

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-48456-5 - English and French Towns in Feudal Society: A Comparative Study

R. H. Hilton

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

This is a comparative study of the role of English and French towns in feudal society in the middle ages. Professor Hilton challenges the view that 'a town is a town wherever it is', and takes issue with the perception of the medieval town as the harbinger of capitalism.

Differences between English and French feudalism are taken into account; but these differences, as well as those between English and French medieval towns, existed within sufficiently similar contexts to justify the kind of comparison pioneered by Marc Bloch in his *Seigneurie française et manoir anglais*. Medieval France was much larger than medieval England, and contained a far larger number of towns. French town populations were bigger than those in England, although it is possible that England had a higher proportion of small market towns. Comparisons are made between the feudal presence within the towns of both countries, and between their urban social structures. Conflicts arising from urban demands for freedom and autonomy are examined, together with frictions between various levels of society, such as mercantile elites, craft masters, journeymen, the unskilled and marginals. Finally, the mercantile domination of English town governments is contrasted with that acquired by lawyers and officials in late medieval French towns – the 'trahison de la bourgeoisie', as one French historian has described it.

In bringing together much material which dissolves old categories and simplifications in the study of medieval towns, Professor Hilton provides an important new perspective on medieval society and on the nature of feudalism.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-48456-5 - English and French Towns in Feudal Society: A Comparative Study

R. H. Hilton

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Past and Present Publications

*English and French
towns in feudal
society*

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-48456-5 - English and French Towns in Feudal Society: A Comparative Study

R. H. Hilton

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Past and Present Publications

General Editor: PAUL SLACK, *Exeter College, Oxford*

Past and Present Publications comprise books similar in character to the articles in the journal *Past and Present*. Whether the volumes in the series are collections of essays – some previously published, others new studies – or monographs, they encompass a wide variety of scholarly and original works primarily concerned with social, economic and cultural changes, and their causes and consequences. They will appeal to both specialists and non-specialists and will endeavour to communicate the results of historical and allied research in readable and lively form.

For a list of titles in Past and Present Publications, see end of book.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-48456-5 - English and French Towns in Feudal Society: A Comparative Study

R. H. Hilton

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

English and French towns in feudal society

A comparative study

R. H. HILTON



Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-48456-5 - English and French Towns in Feudal Society: A Comparative Study

R. H. Hilton

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Published by the Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge CB2 1RP
40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211, USA
10 Stamford Road, Oakleigh, Melbourne 3166, Australia

© Cambridge University Press 1992

First published 1992

First paperback edition 1995

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress cataloguing in publication data

Hilton, R. H. (Rodney Howard), 1916–

English and French towns in feudal society: a comparative study /
R. H. Hilton.

p. cm. – (Past and present publications)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0 521 41352 4 (hardcover)

1. Cities and towns. Medieval – England. 2. Cities and towns,
Medieval – France. 3. Feudalism – England. 4. Feudalism – France.
5. Social structure – England – history. 6. Social structure – France –
History. I. Title.

HT115.H55 1992 91–12206

307.76'0942'0902–dc20 CIP

ISBN 0 521 41352 4 hardback

ISBN 0 521 48456 1 paperback

Transferred to digital printing 1999

UP

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-48456-5 - English and French Towns in Feudal Society: A Comparative Study

R. H. Hilton

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

To Jean Birrell

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-48456-5 - English and French Towns in Feudal Society: A Comparative Study

R. H. Hilton

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Contents

	<i>page</i>
<i>Preface</i>	xi
<i>Introduction</i>	1
1 The town and feudalism: preliminary definitions	6
2 The feudal presence in towns	25
3 Urban social structures	53
4 Urban rulers	87
5 How urban society was imagined	105
6 Urban communities and conflict	127
Conclusion	152
<i>Bibliography</i>	155
<i>Index</i>	167

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-48456-5 - English and French Towns in Feudal Society: A Comparative Study

R. H. Hilton

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Preface

This book is rather a risky venture. Most of my research on medieval social and economic history has been agrarian rather than urban, and my recent ventures into urban history have been concerned with small market towns rather than with big cities. Amongst other aims, I have tried in this book to justify the 'small town' theme as being an important feature of urban history.

My main purpose, however, has been to consider the role of the town within feudal society, as will, I hope, become clear from chapter 1 onwards. This is a specific theme and, while it has to be considered in the general context of the history of medieval towns, there are many aspects of urban history which will not be dealt with in detail. These include both the general and particular economic developments within towns; the patterns of international and regional trade; the economic relationships between the towns and their rural hinterland; not to speak of urban constitutional and political development. These and other aspects of medieval urban history will, of course, be an important context to my main theme. And, while emphasising the towns' relationships with the feudal social formation, I will attempt to convey some feel for medieval town life.

I have developed the Anglo-French comparative theme, because of my interest in France and in French history. If my documentary research into medieval English urban history has concentrated on the study of the small town economy and society, all of my work on French towns has been confined to secondary sources – monographs on specific towns and articles on various themes in urban history, general surveys of urban history. The historiography of French urban history is very rich and I cannot claim to have made a complete coverage. If I did, I would never get round to writing even a small book.