



Tom Scott. *Town, Country, and Regions in Reformation Germany.* Studies in Medieval and Reformation Traditions: Brill, 2005. xxv + 447 pp. EUR 149.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-90-04-14321-0.



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Economy, Society and the Principle of Complexity

This volume brings together fifteen essays by a highly distinguished historian of late medieval and early modern Germany. Tom Scott, now Honorary Professor at the Reformation Studies Institute in St. Andrews, has enriched our understanding of urban and rural society with a string of influential works on economic conditions and political unrest in the period between the Black Death and the Age of Confessions.

Each of the collection's three parts relates to one of the author's major research monographs. Six essays address the theme "Town and Country between Reform and Revolt,"[1] five define "Economic Landscapes,"[2] and the final four investigate "Regions and Local Identities." [3] They are reprinted here with only minor revisions (chiefly updates on secondary literature), but most appear in English for the first time. In terms of dates of original publication, the works stretch from 1978 to 2004, although the lion's share appeared in the last decade. A range of illustrations support the text, with detailed maps offering indispensable topographical guidance. Laudably, cross-referencing is facilitated through indexes of names, places, and subjects (although the latter is rela-

tively brief).

In his introduction, