

## Reviews of books

Editors:

JUSTIN COLSON and TOM HULME

Institute of Historical Research, University of London, Senate House, Malet Street, London, WC1E 7HU

Department of History, Anthropology, Politics and Philosophy, Queen's University Belfast, BT7 1NN

**Caroline M. Barron and Laura Wright (eds.)**, *The London Jubilee Book, 1376–1387. An Edition of Trinity College Cambridge MS O.3.11, folios 133–157*. London Record Society 55. Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2021. 150pp. 5 tables. £40.00 hbk.


doi:10.1017/S0963926822000785

In *Burning the Books. A History of Knowledge under Attack* (John Murray, 2020), Richard Ovenden shows that, while the digital age poses specific dangers to the preservation of knowledge, the destruction of archives and libraries is very much part of human history. In the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, we associate the burning of books with the totalitarian ambitions of autocratic regimes. Until relatively recently, probably the only thing that scholars knew of the London 'Jubilee Book' was the fact that it was burnt. On 16 March 1387, at an extraordinary meeting of the city's common council, attended by so many citizens that the assembly had to move downstairs to the main hall to accommodate them, it was decided that the book called 'Jubile' should be removed from the London Guildhall and publicly burnt. Viewed through a contemporary lens, episodes of book burning are mostly the work of anti-democratic forces, but late fourteenth-century London was not a democracy.

What, then, was so controversial about the 'Jubilee Book'? Its title, recalling its composition in the fiftieth year of Edward III's reign (1376–77), sounds vaguely monarchical and suitably celebratory. The official answer was the novelty of the Book's contents. The inclusion of 'new' oaths of civic officeholders and 'new' civic ordinances, both of which were 'repugnant to the old and approved customs' of London, had generated among the citizens 'great controversies, dissensions, and disputes'. The censorious language, pitting innovation against custom, was classically medieval, and urban. Was the charge true? Without the Book, it was impossible to know. The Book had been burnt, by London's sheriffs. Or so we thought. In this wonderful example of interdisciplinary collaboration, historian Caroline Barron and historical sociolinguist Laura Wright have identified a copy of the Book. They found it in a later fifteenth-century manuscript owned by a member of a London aldermanic family (the Forsters) and possibly commissioned by the London alderman and mayor Sir Thomas Cook. Cook is a familiar name because his family archive was the source of a memoranda book compiled by his secretary, John Vale.

This much-anticipated edition, published by the London Record Society, consists of a historical introduction, written by Caroline Barron, Laura Wright's linguistic study of the text, a full transcription and, very helpfully, a modern English translation. The introduction provides a fascinating account of the turbulent London politics that produced the Jubilee Book and, in the end, consumed it. Barron argues that it was a written constitution for the city, and it is hard to disagree with this conclusion. The Jubilee Book records the oaths and duties of the various civic officers and councillors, describes the modes of their election and appointment, and pays particular attention to the operation of the London courts and quasi-legal bodies, from the mayor's court and sheriffs' court to the London wardmote. A written constitution suggests qualities of permanence, stability and clarity. In fact, the Jubilee Book was the outcome of internal disputes about the governance of the city and the cause of further unrest, from the moment of its writing. Subject to almost continuous processes of inspection, debate and revision, the Jubilee Book is a witness to the seriousness of constitutional thinking about how, by whom and in whose interests the city should be governed.

Reading the text today, we might ask what the fuss was all about. Without the historical introduction, it would be easy to miss the significance of a written constitution that elevated the role of the common council at the expense of the court of mayor and aldermen, that bound all members and institutions of civic government to uphold its provisions and that gave the common council the legislative power of veto. Yet Laura Wright's contribution is fundamental. Her brilliant analysis of the language, spelling and grammar of the Jubilee Book suggests that it was an *earlier* version of the Book that was burnt in 1387, which points to the preservation and perhaps circulation of unofficial copies of the Book well into the fifteenth century. Above all, Wright proposes that the fifteenth-century English text (Trinity College Cambridge MS O.3.11, folios 133–157) was not an English translation, but a direct transcription of an early draft written in English between 1377 and 1383. We are left to wonder whether what was most controversial, and dangerous, about the Jubilee Book was not its constitutional reforms, but its use of the English language.

**Christian D. Liddy**   
Durham University

**Carsten Jahnke**, *Gott gebe, dass wir alle selig werden mögen. Die Mitgliederverzeichnisse der Heilig-Leichnams-, St. Antonius- und St. Leonhards-Bruderschaft zur Burg in Lübeck sowie das Bruderschaftsbuch der Heilig Leichnams- und St. Mauritiusbruderschaft der Weydelude zu St. Katharinen*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2022. 387pp. €55.00 hbk.  
doi:10.1017/S0963926822000773

This volume prints the foundation books and related materials of four of the most important fraternities in late medieval Lübeck: the fraternities of the Holy Sacrament, St Anthony's and St Leonard's, based in the Dominican friary of St Mary's in the north of the city, and the fraternity of the Holy Sacrament and St