

Book Reviews

David Englander (ed.), *A documentary history of Jewish immigrants in Britain 1840–1920*. (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1994.) Pages xiv + 380. £14.99.

This history of ethnic minorities in Britain moves ahead, albeit slowly and in the face of an engrained conservatism. Further advances require the circulation of key documentary sources and several years ago Jim Walvin, one of the pioneer historians of immigration, produced a collection of readings on the Black presence. Now, David Englander has compiled a list of sources on Jewish immigration between 1840 and 1920. In essence he is concerned with the arrival of Jews from the Russian Empire and their subsequent economic, social, political, and cultural life in Britain.

A number of documents will stick in any reader's memory. One such is the account of the immigrant quarter in Mrs Brewer's 'The Jewish Colony in London', which appeared in *The Sunday Magazine* in 1892. Then there is an intriguing account of *Rigoletto* performed in Whitechapel in Yiddish in 1912. The hard life of Mrs Mary Silverberg is also portrayed vividly. Let us not forget, too, Bernard Homa's lyrical account of activities in the Machzike Hadath Synagogue on Fournier Street. Other readers will doubtless have their own preferences.

Yet in the midst of much that is good, some criticisms are called for. Too much of the material is derived from sources on London. Extracts on Manchester's immigrants are strikingly absent. Leeds is only a little better served. And, as so often, 'Britain' really means England: more could have been done on Glasgow, particularly. A more vigorous digging into the source material would also have yielded a number of important finds. Harold Frederic's account of the problems of Russian Jewry, the literature of Israel Zangwill which illuminates life in the immigrant quarter, and Robert Sherard's vicious newspaper attacks on the Russian Poles are among those sources which spring immediately to mind. And

the East End press, not only the *East London Observer* but the *East London Advertiser*, and also the *Eastern Post and City Chronicle* (whose editor, J. L. Silver, took a keen interest in the Russian Poles), might have been deployed to some effect. Similarly, the Yiddish press which grew up in the shadow of the immigration is largely silent throughout the survey. Furthermore, although they contain worthwhile nuggets, some of the extracts are too extensive for their own effectiveness. In the chapter on opposition towards Jews the extract from Goldwin Smith's article 'The Jewish Question', which appeared in 1881 in *The Nineteenth Century*, runs on for too long (it covers pages 253–261, inclusive). That same observation can be applied to Arnold White's reflections in *The modern Jews* of 1899 (pp. 261–71).

The survey is well produced. There is only a handful of evident typographical errors. Moreover, in total, the readings provide a clear picture of key developments in the history of the Russian Polish Jews from the early settlement to the developing acculturation of the group. During the immigration period, a child from Odessa later recalled,

our first lodgings were in Brick Lane... We were just one of the many Jewish immigrant families living in that area, and my initial impressions of the place (in 1912) were not good... Brick Lane was bleak and rather dark, and so were the two rooms we lived in... for the first time in our lives we were really poor, and, on top of this, I could barely make myself understood because all I could speak was Russian.

During these years the conflicts with sources outside and also within the Jewish community are made clear. The vibrant immigrant life amidst such poverty and difficulties is apparent. So too is the march of change, as the years slipped by. If Lew Grade (as he now is), the child from Odessa, was initially confined by his circumstances, some members of the community noticed some such young Jews soon beating a path which threatened to distance them from the world in which they had grown up. 'Generally speaking', a Jewish chaplain wrote in 1919, 'I believe the effect of the war on the Jewish soldier will have been to make him less Jewish in life and outlook.'

Today, only a short historical distance away from the world recreated in Englander's documents, Whitechapel still holds out a strong emotional attachment to many Jews of Russian descent. But the Great Synagogue is today a mosque where Allah's faithful are called to prayer; the pavement in Brick Lane is trodden largely by Bengalis; the aromas arise out of the cuisines of the Indian sub-continent. Still the signs of the earlier Jewish presence and, before that, the Huguenot settlement are still visible to those people curious about immigration who are prepared to use their boots and focus their eyes. Such signs testify to the persistence of immigration into Britain and underline the need to recover such history.

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E. A. Smith (ed.), *Reform or revolution? A diary of reform in England 1830–32*. (Alan Sutton, Stroud, 1992.) Pages ix + 165. £18.99.

Earl Grey claimed that one of the chief objectives of the First Reform Act was to prevent a revolution in England. Historians still debate whether or not Britain was on the brink of revolution during the Reform Bill crisis, and even if Grey's statement is accepted as a cogent summary of one of the primary concerns of parliamentary reformers in the early 1830s there is room for some uncertainty as to whether Grey himself was thinking of the immediate situation which his government faced or of the longer term, especially if the reform cause foundered and timely reform was unhappily delayed for another generation or so. Dr E. A. Smith, himself the author of an admirable biography of Grey, has sought to recapture contemporary hopes and aspirations, fears and anxieties, by making this intelligent and thoughtful selection from the letters, diaries, public utterances and newspapers of the time, conveying much of the contemporary intensity of debate which surrounded the First Reform Act from the fall of Wellington's ministry to the final triumph of reform in June 1832.

