1. Introduction

1 JOHN CARPENTER OBSERVES HIS SURROUNDINGS

In 1419 the London town clerk John Carpenter prepared a codex compiling texts on the constitution and administration of the city. He believed that knowledge of the city's governance had, in recent decades, been buried all too often along with victims of the plague. Written information contained in books, rolls and charters had been recorded unsystematically and was thus difficult to locate again. It was Carpenter's intention to provide an inventory for the future, which indexes would render easy to access and thus to use.

In part 4 of what became known as the White Book produced in this manner, Carpenter began to cite municipal records not in full but in the form of so-called calendars, simply adding a reference to the original entries. Here we find a section that assembles materials modern readers will doubtless find bizarrely disparate. Carpenter gave this passage the following heading: ‘Of Jews, Lepers and Swine that are to be removed from

the City. And ordinances concerning sturdy Beggars in the City’. Indeed, under this rubric he lists twenty-five passages from earlier records calling for the removal of these dissimilar elements of the urban ‘population’. Such admonitions had begun to enter municipal records in 1277, and had become increasingly frequent after the mid-fourteenth century. In the rubric that immediately followed the regulations concerning Jews, lepers, pigs and beggars, he collected material that could be cited in cases against ‘Prostitutes and others taken in Adultery’. Carpenter was not wholly original here. In one of the manuscripts he cited, for example, the regulations concerning pigs, lepers and brothels were also recorded near, if not directly next to, each other. And yet never before in London had non-Christians, the allegedly work-shy, the sick and the sexually deviant so consistently been associated (one might almost say equated) with each other and also with stray pigs.

The associations that guided the clerk and his predecessors can be gleaned at least in part from the wording of the regulations themselves. Undesirables who wandered the city streets, above all lepers and sturdy beggars, were to be arrested. But why did Carpenter include Jews, who after all did not live in London any more, having been expelled from the country 130 years previously by Edward I? Was the proximity of the mentioned groups to the prostitutes purely coincidental? What did it mean for all of them together to be associated with pigs? Would it not have made more sense to link the numerous regulations on these animals, for example, with those concerning stray dogs, which were also found worthy of inclusion in the Liber Albus, if in a quite separate section? Or

2 The earliest instance is noteworthy: CLBkA, 215–19.

3 MGL 1, 590–1: De Judaicis, Leprosis, et Porcis extra Civitatem evacuandis; et ordina[tiones] pro validis Mendicis infra Civitatem; ibid., 591–2: De Meretricibus, et aliis in Adulterio deprehensis. The two rubrics are related to the extent that an entire verso side of the manuscript is reserved for the one, and the following recto side for the other; CLRO, Liber Albus fol. 284f.

4 This is the case in the 1321 Liber Custumarum, fol. 203f. The text is not, however, included in MGL 2 (that is, in the edition of Liber Custumarum), but only in its transfer by Carpenter into the Liber Albus; MGL 1, 260–77, see esp. 270, 273, 275 (cf. the note in MGL 2, 501). On the Liber Custumarum, see L. Dennison, ‘“Liber Horn”, “Liber Custumarum” and other Manuscripts of the Queen Mary Psalter Workshops’, in L. Grant (ed.), Medieval Art, Architecture and Archaeology in London (Leeds, 1990), 118–34, esp. 120–3.


6 MGL 1, 453: Quod Canes non circumvangent in Civitate. On this passage, see the comment in CLBkH, 311 n. 1.
is it perhaps not worth our trouble to scrutinise the associations made by the quill-pusher Carpenter more closely?

