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Samuel K. Cohn Jr, Ed. and trans., *Popular Protest in Late Medieval Europe: Italy, France and Flanders*, Manchester Medieval Sources. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004. xxiv + 389 pp. Maps, notes, suggested reading, and index. \$74.95 (hb) + \$24.95 (pb) ISBN 0-7190-6730-8 (hb), 0-7190-6731-6 (pb).

Review by John H. Arnold, Birkbeck College, University of London.

This is an extraordinarily generous act of scholarship. Samuel Cohn, well known to medievalists for his work on confraternities and the Black Death in Italy, has here provided us with an incredible compendium of sources on popular politics. Most of the sources are translated for the first time, and some are translated from archival documents that have never before been edited. The collection covers France, Flanders, and Italy, and takes us from the mid-thirteenth to the mid-fifteenth centuries. Its obvious primary purpose is pedagogic: as Cohn notes, in conjunction with Barrie Dobson's well-known collection of English sources^[1], one can now teach a powerfully comparative course on medieval popular politics and political violence. But Cohn also has two further purposes. The first is to educate those early modernists who tend to assume rather than establish the difference of their period from what went before. The medieval sources, now so easily available to the most casual reader, demonstrate for Cohn that there were many more continuities than differences between the medieval and early modern. Certainly, with the provision of this collection, there is henceforth no excuse for those working on insurrection and revolt in the sixteenth or seventeenth centuries to depend only upon a vague sense of 'medieval simplicity' attached to the various late-fourteenth century risings. Cohn's final purpose is to argue, in concert with his other work on Italy, that what *does* change in the popular politics of the period is connected not with the initial arrival of the Black Death (1348-51) but with the second major wave of plague that came a decade later. To this theme I will return below.

Popular Protest has a broad scope, chronologically, geographically, and thematically. We find here, as one would immediately expect, extracts concerning the revolt of Flanders in the 1320s, the Jacquerie of 1358, and (most extensively) the brief Ciompi revolution of 1378. Other, less well-known, periods of popular political revolt are also covered, from the *very* brief and tantalising mention in an annal of a weavers' uprising in Tournai in 1281 ("some were captured, and one Roussian called Li Kos was drawn between horses and hanged" (p. 22)), to a letter of royal remission granted in 1418 to one Regnault le Mocqueur for the earlier sedition he had spread in Châlons-en-Champagne ("He and his accomplices endeavoured to overthrow the government and to replace it with new laws" (p. 349)). Also included—and absolutely rightly so—are those moments of insurrection that, being associated primarily with religion, sometimes slip past the attentions of a less imaginative social historian: the so-called Shepherds' Crusade of 1251, the Pastoureaux of 1320, the iconoclastic heretics led by Fra Dolcino in the first decade of the fourteenth century, and so forth. This strand of revolt could in fact have been explored even further, traced back into the twelfth century at least (the *Capuciati* of the 1180s) and seen in the recurrent efforts at moral and political "reform" that periodically coalesced around charismatic preachers in Italy, from John of Vicenza to Savonarola. One might also have drawn strength from David Nirenberg's work on the politics of popular religious violence in illuminating some of the occasions of anti-semitic uprisings.^[2] But this is a counsel of perfection. Cohn has done a great service in at least highlighting the interconnection between religious and socioeconomic protest.

Nor does the sense of breadth cease there. Cohn has not taken 'protest' to always and only equate to "mass violence." Thus the collection also provides an absolutely fascinating glimpse into the less

dramatic and lurid processes of popular politics: workers going on strike (a recurrent feature of thirteenth-century Douai it would appear, as well as in Clermont-en-Beauvaisis and Florence—where evidence of wool workers organising a strike fund is found in 1345), many and varied tax revolts (from Rouen in 1291 to Paris, Lyons and Picardy in the early 1380s), and more symbolic and local actions, such as the carnivalesque street parties held by Florentine workers in 1333 or the destruction of a boundary marker between villages in the Florentine *contado* in 1406. There is a strong sense here of opening up a fertile area for further research, into the local processes of collectivity and dispute that provide the motor for larger-scale political movement. In the best-documented (and, to Cohn, best-known) political risings of fourteenth-century Italy, there is a similar sense provided here of the texture of popular politics, its organisational modes, its language and symbolism and targeted use of violence. We are, of course, often viewing popular politics through documents created from "above" by the authorities against which such movements were mobilized; but the possibility of reading such materials "against the grain" is aided by certain moments of greater visibility, such as an account of the Ciompi uprising written by one of its members, the wool worker Pagnolo di Ser Guido. What Cohn allows us to see is that popular protest was never a simple affair, not just a brutish and reflex "mob" reaction to hardship, but something that, at different times and in different places, shifted along the spectrum between the chance, inchoate movement of disparate factions, to the highly organised and ideologically-directed actions of a collectivity of the poor, the artisanal class, and local officialdom acting in concert with, rather than against, its neighbours.

Focussing particularly upon France (for the context of this review), three major episodes, somewhat contrasting, are presented here in wonderful detail. The first is the aforementioned Jacquerie of 1358, for which Cohn supplies thirty different documents across fifty pages of text, ranging from Froissart's famous account, to other previously untranslated chronicle accounts, to a large number of royal letters of remission. The material, and Cohn's helpful gloss upon it, draws out elements that chime with recent analyses of the English Rising of 1381[3], such as clear evidence of organisation within and between villages, and the *strategic* rather than spasmodic use of violence; although Cohn also argues that a distinct difference between the risings was the relative preponderance of local clergy in the English revolt, and relative absence in France. The editor's notes on the revolt, here as elsewhere, do not strait-jacket discussion, but helpfully frame the issues and raise questions—absolutely ideal for a student audience, and not unappreciated by an academic one. The second, smaller (seven documents) episode comes slightly later in the fourteenth century: the Tuchins (*Tue chiens*, killers—and eaters—of dogs). These bands of ex-soldiers and dispossessed peasants were formed in the context of the long, grinding hardship inflicted by the Hundred Years War, and spent their time extorting a living in southern France. It is not clear to what degree "Tuchin" defined a particular type of *routier* or brigand, or was used indiscriminately as a stereotype against such outlaws. All the accounts here present a picture of extremely violent men, doing terrible things to their enemies; what is less certain is whether that violence was pure brigandage, or whether (as one chronicle account suggests), in some instances at least, a kind of violent class warfare underlay some of its excesses.

The third episode is an interconnected collection of tax revolts in the 1380s, driven by the demands for increased royal revenues to fund war with England. Most dramatic were the so-called *Harelle* of Rouen and the *Maillotins* of Paris in 1381, both large-scale, well-organised rebellions against taxation that clearly involved substantial proportions of the citizens of each city. Cohn again provides us with a wealth of material, nearly sixty pages of documents, ranging from chronicle accounts to various acts of royal remission that contain fascinating details on some individual involvement (such as the man who, fleeing law officers, sought sanctuary in a church. Having been there for over thirty days, and realising that he'd have to give himself up on the fortieth day when sanctuary ran out, he managed to shut his persistent guards into one of the chapels and ran off). Perhaps more importantly, as the editor notes, the sources make it crystal clear that the revolt involved political organisation, not a spontaneous uprising: "many bourgeois of this city [Paris] and this Philippe [Melite, the petitioner for clemency], along with

others who assembled in the church of the Holy Cross and elsewhere, held meetings concerning these taxes. And when each was asked his opinion, many [...] said that they would not tolerate in the least any of these taxes being charged" (p. 312). According to the account in this letter of remission, the bourgeois noted that they'd willingly pay more reasonable and more progressively levied taxes, but not these particular impositions. Other documents however hint at a more radical politics: a lawyer among the rebellious Parisians apparently declared that "neither the king nor his counsellors could make of them a people, but that the people could very well make a king" (p. 300). The risings were to some degree interconnected, as news of Rouen's revolt inspired Paris, and Paris's hammer-men inspired others in their turn. In all of this, we see in some ways a rather better French parallel than the Jacquerie for the English Rising of 1381. Most intriguing is a particular similarity: the destruction of certain kinds of official documents, such as "the registers, acts and charters" found in Le Châtelet, very similar to activities by the English rebels. Moreover, as Steven Justice has demonstrated for England, the rebels did not simply destroy texts, they also created them. Here, similarly, in France: the drawing up of a "charter of the rights and liberties of Normandy" in Rouen, and similar charters presented to the Parisians by the king--the hammer men angrily arguing, however, that if the king did not uphold these charters, he would have to abdicate.

Professor Cohn clearly enjoys a brawl, historiographically as well as historically. The introductory discussion for each section picks a number of fights with existing interpretations of events. But whilst combative in tone, he nonetheless allows the reader to see what an opposing view might involve; and of course having the documents themselves immediately available should encourage a student audience to engage in the tussle rather than simply bet on one side or the other. Cohn's interpretation is very much on the rebels' side, asserting their agency and organisation whenever possible, playing down top-down involvement or control, playing up the effects and implications of their rebellions. His Black Death argument in regard of revolt draws upon his wider work on the plague--in brief, that its immediate effects in 1348-51 were limited, somewhat chaotic, but essentially without long-term consequences; and that it was the *return* of plague (for France and Flanders in the late 1350s) that had real and changing effects. I find this psychologically persuasive, and elsewhere Cohn has tried to demonstrate for Italy some of those effects in greater detail.[4] There are some doubts however about the contrast, because of the kinds of documentary materials available and how they change over time (particularly outside Italy). In particular, is the apparent tendency to "religious fervour" and clerical involvement in the pre-Black Death revolts a straightforward, empirical phenomenon? Or might it be a facet of how the texts--primarily chronicles--conceptualised popular uprisings in the thirteenth and early fourteenth century, as opposed to the discourses deployed by the different genres of document (particularly legal sources) that become more readily available from the later fourteenth century onward? Moreover, if the apparently more religiously-inflected French uprisings of 1320 and 1351 were more fully represented here in documentary form, might we find further similarities between these events and the later revolts, rather than the slightly cursory contrast Cohn invites us to take?

But I don't want to end by picking a fight, let alone starting an insurrection. This is a fabulously useful collection of documents--rendered even more pedagogically helpful by the fact that Manchester University Press has been making its Medieval Sources series available (for a fee) on-line. Cohn's introduction seems to hint at the possibility of a further volume, focussed more on Spain, southern Italy and eastern Europe. One can only dare hope. In the meantime, this is a great book, absolutely essential reading for social historians of the middle ages--and also, I would suggest, mandatory study for those working on social revolt in later periods, for whom 'the middle ages' are so often positioned as a pre-political void, against which different versions of modernity can be contrasted.

NOTES

[1] R. B. Dobson, ed. and trans., *The Peasants' Revolt of 1381*, 2nd edn (London: Macmillan, 1983)

[2] D. Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence: Persecution of Minorities in the Middle Ages* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996)

[3] S. Justice, *Writing and Rebellion: England in 1381* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994)

[4] For example, S. K. Cohn, *The Cult of Remembrance and the Black Death* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 1992); 'The Black Death: The End of a Paradigm', *American Historical Review* 107 (2002): 1-54

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