The book is arranged in eight sections, each with a short, though nicely judged, introduction: *dramatis personae*; the fall of Wellington November 1830; winter of discontent November to December 1830; battle joined March 1831; the people decide April to May 1831; crisis in the Lords September 1831 to April 1832; the days of May 1832; and aftermath. Dr Smith seeks throughout to direct attention to what contemporaries felt and said, and he deftly brings out the contrast between contemporary assessments of the chief personalities involved in the protracted crisis and later evaluations by historians with all the advantages of hindsight and objectivity, as well as a wider knowledge of the entire range of available evidence. Much light is thrown on the characters of Wellington, William IV and Grey, and while the popular dimension of the struggle is not ignored or played down the decisive impact of personality upon events is made abundantly clear. No attempt is made to force a particular interpretation upon the reader. There are times when Dr Smith is content to pose key questions, rather than summarily to answer them. The result is that one occasionally regrets that the editor has not said more by way of engaging with the interpretation of the evidence which he has sifted so astutely.

Useful though a selection such as this is, it highlights the need for care and discrimination in the use of any selection of documents. Without a sound grasp of the main themes of the period under discussion a casual reader or sloppy student could easily lapse into repeating or accepting misleading contemporary judgements, and only those who have mastered the leading authorities in the field will best appreciate some of the finer shades of emphasis which Dr Smith's selection of documents provides. While this volume will prove a valuable accompaniment to the standard accounts of the passing and significance of the Great Reform Act, it is not of itself conclusive. Dr Smith has done much to stimulate debate, not only about the reform of parliament and the impact of reform on the practice of British politics but also about the use of primary evidence and the need for students to be able to contextualize contemporary accounts which can only be understood when a thorough comprehension of the social and political structure of the time and an

ability to pick up the more subtle shades of reference and allusion are brought to the study of a series of extracts from a wide range of primary sources. One of the many attractive qualities this book possesses is a series of nicely chosen plates, which by a combination of portraits, cartoons and drawings adds much to the apprehension of the personalities and passions which dominated political debate between November 1830 and June 1832.

JOHN DERRY

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Ginger S. Frost, *Promises broken: courtship, class, and gender in Victorian England*. (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 1995.) Pages ix + 241. \$35.00.

Whether Lord Hardwicke's Marriage Act of 1753 was a seducer's charter, as some of its critics averred, is highly debatable. One undoubted consequence of that seminal measure, however, was that by stating that actions to uphold spousals could no longer be pursued in the church courts, it effectively completed the transfer of breach-of-promise cases from the ecclesiastical to secular courts. 'By abolishing the legality of betrothals', writes Professor Frost, 'Parliament left jilted lovers with no remedy except the common law.' The author mines the evidence derived from a large sample of cases pursued after 1750 to illuminate with skill and sympathy the identities of the parties who undertook such actions, the nature and outcome of their conflicts, and the general significance of such cases for the social history of the period.

A series of thoughtfully structured chapters offers us a brief legal history of the breach-of-promise action; a stimulating account of how it was managed as a piece of theatre by the barristers performing in the courtroom; what such cases reveal about courtship amongst the lower middle classes – the principal pursuers of such actions – and about the values attached by such women to marriage; what is revealed also about contemporary ideals of masculinity and femininity, and the part played by the legal system in reinforcing or subverting such ideals; and the legal and philosophical debate that such actions precipitated. Throughout the study Professor Frost reveals herself as a sensitive explorer and astute critic, always in touch with the latest historiographical trends in nineteenth-century social history.

Although her sample of 875 cases stretches from 1750 to 1970, the majority of them derive from the period 1870 to 1900. This creates problems for those interested in questions of historical continuity and change. This reviewer wanted to learn more about the differences between ecclesiastical court and common law actions before 1753 and about the chronology of growth thereafter. How popular also was the action in the twentieth century (a legitimate question given that the author offers a brief account of the eventual abolition of such actions in 1970)? Some statistics are offered for the decades between the 1860s and the 1890s, when, she tells us, breach-of-promise cases rose 'substantially' from an average of 34 a year in the first decade to 67 a year in the 1890s. Here one felt the need for more

recognition of the socio-demographic structure. After all, the population of England and Wales rose from 20 million to 32½ million in these years, whilst male marriage ages rose and the marriage rate fell. Not only must there have been many more disappointed suitors with every decade that passed but their numbers dwarfed the few who ever found their way into the courtroom. If there is an area that is undernourished whilst being central, rather than peripheral, to Professor Frost's preoccupations, it is the question of why these relatively few women should have elected to pursue their grievances through the legal process when so many others were not prepared to do so. This demands perhaps more consideration of their personal psychologies, as distinct from their social situations, and more discussion of the costs – emotional and financial – that such actions entailed. That the book prompts such criticism should not detract from its value: it is a sensitive and revealing exploration of love, courtship and marriage, and the values that Victorians attached to them.