This last question is the easiest to answer. John Carpenter was anything but unworldly. He exerted a political influence almost unparalleled among the London citizens of his generation – on the one hand through his commitment to the city’s poor in the spirit of Christian caritas, and on the other through his personal efforts to repress undesirable elements in the population. Only two years before compiling the White Book, on 20 April 1417, he had been appointed town clerk at a session of London’s Common Council. Let us assume that Carpenter followed that session with close interest. We then see the forty-year-old participating in deliberations concerning certain evils of life in the city. Thus on this April day he heard complaints that men of bad character and conduct were haunting the city’s stews, that violence was rife there, and that the wives, children, apprentices and servants of respectable London citizens were being tempted there to commit sins of the flesh. He then also listened to the complaints against people living along the Thames who demanded fees for access to the river, docks and steps – while the poor urgently needed the Thames to fetch water, wash their clothes and take care of other necessities! Such people, Carpenter heard the council members say, were acting according to their own interests rather than the common good. Both evils should be prevented by publicly proclaimed prohibitions: access to the Thames must not become a source of income for the few, and the running of bathhouses in the city was forbidden. Moreover, Londoners were urgently reminded of the prohibition against tolerating people of bad reputation as tenants. It was with these measures that the new town clerk was ushered into office. Henceforth, Carpenter would consider the struggle against vice and the protection of the honest poor to be two sides of the same coin. Until his death in 1442, he repeatedly pursued both goals simultaneously in his capacity as administrator, founder and Homo politicus. He penned a proclamation against vagabonds calling upon them to make their labour available at harvest time. He copied this text with particular care into the Letter Book and added his initials, thus marking it as his intellectual property, which was quite unusual at the time. As executor of the will of the famous Richard Whittington he devoted himself to the new building of Newgate Prison and thus contributed to the improvement – or more

7 For biographical literature on Carpenter see above, n. 1.
8 CLBkI, 178–80. On the prohibition of bathhouse-brothels on that day, see below 286 and 295–8. On Carpenter’s appointment, see Brewer, Memoir, 11.
9 LBkI fol. 212r. Sharpe’s comment in CLBkI (197 n. 2) that the proclamation recorded there was the earliest signed by Carpenter (and thus by any town clerk) is thus not quite accurate. To be sure, the two texts are recorded in the manuscript directly one after the other. It is
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precisely, the diversification – of prison conditions in the English capital. 10 He also saw to it that prayers were said once again ‘in the poor chapel’ above the charnel house in St Paul’s Cathedral. 11 That an almshouse was established in Whittington’s name and given a set of statutes was not least the work of Carpenter. 12 Like many other citizens, he left certain sums to the parish poor in his will. 13 Unique, however, was his concern for those poor children who served as choirboys in the chapel of the Guildhall, and who, thanks to Carpenter’s initiative, were to enjoy a solid education. In the fifteenth century, this well-known group of poor, probably orphaned boys had already come to be called ‘Carpenter’s children’. 14

Thus one could say, without much fear of anachronism, that the town clerk was in the vanguard of social policy in his day. This means that he reacted to the phenomena of urban everyday life, which he like many of his contemporaries regarded as social evils, with the tools applied in the later Middle Ages for the purposes of promotion and repression throughout Latin Europe – that is, with legacies, donations and endowments on the one hand, and proclamations, prohibitions, expulsion, penance and punishment on the other. 15 This offers a first indicator of Carpenter’s place in fifteenth-century London. Another, which relates to his thinking, can be discerned if we proceed once again from the strange combination offered by the White Book.

Those readers of this entry who are interested in cultural history and folklore will be reminded of phenomena from late medieval and early striking that Carpenter wrote the first concerning beggars in French, while the second about the clairvoyant charlatan Thomas Forde is in English. On his innovation of having entries signed by the town clerk, see Kellaway, ‘John Carpenter’s Liber Albus’, 67 n. 5.


11 The chapel is referred to in this way in LBK fol. 78v: ‘in pauperi capella beate Marie virginis super ossamenta mortuorum in cimiterio sancti Pauli London, que de officiantibus in divinis est totaliter destituta’. On the principles of transcription used in what follows, see below, 317.


