

Reviews

Fehler, Timothy G. *Poor Relief and Protestantism. The Evolution of Social Welfare in Sixteenth-Century Emden*. St. Andrews Studies in Reformation History. Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 1999. xiii, 332 pp. ISBN 1-85928-378-0

In this volume Timothy Fehler takes issue with the traditional historiography of Northern European poor relief that, he claims, over-emphasizes Reformation theology as the catalyst for changes in civic poverty alleviation. For his part, Fehler prefers to engage in a more complex investigation of the topic, one that takes into consideration much more than just Protestantism. As a result, his study of poor relief in Emden, while treating extensively the impact of Protestantism, also deals with a number of other factors that impacted on social welfare, for example confraternal, guild, and civic bodies.

As the author points out, Emden is an interesting city to study. The Lutheranism of the 1520s was not immediately adopted city-wide and Catholicism survived well into the mid-century; the Franciscan monastery in Emden, for example, remained an important Catholic stronghold up to the 1550s, when it was finally purchased by the Protestant countess to serve as a hospital for the poor. As an international port city, Emden also served as a hub for many refugees, including a Dutch congregation exiled from Marian England in the 1550s and a flood of fugitives (both rich and poor) from the embattled Netherlands of the 1560s. By the end of the century, Emden was largely a Calvinist city, but the influx of refugees naturally led to an array of religions that forced the city to grapple with such issues as how to treat local and foreign poor, how to determine worthy from unworthy poor, and whether those who were worthy had to be part of the “household of faith.” Fehler follows the city’s confessional evolutions with great clarity and keeps his reader attuned to the various institutions involved in welfare distribution. He shows that amidst such a variety of confessions and welfare bodies, the citizens of Emden often wanted to provide for “the poor” in general, so much so that institutional efforts to differentiate the needy into categories frequently met with failure.

For confraternity scholars, the chapter on pre-Reformation poor relief offers an assessment of the welfare strategies of Emden’s five major confraternities (Our Lady, St. Clement, St. Ann, St. Antonius, and St. Jurgen). The story of the brotherhood of St. Clement is especially interesting. As a confraternity based around the shipping trade, it survived the Lutheran assault and, after absorbing the assets of two of the other confraternities, continued to flourish; in fact, it survives to this day. Fehler also investigates a number of the five brotherhoods’ activities and legacies, such as alms-giving and bequests for the poor. Among these charitable works Fehler includes the administration of *Gotteskammern*, which he defines as “one-room apartments” that served as long-term housing for the homeless and which he considers “unusual, if not unique” for this period and this area.

Fehler's study is a welcome addition to the scholarship on sixteenth-century social welfare, particularly because of its attention to Emden, a fruitful but under-studied centre, and because of its thoughtful approach to the multiplicity of individuals and organizations involved in assisting the poor.

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Guilds, Markets and Work Regulations in Italy, 16th–19th Centuries. Eds. Alberto Guenzi, Paola Massa and Fausto Piola Caselli. Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998. vii, 520 pp.

This volume arises out of the growing interest demonstrated by many European academics in particular in understanding the forms and impacts of corporate groups in early modern Europe. Some conferences of the early 1990s stimulated a major Italian collaborative research project in 1994, whose findings were delivered at a conference in Rome in 1997 and are now made more widely available through this collection. In contrast to some recent work that looks at diverse kinds of corporate groups, this collection focuses more narrowly on economic history and deals almost exclusively with guilds and their adaptation to a new order where merchants and governments held the powers that guilds had once exercised.

Guilds and confraternities were long thought to have retreated, by the early modern period, into mere shadows of their medieval selves: empty ritual bodies at best, and resisting necessary economic and social change at worst. Certainly most were stripped of the central political and economic roles that they had earlier played, but in many instances the expansion of the mercantile economy and regulatory state was done as much with the co-operation of the guilds as in opposition to them. This process is considered in the first two parts of the collection: "The Guild System in Some Urban Realities" and "Profession, Monopoly, and Conflict". In Genoa, regulations governing foodstuffs were adopted by civic governments, but then implemented through the guilds that had formerly held total control. In Milan, guilds adapted as merchant companies began expanding to take control of industries such as silk; while the latter organized production and trade, they could only do so because the former continued to govern contracts, quality standards, and training. The same was true of guilds generally in Sardinia and Sicily, where guild control of standards and training fit well with merchant control of marketing, and where guild control of social life and welfare ensured a continuing social influence even after political power had waned.

The guild activity closest to confraternal realities is mutual aid and charity, and this is discussed in Part Three: "Assistance and Mutual Aid." Welfare was almost always given on the grounds of Christian charity and kin obligation, but we see evolving in this period a growing practice of linking benefit levels for the sick, the poor or the old to the years they had worked and contributions they had offered, that is, a form of modern insurance. The same was true of aid to