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Richard R. Rudolph (ed.), *The European peasant family and society: historical studies*. (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1995.) Pages x+256. £30.00 (hardback).

The book under review is a collection of essays, most of which were originally presented to a conference on the History of the Peasant Family and Economy held at the University of Minnesota in 1988. It should be pointed out that eight of the thirteen essays have already been published, one in Volume 7 (1992) of this journal and seven in a single issue of Volume 17 (1992) of the *Journal of Family History*. For the most part, these eight are of a higher standard than the previously unpublished essays. Some, but not all, of the latter are either speculative 'think-pieces' or read like reports on interesting work-in-progress. Nevertheless, all the essays make some contribution to our understanding of the subject and it will be useful for some specialists to have them collected together in one place.

The essays fall into two categories. In addition to the editor's introduction, there are three general theoretical pieces (by Rudolph, Pfister and Engerman) that address the role of peasant households in the social and economic history of pre-industrial and industrialising Europe, in particular, the debates surrounding 'proto-industrialisation'. Engerman's parallels with America are especially welcome as they place the work in a broader comparative dimension. The other nine essays in the book are specialised studies of particular communities or regions in the time period from the fifteenth to the twentieth centuries. The main focus, however, is on the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Although the geographical coverage of the book is fairly impressive with regard to continental western Europe – there are studies of German, Austrian, French and Italian peasant households by Schlumbohm, Paas, Mitterauer, Ortmayr, Lehning, Fauve-Chamoux and Sella – there is only one essay on eastern Europe: a study by

Plakans and Wetherell of a serf estate in what is now Latvia in the early nineteenth century. This imbalance is slightly surprising given the editor's own research into peasant households and proto-industrialisation in Russia and Austrian Ukraine and is unfortunate in that it precludes much in the way of comparative analysis of industrialisation and economic development in societies with 'free' and 'unfree' peasantries.

The attention paid to social, economic and demographic questions in relation to the proto-industrialisation debate means that the range of themes covered in the book is not quite as broad as the title suggests. There is very little, for example, on the 'sentiments approach' to family history. Nor is there a great deal on gender other than marriage in the context of the household economy and the sexual division of labour. This gap is partly filled by a new essay by Gullickson on how images of women and children were reconceptualised in nineteenth-century French labour protection legislation. While this is an interesting and important essay, its chief concern is the factory working class in Rouen and, therefore, it sits a little uneasily alongside essays on peasant households.

One of the main arguments presented by most of the contributions to this collection, and one that is valid for peasant households in the servile east as well as the western part of Europe, is that there was a constant process of interaction between peasant households and the wider world of which they were such an important part. Peasant households functioned under constraints imposed by the natural environment and the economies, societies, populations, cultures and political entities in which they lived. Yet, at the same time, heads of peasant households and their members made important decisions about their lives and adopted certain demographic, economic and social strategies within these constraints that had a profound impact far beyond the confines of village and rural life.

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Scott A. Bass (ed.), *Older and active: how Americans over 55 are contributing to society*. (London: Yale University Press, 1995.) Pages x + 302. £18.95.

The ageing of the populations of most developed, and many less-developed, countries continues to be a subject for gloom in popular and political discourse. A great deal of academic work has provided evidence that much of this gloom is exaggerated. It seems to go largely unregarded. Here is one more attempt to persuade the world that an ageing population will not necessarily impose an intolerable burden on younger generations.

In 1988 the Commonwealth Fund financed a five-year research programme designed to examine the economic and social situation of older Americans. This included a survey of people aged over 55 and living outside institutions in the US, conducted by Louis Harris Associates, a five-nation comparative survey conducted

by Martin Rein and others and a number of smaller surveys. The essays in this volume report on the findings of these surveys and place them in the context of other research. Each chapter constitutes both a good analysis of a specific piece of research and a useful survey of related work.

The findings robustly support the belief that guided the Commonwealth Fund's initiative, namely that 'older Americans are an untapped resource and many are willing, able and well-qualified to be contributing members of society'. This is against the reality of a background in which people are living longer and are healthier to later ages, but are retiring from paid work, not always willingly, at progressively earlier ages. In the US they are often stereotyped as affluent parasites, causes of envy and potential aggression from relatively less affluent younger generations. These essays further undermine simple notions of inter-generational inequity and conflict.

They show that many older Americans retire from paid work reluctantly, though many would prefer to continue to work part-time rather than full-time. Most are healthy enough to do so: 30–40 per cent at age 70 show no symptoms of any definable health disorder and most of the remainder suffer only minor disorders. Older people retain their intelligence and learning abilities in later life. Cognitive skills are little impaired if kept in practice. The capacity for hard physical labour declines fastest, but this is little needed in modern economies. The problem lies not with the capacities of older people to contribute to the economy, but with the prejudice of employers against them and an unwillingness to offer them training. Firms which have made deliberate efforts to employ older workers report that they are harder-working and more conscientious than younger workers. Staff turnover and hence training costs are reduced. There are less absenteeism and less pilfering and profitability rises.

