

Charlotte Berry, *The Margins of Late Medieval London, 1430–1540*

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The Margins of Late Medieval London is a significant intervention in the historiography of pre-modern towns and cities. Berry's book blends social and cultural approaches to examine the dynamics of exclusion, both social and geographical, across the cusp of late medieval and early modern eras in London. Developed from her University of London PhD, this monograph is organised around five broad themes, each of which concentrates on a different primary source base. Each of these themes – from socio-spatial networks, to mobility, and regulation of reputations – is related to its neighbours through a common framework of spatialising social history. The result is a nuanced approach to inclusion and exclusion that accords more significance to the strategies employed by the marginalised than the formal hierarchies that are so often the focus of traditional structural approaches to pre-modern urban history.

The margins of London explored in this book are explicitly and deliberately both geographical and social, although Berry frequently stresses that the relationship between these was far more nuanced than this overlap might suggest. The geographical margins that form the basis for the study are primarily London's northern and eastern suburbs: the areas where growth would come to be concentrated during the later sixteenth century. Availability of different sources for different parishes has shaped this selection, which ranges from St Botolph Aldersgate in the north-west to St Botolph Aldgate, which stretched down to the river Thames in the east. While all apart from St Lawrence Jewry, used as a central comparator, were geographically at the fringes of the fifteenth and earlier sixteenth century city, most were within the City's liberty, and several actually spanned the city walls, this geography is far more nuanced than intra- and extra-mural. The first chapter, 'Landscape and economy' sketches the social and economic place of these areas within the city. Berry argues that a 'balance of choice and necessity' attracted the varied but on average poorer, and disproportionately female, population who lived in these neighbourhoods.

Much of the book reflects sensitive qualitative analysis layered upon exploratory use of technical quantitative methods, including GIS mapping and Social Network Analysis. Socio-spatial networks are explored in chapter 2 using statistical analysis of social relationships exposed through testamentary records. These records are inevitably somewhat limited in their social range and their extent, but for this period the voluntary social relationships they expose offer probably the best insight to the social production of neighbourhood. The patterns revealed in this way at the

margins of the city are essentially consistent with similar analysis in other contexts (including by this reviewer): the vast majority of executors and witnesses to wills were resident in the same parish as the testator, and others followed occupational or transport networks. Social network analysis unarguably offers powerful exploratory potential, but at times the quantitative discussion of network modularity is at risk of obscuring, rather than enhancing, the argument. Nonetheless, Berry makes a clear case for a far more nuanced and relative understanding of spatial marginality in late medieval cities in this chapter.

Mobility, in terms of both migration and routine movement through the city, is explored primarily through the lens of church court depositions in chapter 3. Careful qualitative analysis of depositions in the Bishop of London's consistory court is used to build an argument that suburban London depended upon everyday mobility. On the broader scale this includes discussion of the surprisingly long distance that even humble Londoners had migrated (in light of scholarship of sixteenth and seventeenth century London), and connections along drove roads. The most innovative discussion of movement, however, relates to smaller scale movement, or the 'spatial footprint' of everyday people within the margins of London. Intriguingly, Berry identified a 'sense of spatial and social separation of extramural areas' (p.126) and a tendency for both day to day movement, and moving to new homes, to take place laterally around the suburbs rather than axially in and out of the city.

The final two chapters explore the themes of inclusion and exclusion and reputation, marginalisation and space. Chapter 4 uses the records of the most localised of London's secular courts: the wardmote. Berry focuses on not only the specific judgements or accusations, but the operation of the institution itself. The composition of the juries, she argues, was a significant means of reinforcing local hierarchies, and serving as a juror could offer significant advantages in other spheres of life. Logically, therefore, women and aliens, who could not serve as jurors, lacked an important means of establishing their local reputation, and were far more vulnerable to indictment. Chapter 5 returns to the church courts to dig further into the dynamics of local transgression and exclusion. The focus is on the 'possibilities and limits of strategy for those whose reputations were sullied by local gossip' (p.174), and Berry argues that the relationship between social capital and reputation was far from fixed, and local relationships could allow for the rehabilitation of those marginalised by previous indictments and elite opinion. In this sense spatial marginality did not have to mean social marginality.

The remarkable variety of sources, and analytical techniques, used in this book combine to illustrate just how subtly we must comprehend marginality in the pre-modern city; it cannot be captured through economic measures. Marginality, Berry argues, was a constraint, not a displacement; it was 'mutable, dependent on context and primarily experienced when an individual's social resources were not able to extricate them from a situation' (p.202). This nuanced picture has emerged only through the combination of such diverse records, illuminating so many different aspects of social life. In one sense it therefore seems that this might have been taken further through a more integrated thematic treatment: the structure used here does tie specific sources to specific questions quite closely. Nonetheless, the

cultural approaches taken to this traditional question of social history will undoubtedly be of great interest to those working on other contexts.

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