Romano clearly illustrates that at the heart of the marketplace was a continual tension between the need to establish trust among its users while still allowing the legitimate pursuit of business and profit. He notes that the phrase 'bona fide, sine fraude' (in good faith and without fraud) was recurrent in medieval laws and contracts, and there was an understandable preoccupation with fraud in a trading society where standardization and valuation were difficult to achieve. However, ultimately fraud was the result of avarice and this shifted the medieval perspective into a dissection of the merchant's intentions and whether they were deliberately undermining the promise of trust. Romano argues that: 'Tension between the common good and individual interest shaped every aspect of life' (p. 11). It moulded medieval commercial ethics, and meant that exchanges were not simply about determining economic equilibrium but also the social and moral factors that underpinned the marketplace and relations between market users.

The final chapter of the book notes that many medieval markets contained artistic reminders of both the dangers of fraud and the justice that was dispensed by civic authorities and by God. This was intended to exemplify the confidence that buyers and sellers could have in a particular market, as highlighted by the inscription on the church of San Giacomo di Rialto in Venice: 'Around this temple let the law of merchants be equitable: let the weights not bend and the contract be not crooked' (p. 217). Such a rich vein of material evidence allows Romano to illustrate vividly the dominant mentalities and expressions of ideal behaviour within the marketplace. The extent to which everyday market users internalized such moral norms is difficult to determine, but this book admirably depicts the complex cultural, social and political contexts that undoubtedly shaped the environment of the medieval Italian marketplace.

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For the last 10 years, the Spanish town of Nájera has hosted yearly international medieval meetings, making the town a renowned forum for academics in urban medieval history. Supported by the University of Cantabria, these meetings have dealt with issues such as urban governance, urban space, the territorial scope of cities, as well as urban social co-existence and the role of women in the medieval city. In 2013, the meeting was titled 'The Commons in the Medieval European City' and discussed the social meaning and the political scope of popular groups in late medieval cities. The proceedings were published within less than a year and include 19 articles in Italian (1), Portuguese (1), English (2), French (2) and Spanish (13).

The volume opens with a theoretical introduction by Solórzano and Haemers where a claim is made for the need to establish more nuanced definitions of the so-called 'popular groups', which we generally identify with those that were

excluded from urban politics. The introduction also retraces how historiography has demonized or glorified popular revolts in the late Middle Ages. The book aims to go beyond these discussions, reflecting on the progressive formation of the political agency of these popular groups. The variety in the choice of articles was to ensure that these research questions were posed in integrative terms, from social, economic, institutional and political perspectives and within a European transnational framework. To achieve these goals, the book was structured in two parts. Part one discusses terminologies and describes popular groups, their urban activities, spaces and mobility experiences, while Part two analyses the political influence of these groups.

Articles in Part one tend to identify popular groups with non-privileged urban inhabitants. In some cases, these conceptions push the contributors into traditional descriptions of major artisanal practices and their emplacement in the urban space. When overcoming these descriptive accounts, the articles in Part one anticipate the objectives of Part two and define popular groups in political terms. They advance in so doing the claims of Hipólito Oliva, who defends the need to understand the commons as a political concept, as this makes it possible to overcome its inherent heterogeneity. In this regard, notions such as the common good and public opinion emerge as fundamental categories, addressed interestingly by James Davis and Luis Clemente. While Davis examines through English normative sources how a rhetoric on the common good helped to embed existing political structures within ideals of morality and virtue, Clemente uses microanalysis to illustrate how municipal authorities in sixteenth-century Castile could shape public opinion in order to preserve their own interests.

It is thus in terms of exclusion and manipulation that the more analytical articles of Part one elaborate on the political nature of popular groups. More closely interrelated, the articles in Part two discuss the awareness that these groups had of their own political identity, analysing their processes and channels of politicization and using the term 'commons' freely (*común* in Spanish). The contributors use a diversity of sources to reflect on how the commons shaped a cohesive political identity by mirroring themselves in a historical tradition (Oliva). As Hernando and González show, identity was also strongly shaped through institutions. Albeit weak, institutional coverage helped members of the commons to create spaces of discussion, from which they fostered their political activism and articulated their complaints in times of deep instability. These articles illustrate how the commons gained political prerogatives through peaceful resistance and negotiation as much as through revolts (Haemers); two articles reflect on how and in which contexts women from the commons could shape their political participation (Majo, Castrillo). Negotiations for spaces of power and influence between the commons and the ruling elites emerge as a core issue, and Part two considers geographical particularities in this regard, as well as the effects of monarchs' arbitrations.

The book includes essays of a very diverse quality: some are sophisticated in terms of theory and methodology while others have recurrent typos. The reader perceives a certain imbalance that, in more general terms, is structural, for Part two has a much clearer focus than Part one. It is only in the conclusions of the book that the articulation of the whole volume gains a clearer sense. Having depicted popular groups as 'political have-nots', Part one aimed at re-evaluating the life and work of members of the commons and was allegedly crucial to grasp

the urban power of these groups from a broad and integrative perspective – as promised in the introduction. Other analytical yardsticks could have provided a more convincing integrative analysis. For instance, I missed any mention in the volume of the role of citizenship in determining social and political balances within the urban community. Briefly mentioned in some of the contributions, citizenship as a problem is never directly addressed in the book. A measure of belonging and an ensemble of social practices, a fiscal privilege and a legal status, citizenship graded urban communities and held them together at the same time. To analyse and contrast perceptions and experiences of citizenship could have helped to feature popular groups in more complex terms, going beyond basic claims on their heterogeneity without renouncing to analyse them from a diversity of perspectives.

In regard to the transnational aims stated in the introduction, the book is more successful in placing Castile within a larger international framework than in providing systematic comparative analysis of the features and political actions of popular groups in late medieval Europe. Despite these limitations, the book is a significant contribution for urban historians. Bringing together analyses on urban communities with different demographic, jurisdictional and economic features, this book is in dialogue with the recent historiography focusing on popular political agency in the Middle Ages in terms of creative reaction and collective negotiation. The volume pushes forward the analysis of relationships between social groups, approaching them with chronological projection and reinterpreting early modern outbursts as the result of sophisticated processes of politicization. Making an effort to cross sources, methodologies and spaces, the volume enriches our understanding of the shaping of urban collective identities in the later Middle Ages. In so doing, the contributors have given life to the turbulent yet parallel rivers that, as recalled in the Castilian medieval verses opening the book, end up flowing together down into the sea.

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> **Dave Postles**, *A Town in its Parish: Loughborough, Origins to c. 1640*. Loughborough, 2015. ix + 213pp. 14 figures. 8 tables.
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The town of Loughborough: an urban entity within a rural setting. *A Town in its Parish* considers the development of this small, non-incorporated Leicestershire town within its economic, social and political context. It is a thematic contribution to the wider historiography of the small town punctuated with rich archival detail. It will be of interest to the urban historian, the local historian and to those studying the history of Leicestershire specifically. It has been written both for the academic and for the general public, reflected in its free availability online. A paper copy is available to academics upon request from the author.

Contemporary Loughborough existed below regional capitals and county boroughs in the urban hierarchy. By the sixteenth century, its size and population were second only to the county town of Leicester, an interesting point to make given the wider debate of urban decline and recovery during this period.