In future older people may have to work to older ages as their entitlements to pensions and services are eroded, though the fact that they are capable of doing so removes part of the rationale for such cuts, which assumes a shrinking population of 'working age'. But not all want or need to work and this is not the sole measure of their integration into society. These essays provide further evidence that older Americans make a substantial contribution to voluntary organizations and an indispensable contribution as informal carers of older and younger friends and relatives. There are frequent gloomy forecasts about the decline of informal care due to the falling birth-rate and the increasing engagement of women in the paid labour market. But 26 per cent of Americans over 65 and 22 per cent over 75 provide such care, often in substantial amounts. In 1989 53 per cent of the primary carers of the disabled elderly in the US were over 65. They were as often male as female.

An important theme of the volume is that the old give to younger as well as to older generations and that contrary to conventional beliefs 'social scientists are rediscovering the importance of extended family ties' and 'there is growing recognition that family members represent the first line of assistance when an individual is in need'. Though divorce and falling birth-rates are changing the

nature of relationships, the authors suggest that as horizontal links such as marriage weaken, vertical links between generations may be strengthened.

Intergenerational exchange is shown to take a variety of forms: co-residence is rare, but contact is frequent. People over 65 are three and a half times more likely to give financial assistance to younger people than the reverse. They also give advice, emotional support, child care and a variety of other forms of care. 'The majority of parents are engaged routinely in supportive relationships with their (adult) children.'

One contribution in this volume calculates the value of the productive activities, paid and unpaid, of older Americans at \$102 billion in 1990. This figure is derived from complex model-building but it is not an implausible one.

The five-nation survey by Rein et al. examines these issues in the US, the UK, West Germany, Canada and Japan and finds similar patterns. The authors are impressed by the 'pervasiveness of family integration everywhere' and the importance of old people as providers of informal care. As they emphasize, their data in no way supports the theory that welfare states 'crowd out' family care. Rather where welfare states are strong – in the UK and West Germany – family support systems are also strong. Where they are weak – in the US and Japan – there are interestingly divergent patterns. The elderly in the US receive least care both from the family and from formal health and welfare services. In Japan they receive least from formal services but most from the family.

This all interesting, convincing and in line with much other research. I hope someone out there is listening.

PAT THANE

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E. Gemmill and N. Mayhew, *Changing values in medieval Scotland: a study of prices, money and weights and measures*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.) Pages xxi + 419. £50.00.

There can be no doubt that for many years to come this book, presenting the fruits of a decade's scholarship on Scottish commodity prices between circa 1260 and 1542, will stand as a trusted and well-thumbed resource for all those seeking to understand the nature and development of economy and society in medieval Scotland. For although the authors come close to apologizing for being able to present 'only' 6,000 price quotations for the period, and are sensibly cautious about the representativeness of much of the data they have managed to unearth, they have, nevertheless, accomplished an enormous task. They have been able to provide the first general perspective on medieval Scotland's price history. Historians who over the last fifty years have become accustomed to pulling down copies of the work of Thorold Rogers or Beveridge for insights on the evolving pattern of prices in contemporary England will scarcely credit the burden of ignorance under which their Scottish colleagues have had to work but may be best

placed to appreciate the inestimable value of what Gemmill and Mayhew have now made available.

With the recent publication of Gibson and Smout's parallel study *Prices, food and wages in Scotland, 1550–1780* (Cambridge University Press, 1995), the support given during the 1980s by the Economic and Social Research Council for work on price history has at last borne fruit. The sixteenth-century price revolution is perhaps not as well charted as might be wished, and the nature of the surviving record is such that the period prior to the late 1320s (and in some decades and for some important commodities even as late as the early fifteenth century) is only understood very imprecisely, but there now exists for Scotland the sort of empirical foundation long appreciated south of the border. Yet it would be wrong to imply that Gemmill and Mayhew's only, or even principal, contribution lies in the wealth of price data they make available – the numerous tables of price statistics covering commodities as diverse as wheat, wax and wine, salmon, salt and sheep. There are also substantive sections on the economic life of medieval Aberdeen, on the intractable difficulties underlying any understanding of Scotland's evolving systems of weights and measures, and on the faltering development of Scotland's coinage and the relationship between the Scottish and English currencies.

The last of these sections is perhaps of greatest significance, for it sets the scene not just for the interpretation of Scottish prices in terms of their hard-currency (sterling) equivalent, but also for an important concluding chapter which, casting a more positive light on the fifteenth-century Scottish economy than is common, explores that part played by the late-fourteenth-century abandonment of the sterling standard and subsequent policy of currency debasement. The strength of the section on medieval Aberdeen is, conversely, its very narrow focus. From a purely evidential point of view, Gemmill and Mayhew's detailed examination of the nature of market life and market regulation in medieval Aberdeen is on especially firm ground, and provides a valuable and interesting insight into the actual working of a medieval Scottish burgh's market. There is also a section on weights and measures, a topic which underpins any genuine understanding of the meaning of the price statistics themselves. Whilst by no means unsuccessful, this section serves most of all to underline the fact that (unless Connor and Simpson's keenly awaited study of weights and measures can provide unexpected certainties) price statistics for medieval Scotland, even when available, must be treated with exceptional caution.

This is a point the authors are at pains to emphasise throughout the book – and not just because of ambiguities concerning weights and measures. They necessarily rely on (or cannot exclude) a wide variety of different types of 'price' data: actual transaction prices where possible, but also a range of accounting, commutation and various forms of legal valuations, all of which bring with them a host of interpretative issues which the authors discuss at length. Moreover, even when genuine transaction prices are available it can never be certain how representative they were. What was the quality of the wheat? Was the sale wholesale or retail?

Was there any preference shown in the deal? Even, what time of the year was the sale? These issues, and many besides, are explored in depth by the authors, even if satisfactory details on particular price quotations are seldom available. Gemmill and Mayhew have thus created an indispensable source book on medieval Scottish prices which, crucially, carefully integrates the price data with a wealth of scholarship without which the many tables would amount to no more than so many pages of meaningless numbers.

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S. H. Rigby, *English society in the later middle ages: class, status and gender*. (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1996.) Pages xii + 408. £13.99.

Steve Rigby's book is concerned with sociological models which have influenced some historians' discussions of English medieval social structure and relations. In an introductory chapter he describes three sociological interpretations – Marxist theory, 'liberal' stratification theory, and closure theory – and from there he proceeds in chapters on agrarian and urban class structure, orders and ranks (the nobility and clergy), gender, and the Jews, to explain how they have been integrated into historical analysis.

Whilst Marxists accentuate the dichotomous relationships of class conflict, 'liberal stratification' theorists, although acknowledging gradation and social stratification, emphasize the social harmony and consensus of the functional interdependence of social groups, of a common value system and community norms (Talcott Parsons after Weber). Rigby's preference (pp. 326–7) is for closure theory (Runciman after Weber) which is concerned with defining the included (self-defined) and the excluded (other-defined). Although Rigby recognizes that closure theory can be applied only imperfectly to medieval social history, he nonetheless regards it as a valuable tool.

The achievement of this book is successfully to marry such complex theories with empirical evidence in an informative and novel fashion. Rigby's exploration of medieval society could, indeed, be read as an introductory work in its own right. The book is successful as an introduction to interpretations of medieval English social relations and an explanation of how they have been influenced by wider models of social activity and agency. There are many grounds for agreeing, then, with the publisher's blurb on the back cover that this book 'should be extremely useful to those undergraduates beginning their studies of medieval England whilst, in offering a new interpretative framework within which to examine social structure, also interesting to those historians who are more familiar with the period'.

For readers of this journal, perhaps Part I ('Class structure as social closure') will engage the most interest. Discussed here are Marxist interpretations, such as Hilton's and Kosminsky's, neo-Marxist discussions (Brenner's model of the

transitional importance of agrarian capitalism), Macfarlane's individualism, and (some of) the 'Toronto School's' structural-functionalist emphasis on community (solidarity and reciprocity across the social structure). Whilst the neo-Ricardian 'population resources' construct of Postan and his acolytes is explained in full, due weight is given to the contrary findings of regional economies (most recently, for example, Bailey on the Breckland) and the arguments for 'commercialization' of the economy. Rigby's discussion is, moreover, informed by a very wide reading of the more empirical secondary literature on agrarian society and social structure and he illustrates his points judiciously. His treatment of urban social structure, although brief, is, as one might expect, vibrant (pp. 145–77). Very interesting is his statement that the proliferation of markets did not create peasant demand for urban goods and services since 'income from such sales was largely expended on paying rents, manorial fines and taxes...' (p. 148).

The section on gender relationships is especially rewarding, illuminating differences in recent approaches. There are three: women's agency within a patriarchal society, the variable experiences of women in such a society, or straightforward patriarchal oppression. Encompassed there are some very helpful considerations of, for example, 'the merchet debate' and *legerwite*. Much informative detail is also recounted in this chapter, which provides a brief introduction to gender relations in the countryside. Rigby points to the need for more research on the localized customs of widow's freebench (p. 256); the development of jointure in customary tenures (p. 256); how inheritance strategies affected women (p. 257); and community and seignorial pressure on women's marriage (p. 260).

Nevertheless, it is essentially sociological, and it is a little surprising that anthropological contributions are hardly discussed at all, since the author is at an institution which has had a long anthropological association. In particular, the study of medieval ritual (pp. 320–2) has long been influenced by anthropology, not least in Miri Rubin's recent post-modernist account. The legacy of Durkheim, as opposed to Weber, and the important French work from Mauss to Bordieu, fall outside the author's remit. On the other hand, Rigby's extensive bibliography is an immense aid.

Overall, this book is a very important contribution for both its theoretical interpretations and its empirical description of English medieval society. It will be much valued and is to be highly recommended.

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Pamela Nightingale, *A medieval mercantile community: the Grocers' Company and the politics and trade of London, 1000–1485*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995.) Pages xi + 640. £40.00.

When the Grocers' Company commissioned this new history, they cannot have bargained for the formidable work that Dr Nightingale has produced. This complex narrative of more than 300,000 words will leave most readers impressed

but exhausted. The Grocers' Company must have expected that the main source for the book would have been their own archives but, though Dr Nightingale has used these documents, a wide range of manuscript and secondary sources have been combed, both for references to London grocers and for background information. The book begins not with the emergence of the Grocers' Company in 1373, nor with the foundation of its predecessor (the pepperers' fraternity of St Antonin) in 1345, but with the origins of the spice trade in pre-Conquest London, and continues the story with a growing mass of detail until 1485.

This is a highly ambitious project, which within a chronological framework seeks to weave together a number of historical strands. One of these concerns the development of the fraternity and Company, a very exclusive body, which at one stage limited its membership to 130. It offered little of the social and religious benefits of other companies, and its main function was to regulate and protect the trading interests of its members. The second strand relates to the commerce of the grocers, which extended far beyond the trade in spices and other goods such as dyestuffs, which were weighed by the Great Beam. In their ideal world, which sometimes worked in the fourteenth century, they exported wool to the Low Countries and brought back cargoes of pepper, woad and alum. But for long periods the import trade was dominated by aliens, especially the Italians, and the grocers distributed spices and dyestuffs, either directly to provincial consumers and retailers or through the fairs or travelling chapmen. They retained an interest in the shipping of wool, and later cloth. The third thread in the narrative concerns the involvement of pepperers and grocers in the politics of the City of London, and inevitably also in national politics. Often a connection can be made between the stances that they adopted in relation to the affairs of the City and their economic interests in such matters as the staple and the trading rights of aliens. A fourth theme is the activity of individual grocers, as revealed by their debts and acquisition of property. And finally this is all set in the context of economic change, and especially of fluctuations in the money supply.

Any historian who writes the history of an organization like the grocers' is bound to identify with them, and one expects to find the subject presented in a favourable light, but the strength of Dr Nightingale's partisanship leads her to defend the policies pursued by this powerful, wealthy and self-interested group in a way which does not always convince. This is taken to extremes in her admiration for Nicholas Brembre (executed in 1388) and her criticisms of his opponent John of Northampton, who in her view has been treated too leniently by modern historians. This empathy, indeed sympathy, creates a rather distorted view of the grocers' overall economic performance. The decision to approach the subject in a narrative form, in which each chapter deals with a period of between four and twenty years, means that our attention is focused on short-term fluctuations in the economy and politics. This has the effect of emphasizing the problems and difficulties encountered by the merchants, and we are given the impression that they had a miserable time. Two chapter titles mention recovery and opportunity, but the majority use words like 'crisis', 'recession', 'struggle' and 'fraction'. A period usually regarded as one of overall commercial prosperity around 1400 is

discussed in a chapter entitled 'The horizons close in'. In fact we are given information which shows that many of these hard-pressed grocers enjoyed great riches. During one depression (in 1342) a grocer was able to lend £40 to a knight, and while the horizons were closing, in 1410, another bequeathed £1,000. It comes as something of a surprise at the end of a series of rather gloomy chapters about the fifteenth century to be told that in 1485 London, and its grocers, were enjoying some prosperity. One is reminded of the modern businessman complaining about the difficulties of recession, unfair competition and government interference as he drives his Jaguar to his country mansion.

Dr Nightingale must have gathered a mass of information about the careers and families of the grocers, and indeed references to migration, apprenticeship and marriage are introduced into the narrative on occasion, and we must hope that in the future she will use this material to write about grocers as part of London society. She demonstrates her skill in writing this type of history in a thematic chapter on the Company hall.

A constant theme, indeed an obsession, of the book is the importance of the money supply. This becomes a dangerously deterministic argument at times, as when the early eleventh century is identified as a period of economic recession, mainly because of the presumed effects of a drain on the coinage by the Danes. We are told also that the population of London must have been diminished in the first half of the fourteenth century by the combination of the great famine of 1315–1317 and the monetary crisis of the 1320s. Rural depopulation in the late fourteenth century is likewise blamed on a shortage of cash. No doubt monetary problems can help us to appreciate the short-term fluctuations which are the principal theme of this book, but they do not explain every development, and have limited value for understanding long-term structural change.

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Peter Clark (ed.), *Small towns in early modern Europe*. (Cambridge and Paris: Cambridge University Press and Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, 1995.) Pages xx + 310. £40.00.

