

Klaus Conermann (Wolfenbüttel)


A striking seventeenth-century painting of a youth appears on the front of this book. He gazes at the observer, with his right hand opening a book on the table beside him and his left hand holding out what appears to be a bundle of pens. Details on the back cover tell us he is fourteen years old, a former pupil of the Latin school in Zwickau, and is displaying the ‘accoutrements of a man of learning’. The portrait creates a visual link to ‘Daum’s boys’ in Alan S. Ross’s title, the boys who were taught at the school in Zwickau by the polyhistorian Christian Daum (1612–1687), went on to university and in adulthood assumed a scholar’s persona, thus — like Daum — joining the Republic of Letters. Ross’s book traces the transmission of early modern scholarship from one
of its earliest stages, in school, at the interpersonal level. Daum taught at the school in Zwickau from 1642 until his death, as teacher of the third class then, from 1662, as rector and teacher of the top two classes. He began the initiation of intellectually gifted boys into the mode of life peculiar to men within the Republic of Letters.

Ross's main source is Daum's 'Nachlass', a remarkably extensive personal archive held by the Ratschulbibliothek Zwickau, a research library renowned for the long history underpinning the richness of its holdings. It was founded some twenty years before the Reformation for the benefit of teachers and pupils at the Latin school, which had been established much earlier, in the 1290s. Both institutions were run and overseen by the Zwickau town council. The value of Daum's archive is heightened by its uninterrupted presence in the institution where it originated, and by its multiple interrelationships with contemporary material elsewhere in the library's holdings.

The archive includes 7000 printed books, forming the personal library Daum collected throughout his life and recorded in the six manuscript catalogues that accompany it; over 5000 letters, sent to him by a total of 489 correspondents; 'Konzeptbücher' for 1633 to 1687, containing the drafts of Daum's letters; 'Schreibkalender' for 1662-1687, itemising all the births, marriages and deaths in Zwickau during that period as well as all the books he purchased; together with several smaller collections. The archive is of value to research in many areas of early modern culture; Daum's correspondence, however, is of outstanding value and has been catalogued with support from the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft. Ross draws on it again and again to develop his thesis that the vitality of the Republic of Letters depended on the continuous recruitment of new members by Daum and the ninety fellow teacher-scholars who corresponded, among many others, with him (pp. 29-31).

Zwickau was one of the earliest German towns to support the Reformation. Its location in Saxony, in the Erzgebirge (Ore Mountains), brought it into competition with the many other civic schools in Saxony and Thuringia. In early modern Germany any town's ability to support a Latin school and employ well-qualified teachers was a marker of prosperity that gave it high status among neighbouring towns and was not to be forfeited lightly. Later, in 1642, Zwickau's economic heyday as a centre of silver mining had been over for more than a hundred years; furthermore, the Thirty Years' War...
War had depleted its remaining resources – yet support for the school persisted: the town council appointed the well-qualified Daum to the post of third teacher. In 1662, when he was appointed rector, a shortage of funds meant his salary was lower than that of his predecessor, Johannes Zechendorf (rector from 1671 to 1662). Nevertheless, the prominent position of the school building in the centre of Zwickau, as well as the presence of just under 200 schoolboys among a total population of over 2000, meant the school still functioned as a highly visible source of civic pride.

Ross argues, too, that Daum’s high personal visibility was crucial to his public role of teacher-scholar. As a barber-surgeon’s son and born Zwickauer who attended the school during Zechendorf’s rectorship, later taught there and became rector himself, Daum must have been a familiar figure in the town. In 1632 he left to go to Leipzig university, but the Thirty Years’ War disrupted his studies; in 1634 he returned to Zwickau and held a live-in post as private family tutor until his first school appointment in 1642. As third teacher (‘Tertius’), he was entitled to occupy the small semi-detached house near the school that was owned by the town council and known as the ‘Tertiat-Haus’ (Figure 5). This house not only confirmed the teacher-scholar identity which its popular name implies, it also gave him a study, which sustained his newly established identity by affording him space for the practices of scholarship. In the very year that he became ‘Tertius’, Daum published his first scholarly work, De causis ammissarum quarundam Linguae Latinae Radicum..., an attempt ‘to determine the lost roots of about 300 Latin words and the reasons for their having become extinct’ (p. 74); and publication enabled him to start establishing his scholarly identity in the public arena of the Republic of Letters. Ross lists all twenty-eight of Daum’s published works, as well as the six works by Caspar von Barth (1587–1658) that he edited after Barth’s death (pp. 188–199), and defines Daum’s style of scholarship as polyhistoria – knowledge ranging broadly across many fields, a style which, in the early Enlightenment, began to give way to the still prevalent belief in scholarship as specialisation. But Daum, like many fellow members of the Republic of Letters, including his former benefactor Barth, whom he had met in Leipzig, attracted widespread respect as a polyhistorian. Meanwhile, his high visibility in Zwickau was emphasised by what Ross argues was conventional scholarly dress – black gown and cloak with a broad white collar and white shirt (Figures 14 and 15).

