

BEN DODDS and CHRISTIAN D. LIDDY, eds. *Commercial Activity, Markets and Entrepreneurs in the Middle Ages*. Woodbridge: Boydell, 2011. Pp. 272. \$95.00 (cloth). doi:10.1017/jbr.2012.31

This collection celebrates Richard Britnell's scholarship in the most honorary fashion, by illustrating the complexity of commercial activity just as Britnell has in his own work. As James Masschaele cogently explains, "[Britnell's] work has demonstrated the value of looking at the medieval economy as something embedded within a larger social and political framework . . ." (199), and it is this larger framework that the contributors flesh out here. The contributors pay homage to Britnell's inexhaustible curiosity (21 books and nearly 90 articles) by supporting their studies with careful archival work, through their attention to the complexities of local customs as well as regional variations, and by weighing in on Britnell's arguments about the importance of individuals, communities, and institutions in the process of commercialization.

John Hatcher begins the volume with an argument against the rosy reality for the majority of workers after the Black Death. Because of inadequate economic theory and misleading reliance on extrapolations of daily wage rates, he asserts that living standards have been "grossly exaggerated" (5). Hatcher creates his own theoretical model and arrives at a lower average earning for a farmer, which also leads him to argue against an increase in consumption in the fifteenth century (21). Hatcher is adept at revealing the interrelated forces involved when uncovering the realities of lived experience, and this complexity is refreshing in a narrative often dripping with images of peasant autonomy. However, Hatcher misses an opportunity by glossing over the contributions of women. He admits that his model understates the ingenuity of late medieval farmers, in part because women's labor is underrepresented (19), but this brief mention belies the significant work done by scholars on this topic. John Langdon's following chapter picks up where Hatcher leaves off in two respects. First, Langdon keeps the reader focused on wages but with an eye trained to one specific royal building site, Old Woodstock. Second, he rounds out Hatcher's discussion by considering women's earnings. Langdon finds that unskilled male laborers made consistently more than women laborers, but that after the plague, women appear to have been replaced by younger male workers. Langdon draws the reader's attention to this dearth of women and argues that if scholars focus on women's, as well as adolescent and child, labor, it might permit a more sensitive and comprehensive index of employment in the Middle Ages.

The next three contributions shift the focus from wages and unemployment to markets and regulation. Derek Keene provides a tour of grain shortage in the capital and adeptly points out the underlying superstructures of political economy, civic identity, and urban space that allow for a more comprehensive understanding of London's economy. As in his other work, Keene re-creates the scene with great skill, lucidly explaining the complexity of wheat prices, exploring the motivations of the individuals involved, and placing the crises within critical continental and environmental contexts. John Lee also discusses grain shortages and the increase in regulation in the late Middle Ages. Focusing primarily on Coventry's 1520 census, Lee finds that when grain was short, the local and central governments increased legislation on the assize of bread, as well as on enclosure, forestalling, regrating, engrossing, and even gaming. In a captivating examination of one manuscript, Lansdowne MS 796, James Davis argues that regulation of late medieval markets was a process of consensus between officials and markets users. Lansdowne contains a set "assizes" for sixteen trades (82), and by placing it at the center, Lee accesses information about this document by probing around it: into the role and responsibilities of the royal clerk of the market and into extant royal and local legislation.

In chapter 6, Mark Bailey takes the reader from the center to the local. Bailey's analysis focuses on individuals and groups leasing seigniorial boroughs, and he argues that burgesses in small mesne towns were able to wrest "direct and *formal* control over the key institutions of their towns" (112), such as tolls and borough courts. Bailey explores other examples

where gentry are the lessees, for example, at Leeds, which sometimes led to increased social tensions. Although more careful attention to the fluidity among gentry, burgess, and manorial officials would have been useful, this article is sure to encourage further research into small towns and the opportunities for autonomy presented to their inhabitants.

Christine Newman's contribution turns the spotlight on Britnell's heartland of Durham. Newman focuses on trade networks and explains the reliance on fish, coal, salt, and cloth in the smaller Wearmouth/Sunderland and larger Darlington. In one of the strongest contributions in the collection, Peter Larson expands the focus on Durham by considering its rural inhabitants and picks up on the earlier conversations started by Hatcher and Bailey. Larson examines the halmote books from three villages in the bishopric of Durham and finds limited evidence of land accumulation after the Black Death despite low entry fines. Larson's research, like Hatcher's, emphasizes the need to peel back the layers of change wrought by the plague with care. For example, Larson suggests that peasants might have hesitated to buy more land, even cheap land, if the labor to work it was scarce (156).

The next two chapters expand the study into business operation and are simultaneously insightful and alluring. Maryanne Kowaleski's contribution moves the reader to medieval port cities to fill out the job description of the medieval shipmaster. This entrepreneur, like the burgesses and peasants of the preceding chapters, had to be savvy about laws and commerce, but he also needed to be clever with numbers, to adapt quickly in mercurial situations, and to be comfortable with large doses of responsibility for crews and cargoes. Relying on tax records, maritime laws, court cases, and contracts, Kowaleski adroitly plucks these shipmasters out of strictly navel contexts and places them into commercial environments as well. Often partnering with merchants, shipmasters could earn high salaries, but not without high risks. While the high seas were fraught with danger, Martha Carlin shows that the medieval manor could be the site of swindling. Carlin discusses a thirteenth-century bailiff's instructions for how to defraud his lord. Although in popular literature, as Carlin points out, the dishonest official abounds, these instructions are unique. Carlin suggests that the document permits a consideration of all that was underreported, and, by extension, she cautions scholars to use records of reported yields and wages with care.

The last two chapters, by James Masschaele and Christopher Dyer, are equally strong contributions. Masschaele considers the broader legal scaffold on which the economy is built. Through a set of intriguing challenges to charters, which he illustrates were both written down and performed publically, Masschaele reveals the cultural (in addition to economic) values tied to land. The collection ends with Christopher Dyer's observation of the luxury trade from 650 to 1540. He highlights the role of cities and towns in driving the trade in luxury goods, as well as the role of traders themselves and the importance of recycling these valuable objects. Dyer assesses both supply and demand, usefully includes an expansive understanding of luxury goods, and contributes to ongoing work into the cultural meaning of these goods.

This festschrift should be required reading for all who study late medieval England. The authors have challenged long-held assumptions while also creatively exploring documents of practice to represent the lived experiences of manorial officials, entrepreneurs, burgesses, and laborers. Advanced undergraduate and graduate students alike will benefit from the careful attention to methodology as well as the content as they are exposed to the detail of the trees without losing sight of the shifting landscape of the forest.

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