A collection of essays on the small town in early modern Europe begs the question whether the term is a meaningful category of analysis. The contributors to this volume, who range widely across the continent and include the peripheral areas of Scandinavia and central eastern Europe, discuss settlements whose populations vary from fewer than 500 (Sweden) to 10,000 (Flanders). The communities they describe are of highly varying character. Some were highly agricultural, others enjoyed an industrial specialism; some were no more than military frontier outposts, others benefited from their role as administrative centres in developing bureaucratic states; some served merely as local market centres, others were tied into networks of international trade through their role as ports, whether as outlets for the unprocessed agricultural produce of a largely undeveloped rural hinterland

or as outposts for major centres. When did a village become a town, and what made a small town different from a larger town?

Population size alone cannot be taken as a defining characteristic of the small town, as the size of the town was determined by the nature of the economy of its hinterland. Thus Bacskai draws attention to contrasting patterns of urbanization in the western and eastern halves of the Habsburg Empire. In the western provinces there was a higher proportion of towns with small populations, while in Hungary settlements were larger. The difference is not to be accounted for in terms of industrialization in Hungary, but rather in terms of the nature of agricultural commodity production which fostered the development of agro-towns with populations upwards of 5,000. Whether, once these functional criteria are taken into account, they should be described as large, medium or small towns, notes Bacskai, remains an open question.

The most sceptical remarks on these questions occur in a provocative piece by Bernard Lepetit on the nineteenth-century French small town, the implications of which some of the other contributors could perhaps have pondered more fully. He doubts whether during the early modern period there were qualitative differences of a socio-economic or socio-cultural kind between large and small towns, and suggests that the differences were ones of degree rather than kind. Other contributors touch on these issues only tangentially, although Stabel produces some pioneering data on the demography of small towns in sixteenth-century Flanders, suggesting that among the elements in their distinctiveness were the larger size of households and a modest surplus of baptisms over burials, but even this argument is qualified by the finding that small industrial towns resembled the demography of middle-ranking urban settlements. The editor opts for 'a flexible matrix' of demographic (relatively low population), economic (agricultural marketing functions, the presence of a range of artisanal trades, and the provision of services to the surrounding countryside), social (a lack of social polarization), political (a small ruling group) and other attributes as the defining characteristics of the small town, but questions remain as to just how flexible one can be. For example, Gelabert seems to prioritize the juridical elements of the package, stressing the town as a community distinguished from those around it by the privileges it enjoyed, but these same privileges were sometimes enjoyed in Castile by settlements which were largely rural in character.

However, these definitional issues apart, the collection's main claim to our attention lies in the ways in which an understanding of the fortunes of small towns can alter our perceptions of the nature and extent of urbanization. The editor notes that de Vries' survey of European urbanization took as its threshold towns with a population of 10,000, thereby virtually excluding all towns on the European periphery from the discussion, while even Bairoch's lower threshold of 5,000 fails to capture more than a tiny minority of the continent's smaller towns. Such partiality is the more significant once one realizes, as several of the essays point out, that the fortunes of smaller and larger centres sometimes diverged. Their dependence on constant replenishment from the countryside to compensate for their demographic deficits meant that larger towns were more vulnerable in

periods of recession. This may be the explanation for the disparity in the fortunes of smaller towns and larger towns in seventeenth-century Castile and early-eighteenth-century Sweden noted by Gelabert and Lilja respectively. Alternatively (or additionally) small town economies, like those of eighteenth-century Brabant studied by Blonde, benefited from a lack of guild restrictions and lower wage costs, enabling them to weather the pressures of international competition better than the major centres. 'In eighteenth-century Europe', comments Peter Clark, 'proto-industrialisation might be re-styled small town industrialisation.' Other essays stress that small town urbanization was a significant element in urban growth. Peter Clark reverses the conventional chronology of small town development in early modern England, playing down the buoyancy of Elizabethan small town economies and suggesting that the cream of a growing inland trade was spread rather thinly, while also pointing out that the contribution of small towns to post-Restoration urbanization has been underestimated, as their populations grew at a similar or faster rate than the national population.

A powerful theme running through several of the contributions is the way in which the distribution of political power and the actions of the state determined the fortunes of small towns. For example, Gelabert provides a lucid account of the distorting effects of the crown's policy of selling urban privileges to village communities in sixteenth-century Castile: the burden of debt which communities undertook threatened their prosperity, while the sale of market rights by the crown undermined traditional centres. The result was that some of the more prosperous seventeenth-century Castilian towns were the seigneurial ones. Musgrave shows how the political leverage exerted by the larger north Italian centres in the sixteenth century stunted the development of lesser towns, confining them to the role of local service centres. In the seventeenth century, however, intervention by the Venetian authorities to curb the privileges of some of the regional centres, combined with the greater availability of citizenship in small towns and the encouragement of guilds within them, ensured that the recession did not hit the smaller towns as severely. It was only a temporary respite, for by the eighteenth century the competition of mechanized industries elsewhere had undermined small town industries in northern Italy.

