medieval pageants, since the Chester Banns themselves evoke authorial integrity and intent as part of their argument.

Schreyer consciously engages theories of history and of materiality, and, despite some remaining questions, he makes a strong case for the relevance of his research to the fields of literature, theater history, and cultural studies. He has written a smart, readable, and lively argument that shows how the author function in "Renaissance" drama encompasses a crafting of diachronic language, history, and objects into a synchronic synthesis of both past and present.


Reviewed by: Carolyn Corretti
Suffolk University

Historians Jeffrey and Isabella Watt have published the most recent volume (no. 8) of a series of tomes of the registers of the Genevan Consistory. This latest endeavor is part of an ongoing project that, when completed, will result in a total of twenty or twenty-one volumes (that will end with and include the year 1564). These sixteenth-century primary sources are compilations of case transcripts (proceedings and outcomes) of an important morals discipline institution that John Calvin (1509–64) and fellow reformers used to further the Reformation in this French-speaking city. The Genevan Consistory was an ecclesiastical institution that Calvin established in 1541 to regulate cases of such morals transgressions as adultery, gambling, and errant religious beliefs and practices.

The Consistory cases are valuable for historians and students alike for numerous reasons. For one thing, the transcripts illustrate many issues pertaining to the progress and spread (including successes and failures) of the Protestant Reformation in the theocracy that was Geneva. After the city had officially converted to the Reformed faith in 1536, religious leaders, most notably Calvin, were busy implementing religious and political reforms in the community. They erected and used the Consistory to instill morals discipline. Indeed, the eradication of sin, Calvin and his cohorts believed, would be instrumental in achieving and maintaining a godly society.

Volume 8 of the registers, which covers the period March 1553 to February 1554, also highlights several important events in the history of Reformation Geneva. For example, it was during this time that Calvin and his followers secured a victory over their political rivals, the Perrinists (or Children of Geneva), a victory that helped Calvin to secure the Consistory's authority to regulate morals transgressions and to retain critical prerogatives such as excommunicating sinners. Also of importance is the case of Michael Servetus, which came to the Consistory in 1553. Servetus's trial for heresy, sensational then as it still is to modern-day scholars, was a high profile case in Geneva—the only one for heresy that ended with a death sentence.

Moreover, the transcripts elucidate the workings or procedure of the Consistory, whose elders and pastors (overseers) met every Thursday. Calvin also presided over the hearings. The Consistory, in tandem with local investigators (dizeiniers), heard cases of moral transgressions and meted out chastisements to sinners, punishments or corrections such as verbal admonishments and orders to attend sermons. In cases that were particularly serious, such as excessive physical abuse and blasphemy, the elders and pastors referred parties
to the Small Council, a civil institution that could imprison, fine, and exile miscreants.

However (and finally), perhaps the most fascinating elements about the Consistory registers are the vivid stories about ordinary (and sometimes elite) people whose private lives are laid bare for the perusal of posterity. Readers of the transcripts can expect vivid accounts of contested betrothals and marriages, blasphemy, and all sorts of conflicts (often violent) between family members, spouses, and neighbors. In these ways, we obtain a considerable picture of the tribulations and misbehaviors of early modern men and women as well as their confrontations or interactions with figures of authority. The registers of the Genevan Consistory will continue to enrich students’ and professional historians’ understanding of the sixteenth-century world.


Reviewed by: Kirk Summers
University of Alabama

The latest installment of Beza’s correspondence from the editors at Geneva offers a fascinating window into the reformer’s waning years. Beza has now made it to his seventy-eighth birthday and, as he tells his former student Venceslas Budowicz, has lost all hope of returning to health in order to meet his public duties (2527; see also 2529). Even so, he busies himself in his private studies while keeping up a prolific correspondence touching on various literary and scholarly endeavors, current theological disputes, international political wrangling, and matters of a more personal sort. The one scholarly endeavor that Beza mentions to Budowicz is his revision of the “major annotations” of the New Testament, the fifth and final edition of which was published, after printer delays (alluded to by Jacob Monau [2523]), in the following year. Historians of biblical interpretation will find several gems among the correspondence with Isaac Casaubon, former chair of Greek at the Genevan Academy, showing Beza grappling with correct readings and precise ways to render the text into Latin. For example, in an intriguing conjecture for Matt. 28:17, he proposes that the author originally wrote οὐδὲ in place of οἱ ὑπὲ, with the sense that “no apostle doubted” as opposed to the traditional understanding that “some apostles doubted.” Beza finds it odd that οἱ ὑπὲ would stand for ρήτορον ὑπὲ, but after Casaubon finds parallels for the usage in Diogenes Laertius, Beza is content to relegate his conjecture to a lengthy note in his edition (2498n5 and 2503).

There is much here too about the publication of the deluxe in-quarto Poemata varia (1597). The editors have detailed the involvement of Venceslas Zastrisileus the Younger and his family of Moravian nobility (George Sigismund was a cousin) and the financing that they provided for its publication. In fact, the book would have been published in Moravia after Venceslas took the manuscript there in 1596, but, at the prompting of friends, Beza asked for it back so that the editing of it could be overseen in Geneva (2513). It is in this same letter that we learn of the existence of a Latin version of the Household Prayers that was published in England in 1607. Appendix 1 of the volume reprises the preface of the Poemata varia written by the aforementioned Venceslas to Venceslas Zastrisileus the Elder. What is of more interest to literary historians is Beza’s own letter to the latter (2529), where he talks about the critics of his poetry and makes the surprisingly positive assessment of Catullus’s poems: