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978-0-521-84549-6 - Cultural Exchange in Early Modern Europe, Volume IV: Forging European Identities, 1400-1700

Edited by Herman Roodenburg

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CULTURAL EXCHANGE IN EARLY MODERN EUROPE

Cultural exchange, the dynamic give-and-take between two or more cultures, has become a distinguishing feature of modern Europe. This was already an important feature to the elites of the fifteenth, sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and it played a central role in their fashioning of self. The cultures these elites exchanged and often integrated with their own were both material and immaterial; they included palaces, city-dwellings, paintings, sculptures, ceramics, dresses and jewellery, but also gestures, ways of sitting, standing and walking, and dances. In this innovative and well-illustrated volume all this lively exchange is traced from Bruges, Augsburg and Istanbul to Italy; from Italy to Paris, Amsterdam, Dresden, Novgorod and Moscow, and even from Brazil to Rouen. This volume, which reveals how a first European identity was forged, will appeal to cultural and art historians, as well as social and cultural anthropologists.

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At a time when the enlarged European Community asserts the humanist values uniting its members, these volumes of essays by leading scholars from twelve countries seek to uncover the deep but hidden unities shaping a common European past. These volumes examine the domains of religion, the city, communication and information, and the conception of man and the use of material goods, identifying the links which endured and were strengthened through ceaseless cultural exchanges, even during this time of endless wars and religious disputes. Volume I examines the role of religion as a vehicle for cultural exchange. Volume II surveys the reception of foreigners within the cities of early modern Europe. Volume III explores the place of information and communication in early modern Europe. Volume IV reveals how cultural exchange played a central role in the fashioning of a first European identity.

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VOLUME IV

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EDITED BY

HERMAN ROODENBURG

WITH AN INTRODUCTORY ESSAY BY

BERND ROECK

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General editor's preface

The four volumes of this series represent the synthesis of works from 'Cultural Exchange in Europe, 1400–1700', a research programme sponsored by the European Science Foundation and financed by eighteen councils for research from seventeen countries. The adventure began in January 1997 when its originators decided to conduct an international investigation of the cultural roots of modern Europe. Research has increased considerably since this programme began and identifying the origins of the European identity has become a fundamental issue at the dawn of the twenty-first century.

Ultimately, our programme brought together over sixty regular members, plus a few dozen individuals who participated in one or more of our group meetings. It was a real linguistic Tower of Babel including specialists from various disciplines: history, art, architecture, theatre, literature, linguistics, folklore, clothing and dance. We have recruited well beyond the borders of the European Union, from St Petersburg to Chicago by way of Istanbul, although it was not always possible for every geographical location to be fully represented in each of our four groups.

This series is devoted to four major themes: religion; the city; communication and information; the conception of man and the use of material goods. The four volumes collectively include about a third of the papers presented throughout the programme.¹ Most have been discussed collectively, revised, and sometimes rewritten.

¹ Many other contributions prepared for this programme have appeared or will appear elsewhere: Eszter Andor and István György Tóth (eds.), *Frontiers of Faith: Religious Exchange and the Constitution of Religious Identities, 1400–1750* (Budapest: Central European University/ESF, 2001); José Pedro Paiva (ed.), *Religious Ceremonials and*

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It was not always easy to conceptualise our theme collectively. The most difficult and time-consuming task was to get scholars to understand each other unambiguously when employing such apparently clear concepts as 'culture', which means different things in different languages and cultural traditions. Our first major task was simply to discover whether or not a European culture existed between 1400 and 1700, an intensely conflictual and profoundly tragic period which seemed to be characterised by ruptures rather than creation. From 1517, when Luther broke with Roman Catholicism, until the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, a series of terrible religious wars drowned the continent in blood, ending the medieval dream of a united Christendom. This age of intolerance was also one of fundamental inequality, particularly with respect to birth and sex, because any woman was considered fundamentally inferior to any man. Not only was the continent divided into at least five different cultural areas – the Atlantic, the Baltic, the Mediterranean, central Europe and eastern Europe – but also, and everywhere, those frontiers established in men's minds – both visible and invisible – conflicted with any residual hopes of unity, whether expressed in terms of imperial ideology, papal universalism, or Thomas More's humanistic Utopia, all of them swept away after 1520 by a wave of persecutions.²

And yet this very same Europe also bequeathed us powerful roots for the slow and difficult construction of a collective sensibility. Our research has unearthed traces of underlying unities, despite (or because of) formidable obstacles. This stubborn growth in some ways resembled an earlier process described by a prominent medievalist as the 'Europeanization of Europe'.³ They have given substance and meaning to my working hypothesis: that European culture from 1400 to 1700 contained expressions of hidden cohesion against a background

Images: Power and Social Meaning (1400–1750) (Coimbra: Palimage, 2002). A volume on translations will be edited by Ronnie Po-Chia Hsia.

² Robert Muchembled, 'Frontières vives: la naissance du Sujet en Europe (xve–xviiie siècle)', introduction to Eszter Andor and István György Tóth (eds.), *Frontiers of Faith*, pp. 1–8.

³ Robert Bartlett, *The Making of Europe: Conquest, Colonization and Cultural Change 950–1350* (London, 1993).

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of intense conflicts. If those conflicts were destabilising, they also created a dialectic which contributed to the overall advance of European civilisation.⁴ Following Norbert Elias's argument, I believe that every human society is constantly seeking to attain a 'balance of power' through a mechanism of 'reciprocal dependency' which produces a clear evolutionary trend. Culture is a symbolic arena for both collective negotiations and the fashioning of the Self.⁵ The enormous importance of the Self in today's Europe (and in the United States) is the result of a major cultural change which began during the Renaissance. In the face of the tragedy of real life, this new individualism provided a fresh means of expressing the continent's collective vitality and produced a growing conviction of its superiority and differences from all other places and people in the world.⁶

The 'culture' analysed in this series may be defined as that which simultaneously holds a society together and distinguishes it from other societies. If the Europe of 1400–1700 had little obvious regard for human rights, it did at least prefigure the time when they would be important. The humanistic lights which glimmered from time to time in the two dark and bloodstained centuries after 1520 were never to be completely extinguished. The Enlightenment revived them and honoured their Renaissance origins. But the tragic events that polluted its soil during the first half of the twentieth century proved that the Old Continent was not yet fully free from intolerance and persecution.

I should like to thank Wim Blockmans, who warmly supported the creation of this research programme; the European Science Foundation for its constant help; the eighteen institutions which provided generous funding over four years;⁷ all the scholars who participated

⁴ Robert Muchembled, 'Echanges, médiations, mythes unitaires, 1400–1700', plenary conference address, published in the programme's *Newsletter* no. 1 (2000), pp. 7–26.

⁵ Norbert Elias, *The Society of Individuals*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Oxford, 1991).

⁶ Robert Muchembled, *A History of the Devil: From the Middle Ages to the Present* (Cambridge, 2003); *L'Orgasme et l'Occident: une histoire du plaisir du XVII^e siècle à nos jours* (Paris, 2005, forthcoming in English translation).

⁷ Austria: Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften; Fonds zur Förderung der wissenschaftlichen Forschung (FWF); Belgium: Fonds National de la Recherche Scientifique (FNRS) / Fonds voor Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek – Vlaanderen

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in the experience, notably E. William Monter without whom this series would probably not have been published, and the late István György Tóth, codirector of volume 1, who passed away unexpectedly on 14 July 2005; and last but not least Cambridge University Press for producing four superb books proving the great vitality of past and present European culture.

Robert Muchembled

Chair of the ESF programme

'Cultural Exchange in Europe, 1400–1700'

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