

*Le marché de la terre au Moyen Âge*. Edited by LAURENT FELLER and CHRIS WICKHAM (Rome: École française de Rome, 2005; pp. 670. N.p.).

IN 1998 the Laboratoire de médiévistique occidentale de Paris (LAMOP) fixed on four themes for close investigation. One of them was the medieval land market, and this book is the product of successive colloquia on the subject. It consists of articles by twenty-one authors, of whom six have made more than one contribution. Eight are in English, most of them on specifically English topics; the remainder are in French, but these include work on German, Portuguese, and Spanish evidence as well as French and not all are by francophone authors. The articles are grouped in three sections of unequal length. A preface by Monique Bourin leads into three general introductory articles and these are followed by nine articles on the historiography of the medieval land market in different regions of western Europe. But the bulk of the book, two-thirds of the whole, consists of twelve case-studies, detailed regional or local work on the land market from particular sources; they conclude with a general summing-up by Chris Wickham.

*EHR*, cxxii. 496 (April 2007)

It is fitting that the work is published by the *École française de Rome*, which in 1986 had organised a colloquium on the general (and not just medieval) history of the land market; its proceedings were published in *Quaderni Storici*, xxii (1987). The present book shows how the problems of the land market have attracted and intrigued medieval historians over the past twenty years. It is of daunting appearance: no conversations and no pictures, and not very many maps, diagrams, or even tables. But this is misleading. Not only is it an important book; nearly all the contributions are highly readable and all are thought-provoking and full of interest. It is space, not any form of quality assessment, that prevents this review from mentioning more than a few of them. There is an index of persons and places but no subject index. This is a pity—and this is my only criticism of the book. One sees the difficulties of providing one, especially given the book's two languages, but they should not have been insuperable, and it would have made the book more generally accessible and increased its value substantially to future research to have had an index to lead one to topics such as the accumulation of holdings, debt, notarial registers, partible inheritance, wills, and other topics that recur in work on the land market.

It is unavoidable, but a pity, that space should have been taken up throughout the book to discussion of the appropriateness of the term 'land market' and its literal equivalent in some other languages: '*mercato della terra*' and others (François Menant points out that it does not appear in German). English-speaking historians take it fully in their stride, as Monique Bourin remarks, but the phrase is perhaps an unfortunate one. Medieval dealings in land simply do not conform to economists' and anthropologists' strict definition of a market; this would demand sales and purchases uninfluenced by family ties, seignorial control, or any of the other constraints that affected the scale, the rhythm, and the costs of land transactions throughout medieval Europe. This worries greatly some of the book's contributors, who discuss what they see as contradictions—but in truth it is a non-problem. As Wickham points out, there is no disagreement over what actually happened, only over what we should call it. Is it too late to end an utterly sterile debate by referring simply to land transfers?

It would be wonderful if as a result of LAMOP's initiative we could begin to discern a general pattern, a broad chronology even, of these transfers across medieval Europe. That we cannot do so is no reflection on the value of the project or on the work of the contributors, which has brought us a long way forward. It may well be that the broad-brush picture is not so much unattained as unattainable. The general articles here provide an authoritative account of the possible approaches to the subject and of the present state of play in each area of western Europe, an invaluable point of reference for future work. But the twelve case-studies are no less important. Like much other work on land transfers, they throw bright shafts of light on detailed occurrences over a more or less limited period in a more or less limited area. That all around is darkness, and that even these shafts of light leave some relevant matters in shadow, is entirely due to the sources at our disposal. What we have are chance survivals of documents that directly concern transfers of land or the chance inclusion of relevant information in records of quite different business, information often far from explicit so that it has to be teased out with much labour and with perceptive insight. The scale of these sources differs hugely. Mark Page analyses 36,000 peasant land transactions from 1260–1350 that are recorded on the

manorial accounts of the bishops of Winchester; Stéphane Boissellier considers the forty-odd land transfers from 1147–1205 in a cartulary of St Vincent's Abbey at Lisbon. With contrasts like these, there are bound to be enormous differences in methodology and interpretation.

Even so, discoveries in one area, from sources particularly idiosyncratic or analysed with particular insight, can help work in others, where similar phenomena may lie more deeply concealed, but not wholly out of sight if the historian knows what to look for. Two examples from this book come to mind. Julien Demade shows from records of 1498–1526 from the Hospital of the Holy Spirit at Nuremberg how circular chains of buyers and sellers, some wanting more land, others less, would come together to transfer property simultaneously, thus reducing to a minimum the cash needed for the transactions. Antoni Furió and Antonio José Mira Jódar show from fifteenth-century notarial registers that in the area around Valencia there was not only an active system of land transfers but also a parallel system of buying and selling debts, and that the two were closely linked. It will be interesting to see whether, alerted to these possibilities, researchers in other areas can detect similar phenomena, as well as others that these case-studies reveal.

This is essentially a book that looks forward, to more work to be done and to more discoveries to be made. We may be certain that there are further illuminating sources to be investigated and more insights to be gained from those already known. There are new regions to be explored—Scotland comes at once to mind. We can only hope that LAMOP will not now abandon a field of research that it has done so much to advance. Meanwhile, LAMOP, the editors, and all contributors to the work are to be warmly congratulated. This is an important book.

doi:10.1093/ehr/cem011

P.D.A. HARVEY  
*Durham*