

Cultures of Law in Urban Northern Europe: Scotland and Its Neighbours c.1350–c.1650. Jackson W. Armstrong and Edda Frankot, eds.

Themes in Medieval and Early Modern History. Abingdon: Routledge, 2021. xvi + 288 pp. \$160.

The editors of this incisive volume state that their goal is to explore medieval and early modern urban legal culture “from the perspective of Scotland and its northern neighbors . . . which enables a broader set of European and investigations to be advanced.” In this they amply succeed, presenting a series of essays from scholars of a variety of disciplinary backgrounds that touch on many different aspects of this topic, but which mostly add up to a coherent whole. The result is a volume that will be of great use to historians seeking to understand the distinctive facets of northern European legal culture in this formative period.

The coherence of the book is partly a mark of its origins in the Law in the Aberdeen Council Registers project, which brought together a team of historians and linguists to analyze the remarkable series of common books that survive from the town between 1398 and 1511. As the editors point out, more records survive from Aberdeen in the period before 1500 than all other Scottish towns combined, and these rich sources—now available in a database online—provide the central evidentiary base for half of the chapters.

These sources are mined not only for what they can tell us about legal culture in the narrower sense of legal reasoning, as in J. D. Ford’s chapter, or the personnel of the law courts, as in those of Andrew Simpson and Adelyn Wilson, but also what they can reveal about the broader cultural apparatus of law. With some 1.5 million words available from the registers’ corpus, there is an understandable focus on the linguistic features of the documents, and it is interesting to have contributions from linguists. Chapters from Joanna Kopaczyk and Anna Havinga on multilingualism, code-switching, and venularization do an admirable job of speaking across the disciplinary divide despite the technical nature of their work.

But the wealth of language in the Aberdeen registers also lends itself to more familiar varieties of cultural history. William Hepburn and Graeme Small’s adroit chapter on the common books as nodes and indices of a broader urban documentary culture, Jackson Armstrong’s careful contribution on the language of malice and the emotional timbre of felony, and especially David Ditchburn’s beautifully wrought chapter on the temporalities of law in sixteenth-century Aberdeen, make for excellent exemplars of what historians can do with these sources. As well as highlighting the yields of this evidence, they build out to present new insights into medieval legal culture.

The comparative aims of the book are extended through the other chapters, drawn from specialists working on other parts of Northern Europe. Miriam Tveit, Michael H. Brown, and Jörg Rogge each focus on the role of law in constituting urban community in Norway, Scotland, and Germany respectively, in what is perhaps the most



cohesive section of the book. It would have been useful had the contributors here reflected more on the potential comparisons and similarities between their different contexts, rather than leaving them implicit by juxtaposition.

The remaining European chapters are fruitfully diverse, with Chanelle Delameillieure and Jelle Haemers drawing on a fascinating case study from Ghent to examine the role of property in marriage formation; Edda Frankot offering a lively and insightful study of the tradition of *wijncoep*, a shared drink which helped to validate extra curial legal business; and Justyna Wubs-Mrozewicz demonstrating the way that property rights were enforced within the transregional legal regimes in which the Hanseatic merchants operated.

For the most part, the book seems to be aimed at specialists. Given this, and the enticing vernacular language available from the Aberdeen Council Registers—who could fail to love a legal record in which formal appeals (“falsing a doom”) are made by declaring a judgment “stinkande and rottyn”?—it is understandable that the editors decided to leave quotations from Middle Scots untranslated. Nonetheless, given the editors’ comparative aims, it did make some of the essays in the volume more difficult to grapple with. An explicit translation, even just in the footnotes, would have made it more accessible to scholars less familiar with the language.

For all this, however, the volume succeeds admirably in showcasing the Aberdeen material and setting it within a broader context, bringing together a varied set of contributions that will be useful to postgraduate students and researchers alike.

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Marktstrategien der Kurienbanken: Die Geschäfte der Alberti, Medici und Spinelli in Deutschland (1400–1475). Kurt Weissen.

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The history of Italian, especially Tuscan finance in the late Middle Ages, has always been a particularly important topic of international historiography. A general opinion derived from more than a century of research holds that the Holy Roman Empire was uninteresting to the Italians for banking transactions—or, in the words of Arnold Esch, “While almost all of Europe was covered by a network of Italian-served *piazze di cambio*, from which bills of exchange could generally be found in all directions, i.e. cashless transfers, this system had a conspicuous hole east of the Rhine” (“Aus dem Alltag eines Ablasskollektors. Eine Reise durch Deutschland, die Niederlande und Österreich anhand der Buchführung 1470–1472,” in *Päpste, Pilger, Pönitentiarie: Festschrift für Ludwig Schmugge zum 65.*, ed. Andreas Meyer, Constanze Rendtel, and Maria Wittmer-Butsch [2004], 124). Nevertheless, there was a need for financial