternity. The three chapters on high culture are centred around the *Confrérie de l'Immaculée Conception* and its poetry contest, and include a detailed discussion of the structure, history and poetry of this confraternity from its foundation in 1486 to its dissolution around 1650. Together, these chapters demonstrate the fundamental role of confraternities in the urban culture of an early modern city.

A copy of this thesis has been deposited into the Confraternities Collection at the Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies in the University of Toronto.