Urban Literacy in Late Medieval Poland

by Agnieszka Bartoszewicz

DESCRIPTION:
From the end of the thirteenth century onwards, European towns exhibited a significant increase in the use of writing as a tool for administrative and economic purposes, as well as for social communication. The medieval towns of Poland are no exception to this pattern. This book surveys the development of the literacy of Polish burghers in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, revealing socio-economic and cultural processes that changed the life of Polish urban society. Polish urban literacy is examined according to the reception of Western European urban culture more generally. Town networks in medieval Poland are explained, and the literacy skills of the producers and users of the written word are discussed. Literacy skills differed greatly from one social group to another, it is shown, due to the variety of town dwellers (clerics and lay people, professionals of the written word, occasional users of writing, and illiterates). Other issues that are discussed include the cooperation between agents of lay and church literacy, the relationship between literacy and orality, and the difference between developing literacies in Latin and in the vernacular languages.