Ross discusses the pedagogic reforms which took place in many institutions during the earlier decades of the 1600s, influenced by men such as Wolfgang Ratke (Ratcyus) (1571–1635) and Jan Amos Komenský (Comenius) (1592–1670). Against this background, he concentrates on the curriculum at the Zwickau Latin school and, in particular, on the question of who effectively controlled it: the territorial authority in Dresden, the town council or the current rector. Zechendorf is notable for having introduced Arabic and other oriental languages into the curriculum, but the teaching of these languages lapsed towards the end of his long rectorship. After his death the town council attempted to gain tighter control over the curriculum. When Daum became rector, it required him to reform specific teaching practices which had taken root owing to the general laxity of Zechendorf’s final years, and which it considered undesirable.
Ross reviews Daum’s successful resistance to intervention in some detail, finding it only proper for the council finally to allow Daum, as ‘hands-on’ teacher-scholar and rector, the final say on what was to be taught and how it should be taught. He, rather than any more remote authority, had the expertise to design a curriculum adapted to the particular requirements of the school and its pupils. A summary of Daum’s 1676 curriculum appears in this chapter, in Ross’s English translation (pp. 106–109), and helps illuminate the argument.

Ross exploits data from Daum’s own matriculation records to throw further light on the internal dynamics of the school. Pupils had two main options, depending on whether they hoped to spend their adult careers as artisans or tradesmen, or in a profession. The first batch of pupils usually attended only the lowest form (‘Septima’), where they learnt to read and write German; the second had to learn Latin and go to university, so had to attend the higher classes (‘Sexta’ to ‘Prima’) which taught Latin, especially the two highest (‘Secunda’ and ‘Prima’), which prepared them for university. Ross derives vivid detail from the data: for instance, between 1662 and 1669 ‘Septima’ was by far the largest class, with up to 120 pupils per year, while barely twenty per year attended ‘Secunda’ or ‘Prima’. The figures intriguingly demonstrate that the school owed its regional prestige to small groups of elite pupils and the expertise of hardly less elite teacher-scholars. Other data equally intriguingly reveal that most pupils in the lowest forms came from Zwickau, while most in the highest came from outside it. In other words, the majority of pupils in the highest forms were ‘outsiders’ who, in leaving home to attend school in Zwickau, had taken what they supposedly saw as their best option for achieving a professional career. This allows us insight into the school’s regional prestige and why the town council was so keen to safeguard it.

But Ross also notes that the internal dynamics of the school opened a pathway to ‘upward mobility’: a pupil in ‘Septima’ could, if he was able and willing, progress into ‘Sexta’ and start learning Latin. There was, in fact, no obstacle within the school to prevent an able pupil from continuing to progress into the highest classes and on to university. Ross presents upward mobility of this kind as a gradual step-by-step process, generally taking place over two or three generations, yet he also provides the glowing example of ‘Daum’s star pupil’, Joachim Feller (Figure 26). The son of a Zwickau artisan (a cloth-maker), Feller was distantly related to the first rector of the territorial school in Grimma. But family connections did nothing to support his stellar progress from school in Zwickau to graduation from Leipzig university in 1660, and rectorship of the university in 1680 (pp. 171–173).

It was, of course, Daum who took Feller under his wing. Indeed, Feller became one of the fifty-five students/pupils who corresponded with Daum. Daum first introduced him to scholars in Leipzig, including Caspar von Barth, his own former benefactor, and recommended him to others as a promising famulus. Feller soon became a skilled networker in his own right. He cemented his place within scholarly circles in Leipzig by choosing daughters of eminent academics in both his first and second marriages, and took his place within the wider networks of the Republic of Letters.
Daum’s support of Feller and other promising ex-pupils was far from disinterested. In return he relied on them to keep him up-to-date with scholarly news and gossip and, above all, to act as his agents in negotiations with booksellers and printers. The size of his personal library owes much to the efforts of these protegés. Ross gives a final glimpse of Daum managing his resources to ensure a steady supply of likely contacts, storing the information about ex-pupils he gleaned from his matriculation records, correspondence and notes, ‘until, some day, [he] felt the need to activate such a relationship. If they wanted to stay in the loop and avoid being replaced, Daum’s contacts needed to stay useful to him’ (pp. 173–174).

Ross’s book is a most welcome contribution to the early modern history of scholarship in Germany. Numerous histories of individual schools exist but – as far as I know – few are recent and none is as richly detailed or as engaging as this one. I think and hope it will inspire comparative research into other German schools of the same period and thus increase our understanding of their importance in the history of European culture.

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Die innerlichen, auf Gott gerichteten Gewissensoperationen sind jedoch per se unsichtbar und unhörbar, so dass dem „unsichtbaren Blick“ (12) auf der Bühne Sichtbarkeit verliehen werden muss. Dieser theatricalischen Sichtbarmachung der Gewissensoperation widmet sich der Verfasser in einer – um es gleich vorweg zu nehmen – durch präzise Analysen und plausible Thesenbildung durchweg überzeugenden Arbeit.

Die Studie gliedert sich in ein knappes Einleitungskapitel, insgesamt zehn Einzelschritten zu Dramen von 1537 bis 1800 – einen Schwerpunkt der Untersuchung bilden hier Andreas Gryphius und Daniel Casper von Lohenstein, die jeweils mit zwei