Medieval Market Morality

Life, Law and Ethics in the English Marketplace, 1200–1500

This important new study examines the market trade of medieval England from a new perspective, by providing a wide-ranging critique of the moral and legal imperatives that underpinned retail trade. James Davis shows how market-goers were influenced not only by practical and economic considerations of price, quality, supply and demand, but also by the moral and cultural environment within which such deals were conducted. This book draws on a broad range of cross-disciplinary evidence, from the literary works of William Langland and the sermons of medieval preachers, to state, civic and guild laws. Davis scrutinises everyday market behaviour through case studies of small and large towns, using the evidence of manor and borough courts. From these varied sources, Davis teases out the complex relationship between morality, law and practice and demonstrates that even the influence of contemporary Christian ideology was not necessarily incompatible with efficient and profitable everyday commerce.

James Davis is Lecturer in Medieval History in the School of History and Anthropology at Queen’s University Belfast.
Medieval Market Morality

Life, Law and Ethics in the English Marketplace, 1200–1500

James Davis
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JAMES DAVIS
Abbreviations

Alsford, *Towns* *Medieval English Towns*, at:

*Ayenbite of Inwyt* R. Morris (ed.), *Dan Michel’s Ayenbite of Inwyt,* or, *Remorse of Conscience. In the Kentish Dialect, 1340 AD* (Early English Text Society, o.s. 23, London, 1866)

*BBC, 1042–1216* A. Ballard (ed.), *British Borough Charters 1042–1216* (Cambridge, 1913)

*BBC, 1216–1307* A. Ballard and J. Tait (eds.), *British Borough Charters 1216–1307* (Cambridge, 1923)

*BBC, 1307–1660* M. Weinbaum (ed.), *British Borough Charters 1307–1660* (Cambridge, 1943)

*Beverley* A. F. Leach (ed.), *Beverley Town Documents* (Selden Society, 14, London, 1900)

*BL* London, British Library


*Bridgwater* T. B. Dilks (ed.), *Bridgwater Borough Archives,* 1200–1485 (Somerset Record Society, 48, 53, 58, 60 and 70, 1933–71)

*Bristol* F. B. Bickley (ed.), *The Little Red Book of Bristol,* 2 vols. (Bristol, 1900)


*CChR* Calendar of Charter Rolls, 6 vols. (London, 1903–27)


*Chaucer* L. D. Benson (ed.), *The Riverside Chaucer* (Boston, Mass., 1987)
List of abbreviations


CUL  Cambridge University Library

DB  A. Rumble (ed.), Domesday Book, 34: Suffolk (Chichester, 1986)


Fleta  H. G. Richardson and G. O. Sayles (eds.), Fleta (Seldon Society, 72, London, 1953)


Great Red Book  E. W. W. Veale (ed.), The Great Red Book of Bristol (Bristol Record Society, 2, 4, 8 and 16, 1931–51)


HMC  Historical Manuscripts Commission, Report on Manuscripts in Various Collections (London, 1907)

Jacob’s Well  A. Brandeis (ed.), Jacob’s Well: An English Treatise on the Cleansing of Man’s Conscience (Early English Text Society, o.s. 115, London, 1900)


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<td><strong>Northampton</strong></td>
<td>C. A. Markham and J. C. Cox (eds.), <em>The Records of the Borough of Northampton</em>, 2 vols. (Northampton, 1898)</td>
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<td><strong>Norwich</strong></td>
<td>W. Hudson and J. C. Tingey (eds.), <em>The Records of the City of Norwich</em>, 2 vols. (Norwich, 1906)</td>
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<td><strong>Oak Book</strong></td>
<td>P. Studer (ed.), <em>The Oak Book of Southampton</em>, 2 vols. (Southampton Record Society, 10–11, Southampton, 1910)</td>
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<td><strong>RCh</strong></td>
<td>T. D. Hardy (ed.), <em>Rotuli Chartarum</em> (London, 1837)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>RP</strong></td>
<td><em>Rotuli Parliamentorum</em>, 6 vols. (London, 1783)</td>
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<td><strong>Salisbury</strong></td>
<td>D. R. Carr (ed.), <em>The First General Entry Book of the City of Salisbury 1387–1452</em> (Wiltshire Record Society, 54, Trowbridge, 2001)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>SRO (B)</strong></td>
<td>Suffolk Record Office (Bury St Edmunds)</td>
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<td>Abbreviation</td>
<td>Description</td>
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<tr>
<td>SRO (I)</td>
<td>Suffolk Record Office (Ipswich)</td>
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<td>TNA</td>
<td>London, The National Archives</td>
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<td>VCH</td>
<td><em>Victoria County History</em></td>
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<td>Winchester</td>
<td>W. H. B. Bird (ed.), <em>The Black Book of Winchester</em> (Winchester, 1925)</td>
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<td>York, i–ii</td>
<td>M. Sellers (ed.), <em>York Memorandum Book, volumes I–II</em> (Surtees Society, 120 and 125, Durham, 1912–15)</td>
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Notes to the text

Currency and measures

A pound sterling (£) consisted of 20 shillings (s., ‘solidus’) and 240 pence (d., ‘denarius’), with 12 pence to a shilling. A ‘mark’ was worth two-thirds of a pound (13s. 4d.) and a ‘groat’ was worth 4d.

A ‘quarter’ was a dry measure, equivalent to eight ‘bushels’; a bushel was equivalent to eight gallons. Other measures included the ‘peck’, which was equivalent to two gallons or a quarter of a bushel, the pottle or potel (½ gallon) and the ‘quart’ (¼ gallon). The ell was a measure of length, particularly for cloth, equivalent to 45 inches in England.

The troy pound was mostly used for money and bread and often delineated in pounds, shillings and pence: 20 pennies to an ounce, 12 ounces to a pound (lb.), 64 lb. to a bushel, and 512 lb. to a quarter. A tower pound consisted of 5,400 barley grains, a troy pound of 5,760 barley grains, and an avoirdupois pound (of 16 ounces) of 7,000 barley grains. Many other scales were also employed throughout the period covered by this book, with numerous local variations.

Extracts from contemporary texts

The original Middle English versions of vernacular texts are given where possible, and modern English translations are provided for certain difficult words or passages. Middle English includes the letters þ (thorn), generally pronounced ‘th’, and þ (yogh), similar to ‘gh’. Translations of Middle English, Latin and French texts are either the author’s own or taken from published sources as referenced.