

Credit and Debt in Medieval England c. 1180–c. 1350. *Edited by P. R. Schofield and N. J. Mayhew.* Oxford, U.K.: Oxbow Books, 2002. x + 164 pp. Index, notes, bibliography, figures, tables. Paper, \$39.95. ISBN 1-842-17073-2.

Reviewed by Maryanne Kowaleski

Four of the seven essays in this volume represent the medieval contributions to a recent Oxford conference on credit and debt in medieval and early modern England. In his introduction, Philip Schofield remarks on the medieval papers' similarity of focus. In contrast to the broader purview of early modernists, for whom credit and debt are entrées to major issues, such as the relation between credit and gender, life-cycle indebtedness, or the poor, the medievalists concentrate on the legal process and the economic context of contracting debts and enforcing payment. What Schofield does not come out and say, but what is evident after reading the essays, is that scholarly work on credit in medieval England tends to be less adventurous and imaginative than what early modernists have produced on the topic. Parts of the volume display a plodding quality, since each author exploits one particular source in one particular locale or region to squeeze out data on how debts were contracted and on lending patterns. To their credit, however, the authors do place their detailed findings into a larger economic, social, and historiographic context, and their essays benefit from strong thematic organization and clear, summary conclusions.

Schofield's introductory essay provides a useful review of the sources and historiography of medieval credit and debt that does not (thankfully) restrict itself to the narrower pre-plague period covered by the volume. Paul Brand discusses changes in the law of debt in the king's courts, starting with Glanvill's treatise in 1189 and continuing with developments until 1307. These changes helped to draw a firmer line between the jurisdiction of lay and ecclesiastical courts—a line that often privileged lay courts, particularly the county court and king's court, which generally were assigned the more valuable debt litigation. Other changes in the use of sureties and in types of mortgages tended to favor creditors over debtors in litigation. Brand also notes how much longer

older forms of procedure (such as the defendant's use of wager of law) survived in debt litigation.

Three essays draw upon the records of formal debt registries to profile particular groups of creditors and debtors. In an interesting essay comparing Jewish and Christian lending patterns, Robin Mundill traces the development of Jewish lending from the Ordinances of the Jewry of 1194 (which set up an Exchequer of the Jews to regulate and protect Jewish financial dealings) into the thirteenth century, when Christians' increasing use of credit as they found ways to circumvent usury prohibitions raised demand for the type of regulated debt recovery enjoyed by the Jews. Indeed, Mundill suggests that the development of the statutory recognizance or bond in the late thirteenth century owed much to the regulatory mechanisms that evolved in Jewish lending during the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. Christopher McNall takes up the story where Mundill leaves off in assessing the impact of the Statute of Acton Burnell (1283) and the Statute of Merchants (1285), which set up debt registries to provide creditors with the means to certify and enforce debts. The array of creditors—most not even merchants—taking advantage of the new debt registries, and the marked rise in the average sum of debts between 1283 and 1299, attest to the effectiveness of the enforcement mechanisms provided by the new statutes, although the meaning of other trends, such as the contraction in the volume of business, awaits further study. Pamela Nightingale draws on these same certificates of statute to trace the role of the English parochial clergy in providing investment capital in the early fourteenth century. She focuses on Norfolk, where clerical creditors were more active than in any other county, although their loans were lower in value because, argues Nightingale, they were proffering credit to so many people lower on the social ladder. Unfortunately, the essay is marred by Nightingale's refusal to consider the limitations of her evidence (the surviving certificates only record bad debts, as Mundill rightly acknowledges) or alternative explanations, as well as her propensity to make sweeping claims on very slim evidence.

The last two essays examine credit in the medieval countryside, especially among peasants. Schofield, although working with a thin evidentiary base, does a good job of asking the right questions and seeing the broader implications of his findings on the relative wealth of debt litigants in the county courts and peasants' access to credit in

neighboring villages. Chris Briggs, like Schofield, is sensitive to the relation between credit and socioeconomic status in his examination of debt pleas in Cambridgeshire manorial courts during the six decades before the Black Death. Briggs's data series is the best of those used in the volume, and his admission of his sources' limitations adds methodological credibility to his comments. His findings on the wide availability of rural credit are also significant for understanding the ability of peasants to weather crises or seek out investment opportunities. And in illustrating ongoing ties of dependency between particular creditors and debtors, as well as the sensitivity of peasant creditors to risk, Briggs does much to show how "debt accumulation" rather than "reciprocal indebtedness" governed credit relationships among the early-fourteenth-century peasantry.

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