13 Brewer, Memoir, 93.


15 Mervyn James, in contrast, stresses not Carpenter’s traditional traits, but rather those that anticipate the Reformation. ‘Ritual, Drama and Social Body in the Late Medieval Town’, Past and Present, 98 (1983), 3–29, 22–8.
modern European history that help us to lend some context to Carpenter’s equating of the sick, the poor, the Jews, stray pigs and finally also the sexually deviant. They will see that the town clerk was in good (or at least numerous) company. One example that comes to mind is the popular entertainment of ‘pig-beating’: in this rough sport, blind beggars were equipped with clubs and ordered to beat a pig to death in a pen. Naturally, they also cudgelled each other in the process, before bringing the creature down out of exhaustion more than skill. The point of this brutish game is clear enough. During the fight, the distinction between human and animal, hunter and prey, subject and object is abolished. Before the pig is finally killed the blind men have knocked each other down, lain in the mire, unwittingly turned each other into prey, and acquired wounds and bruises. Thus for the amusement of the audience watching from a safe distance, the beggars have temporarily ‘become pigs’.16

Similarly, particularly from a Continental perspective, the combination of ‘pig’ and ‘Jew’ can be traced far backward in time from the period when Carpenter thrust the two together – quite pointlessly, as noted above – in the White Book. We need only recall representations of the Judensau, which seem to have been in use as early as the thirteenth century. The object there, as Isaiah Shachar has shown,17 was also to dehumanise people separated from the majority society (Mehrheitsgesellschaft) by a common trait (in this case, their different faith) by associating them pictorially with pigs. Here, too, the uncovering of alleged inhumanity was tied to the majority society’s defilement fantasies – fantasies that


would assume countless bizarre shapes in the centuries to come.18 Thus, the reservoirs of the late medieval imaginaire provided docking points for the association between pigs and blind beggars on the one hand and Jews on the other, which individuals could pick up, process and pass on. The same may be said of the association between Jews and lepers. According to a London ordinance of 1274, only Jews, lepers and dogs were allowed to consume the meat of animals butchered by Jews, which must not be purchased by ordinary Christians.19 And in the era of King Edward II (in a kingdom virtually devoid of Jews) claims were made that in France, Germany, Spain and Burgundy the Jews, with the help of the sultan of Babylon, had incited the lepers to kill all of Christendom with the juices of their own poisoned bodies. Fortunately, so it was said, the plot had been discovered just in time at Whitsun tide, so that four thousand lepers could be committed to the flames and meet their just punishment.20 What apparent common trait suggested this conspiracy theory? Like the Jews, lepers were considered to live in a state of sin, and their bodily defects were interpreted as the visible sign of God’s wrath at their individual failings. Mortal sin, one thirteenth-century Londoner wrote, was a sort of leprosy: it rendered the soul hateful to God and removed it from the community of saints.21 Yet lepers were also said to be unwilling to submit to isolation. King Edward III, for example, a benefactor of the scrofulous and epileptic in the eyes of his contemporaries,22 accused lepers of seeking the society of the healthy, deliberately infecting them so that they had more company in their misery. Thus, for example, they delighted in visiting the bathhouses and other private places, engaging in sexual intercourse there and infecting healthy women and men.23

Here we see a further overlapping of traits (this time between lepers and prostitutes), to which Carpenter could have referred if asked: in the fantasies of contemporaries, prostitutes and lepers alike practised sexual promiscuity. Late medieval medicine considered leprosy to be a venereal disease, deeming extramarital intercourse to be the most important source of infection.24 At the same time, the infectious disease provided the

18 C. Fabre-Vassas, La bête singulière. Les juifs, les chrétiens et le cochon (Paris, 1994).
23 For a fuller account see below 93–5 and Appendix, no. 11.
24 See below 94 with n. 109. For the overlapping of traits commonly attributed to both ‘Jews’ and ‘prostitutes’, see D. O. Hughes, ‘Earrings for Circumcision: Distinction and
London authorities with a pattern of interpretation for explaining the harmful influence of the city’s bathhouses. The spread of the indecency engaged in there was portrayed in a manner that strongly recalled miasmic infection; sexual deviance was associated with the world of the vile and stinking. Leprosy and sexual excess were dangerous for citizens and thus the commonweal for quite similar reasons.

