PARISH BOOKS IN THE SOUTHERN LOW COUNTRIES
IN THE LATE MIDDLE AGES

In the last centuries of the Middle Ages, the parish emerged as the main organisational structure for populations in the West. Indeed, the characteristics of the parish are well known: a territory with relatively fixed borders that hardly evolved; a church (sometimes supplemented with outbuildings) with baptismal fonts and a cemetery; a community of the faithful required not only to participate in the liturgical celebrations and receive the sacraments in this context, but also to pay tithes and make offerings; and finally, one or several priests in residence who were responsible for the religious guidance of their flock.¹ To carry out this cura animarum successfully, parish priests had to have a basic education as well as pastoral training; in the 14th and 15th centuries, these two conditions, usually confirmed by an examination prior to ordination and then by subsequent pastoral visitations, diocesan synods, or decanal meetings, appear to have been broadly met, much better, in any case, than had long been thought.²


² Nicole Lemaître et al., Histoire des curés, Paris, 2002; for Germany, see also, more recently: Matthew Wrannox, Priests and their Books in Late Medieval Eltville, Lanham – Boulder – New York – London, 2017. For the Early Middle Ages, see Steffen Patzold and Carine Van Rijn (ed.), Local

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