

scholars, cultivate the idiomatic knowledge needed to understand our period “while enabling expansive intellectual inquiry beyond the box of a historical period?” (282).

“Always historicize!” Fredric Jameson famously urged. Less notoriously, he observed, “We cannot not periodize,” as if preemptively answering Jacques Le Goff’s more recent challenge in his *Faut-il vraiment découper l’histoire en tranches?* (Must we divide history into periods?, 2014). Such découpage is now practically inevitable yet still perpetually unsettling to almost every sort of historian. *Early Modern Histories of Time* provides an indispensable survey of just how periodization became both inescapable and endlessly, fruitfully debatable. Period.

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Law in Common: Legal Cultures in Late-Medieval England. Tom Johnson.
Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020. xiv + 324 pp. \$99.

This is an ambitious book. Based on a wide survey of unpublished local court records—royal (leet, forest, admiralty), borough, manorial, and ecclesiastical—Johnson first creates a sense for local legal cultures in England, and then selects the common elements in those cultures to paint a picture of how ordinary people came to understand the law that they had in common. He begins with the Peasants’ Revolt of 1388 and ends early in the reign of Henry VIII. The book is divided into two parts. The first four chapters seek to reconstruct the legal culture of the rural village, the urban area, the maritime world, and the forest. The next four chapters deal with “the legal landscape,” law as embedded in nature; the “economy of legitimate knowledge,” who was listened to in the courts and about what; the increase in using English to speak about the law; and the great increase in the use of written documents, legal but not necessarily connected with litigation. The conclusion argues that these phenomena made the law more popular and the *populus* more political.

To the legal historian this might seem like Hamlet without the Dane. The central royal courts of common law are hardly mentioned. The Chancery is mentioned a bit more often, normally as a recipient of petitions against the actions of local courts. Assizes, gaol delivery, coroners, and justices of the peace get a few mentions, but they are not emphasized. On the ecclesiastical side, episcopal consistory courts get some mention, but the emphasis is on ruridecanal courts and peculiars. The reader will know that the higher institutions existed, but the argument almost suggests that they were not particularly relevant to most ordinary people.

Even if we reject this implied suggestion, we can nonetheless appreciate the imagination of Johnson’s approach. A central theme of much medieval English legal history is how the secular local courts were gradually brought into the common-law system. By

focusing on the local courts and assuming that what happened there formed a greater part of ordinary people's perception of the law, Johnson is able to argue that we need to consider the forces working from the bottom up in addition to those working from the top down. Demonstrating that these bottom-up forces had any effect on what was going on at the top is beyond the scope of the book. One is reminded, however, of the painful process by which the central royal courts reformed themselves over the course of the fifteenth, and particularly the sixteenth, century, and one has to wonder if the bottom-up forces were not among the causes of that reform.

The book contains a number of insightful generalizations. The local courts in rural areas strove to build community, and at least in some cases successfully. The urban courts were more conflictual, both because of their multiplicity and, perhaps, because the crowded conditions of late medieval urban areas had already made for a bit too much community. The expertise of the mariners meant that the litigants and their circle had to be brought into the decision-making process of the maritime courts. In the forest areas, the expertise was with the forest officers, and that meant that the tenants of the forest areas were pawns in a process designed exclusively for the purpose of protecting the nonhuman ecology of the forest.

None of the four subjects chosen to illustrate the common characteristics of the local courts was characteristic only of the local courts, nor was any of them totally new in the fifteenth century, though there was certainly a dramatic increase in the use of English to express legal ideas. Johnson's description of the way in which medieval people shaped nature and then regarded what they had done as natural is striking, as is his conceptualization of the use of lay people with local knowledge as an economy. We have charters written on behalf of unfree landholders from the thirteenth century, but the final paragraph of the chapter on written documents is convincing: the rebels of 1388 burned written documents; those of 1450 produced them.

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The Puritans: A Transatlantic History. David D. Hall.

Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019. vi + 518 pp. \$35.

Many historical topics have generated huge quantities of scholarly energy. The fall of the Roman Empire, the European Renaissance and Reformations, the rise of nation states in Europe, the French Revolution, the Industrial Revolution, the American Civil War, the causes of World War I, and the Holocaust quickly spring to mind. If we think of such subjects as mountain ranges, these belong in the Himalayan category, and Puritanism is certainly among them as well. David Hall's book is a deeply informed, highly nuanced masterpiece, and anyone seeking a wise, sure-footed guide among the Puritan peaks