For too long the attention of early modern urban historians has concentrated on the metropolises and the larger provincial centres of Europe, and they have often written within locally defined historiographical traditions. With this collection Peter Clark will foster a continuing dialogue and encourage further exploration of a neglected field.

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Lyndal Roper, *Oedipus and the Devil: witchcraft, sexuality, and religion in early modern Europe*. (London: Routledge, 1994.) Pages x + 254. £13.99.

This highly interesting collection of essays signals an important revision of feminist history of gender relations in early modern Europe. The traditional,

politically correct orthodoxy of gender history claimed that the differences between the roles, status and life-experience of men and women in history were mutable, transient phenomena of culture and language. In other words, there was nothing 'natural' about the division of social roles, duties and rights into male and female. The political inference was that if all gender differentiation was historically contingent it could be consigned to a remote, irrecoverable past. The analogy with race relations was obvious: to identify any supposed 'natural' differences between human 'races' might give comfort to repugnant theories of racial inequality: to reject such difference was to affirm racial equality. However, the old gender orthodoxy also carried the implication, for historical scholarship, that gender differentiation should be studied entirely as a matter of language and cultural convention, divorced from any supposed 'realities' about the human body. It is this corollary that Lyndal Roper, with her impeccable feminist credentials, has now challenged in a subtle and provocative way. As she says on page 48: 'to a far greater extent than the divisions of race and class [*sic!*], sexual differences are ingrained in the body, and difference, if not its meanings, seems to be an irreducible fact of life'.

How, in practice, does this re-admission of the 'body' to gender history affect the essays printed (or re-printed) in this collection? At the very least, it allows Roper to write some frank, empirical analyses of the mental worlds of sixteenth-century German men and women, unencumbered by any theoretical *a priori* assumption that their views of manhood and womanhood were solely those imposed by their social, intellectual or religious superiors. This acceptance clears the air, especially because Roper's favourite city, Augsburg, had a complex and tortuous religious history across the Reformation era: it hesitantly embraced Protestantism only to re-admit an increasing amount of Catholic influence and activity as time passed. There *was* no single religious or moral orthodoxy on gender and sexual issues, which might have dictated the views of her subjects.

The nine substantive essays divide into three equal groups. First there are three chapters concerned essentially with the impact of the Reformation on gender, sexuality and morality: one explores the ambiguous results of Reformation changes on gender relations, one the language of Augsburg trials for sexual offences, one the problems raised by Anabaptist views of marriage. The second group considers masculinity, ranging from riotous guildsmen, via Anton Fugger's use of a female seer, to the Protestant 'literature of excess'. The last three pieces address magic and witchcraft, including exorcism and the Oedipal fantasies of some of the accused as reflected in their confessions.

Lyndal Roper writes with enormous sensitivity and obvious intelligence; she engages conscientiously with a wide range of current theories, and willingly examines her evidence from every possible angle of view. A number of important perceptions and suggestions emerge from the collection. Rightly or wrongly, sixteenth-century Germans clearly *did* think that men and women were very different, and that those differences could be explained not only by anatomical bodily difference but also by physiological conditions. There is much discussion of the 'permeability' of bodies to their various fluids, of men as liable to 'spill over' uncontrolled secretions under the influence of drink or lust. 'Body' was used as

a metaphor for temperament: although the relation of these views to Renaissance medical theory, which regarded bodily fluids as determinants of mental balance, is not fully explored here. Secondly, Roper shows, legal sources can be analysed as 'discourse': edicts forbidding drinking, feasting or provocative dressing took furtive delight in the sins they denounced; Augsburg witch trials developed the final 'confession' of the accused witch through a long dialogue in which the fantasies of the accused were reconciled and combined with the preconceptions of the judges. In each case, the relationship between 'authority' and popular thought and behaviour was not one-way: it was a complex, reciprocal relationship riddled with ambivalences.

These are valuable suggestions, and historians interested in issues as varied as Protestant discipline ordinances, magic and superstition, or the control of distant branches of the Fugger bank will find useful material here. Yet this is not an easy book to read, and it is not always clear just how far Roper wishes to press her conclusions, or indeed how far they may legitimately be pressed. The problem derives in part from her method. She tends to extrapolate from minute analysis of a very small number of case-studies (for instance, she says much about accusations of witchcraft made against lying-in-maids, yet on page 219 in note 3 we learn that only three of these were actually executed as witches in Augsburg). The extrapolation method is worrying, especially when Roper ventures tentatively into psychoanalysis of accused witches. Implicitly, she seeks to unpick the mental world of early modern women out of the fantasies of a few highly disturbed victims of a long and tormenting process of interrogation: here, the individuality, the oddity *and* the suffering of the subjects surely compromise general conclusions if they do not disallow them altogether. Finally, Roper's writing is unforgivingly complex, abstract and demanding. This book was born in the specialist seminar, and it is there that it will be most readily, and rightly, appreciated.

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