In what follows, we will discover some further associations and alleged shared traits that sound highly curious to modern ears. What is more, we will see that they were components of conceptual worlds whose formation and societal implications historians can help us to understand.

2 POOR AND MARGINAL PEOPLE UNDER THE SCRUTINY OF THE MUNICIPAL AUTHORITIES: AN OVERVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

When engaging in such an attempt, one need not, of course, start completely from scratch. Historical research has developed tools for describing interpretative efforts such as Carpenter’s. For good reason, nearly all of them are rooted in the study of late medieval and early modern urban societies. Two fields deserve particular emphasis: first, research on marginal groups and second – since the members of these groups were largely recruited from the urban underclass – research on poverty. For most recent scholars of practices of exclusion, a tense relationship seems to have existed between ‘poverty’ and ‘marginality’.

Let us turn first to interpretations of late medieval and early modern poverty. In the late Middle Ages (and more intensely in the sixteenth century) European cities began to make more problematic use of the instruments of poor relief motivated by Christian charity. It became increasingly obvious that the municipal authorities intended to aid only those poor people who – for example, because of outwardly apparent bodily or other deficiencies – were in fact incapable of supporting themselves through labour, and who had resided in the city for some time.


25 See below chapter 7, section 2.

Locals who could not feed themselves and those inhabitants who barely subsisted in their own households (so-called ‘poor householders’ or ‘shame-faced poor’\(^{27}\)) could hope for assistance, whereas beggars from outside the city, or those who were of sound body or who merely feigned infirmities, were to be expelled as quickly as possible. The distribution of beggars’ tokens as a sort of begging licence and the use of municipal employees for the constant supervision of beggars were widespread measures intended to serve this purpose.\(^{28}\)

Historians disagree on the chronology of this change, and on whether the authorities were responding to actual new abuses (the much-vaunted pre-modern ‘plague of beggars’), or were instrumentalising these measures with the aim of extending the scope of their power within the city. Ulf Dirlmeier makes a convincing argument for the latter view for the period preceding the Reformation.\(^{29}\) As to the chronological issue, French social historians, in particular, see the Black Death of the mid-fourteenth century, with its demographic and economic consequences, as providing the decisive impetus for administrative innovations.\(^{30}\) Historians who proceed from a quantitative clustering of such measures have sometimes referred to the fifteenth century, but generally to the era of the Reformation, as the key period in the history of poor relief. Both sides have brought forward good arguments. In their favour, the early modernists have been able to argue that municipal, territorial and national regulations concerning

\(^{27}\) For more on the house poor and shame as their attribute, see below chap. 6, section 3.


begging, vagrancy and enforced labour indeed became particularly numerous in the Reformation era, and that relief and repression were both rationalised and standardised in the age of Luther and the incipient Counter-Reformation.\textsuperscript{31} They have had a difficult time, however, answering the medievalists’ objection that these measures, as frequently documented as they may be for the early modern period, already had their own history rooted in medieval ideas on the justification of almsgiving, and that language very similar to that of sixteenth-century laws and statutes can be found by the fourteenth century.\textsuperscript{32} To put it another way: from the viewpoint of medievalists, the catalogue of measures enacted by early modern states and towns was far more ‘medieval’ than the experts on the

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post-Reformation period were prepared to believe, since the pre-modern laws were grounded in popular notions of poverty, honesty, indolence and moral degeneracy, which to some extent can be traced back to late antique Christian thought, but which increasingly became practical policy from the fourteenth century onward.33

It was also these very notions that were applied with particular stringency to specific categories of the urban population, the ‘marginal groups’.34 In this field, František Graus’s programmatic essay of 1981 paved the way for future research. Graus combined sociological approaches and terminology (a discipline of which he was personally critical) with the theory of the ‘crisis’ of the late Middle Ages.35 Although he, whose

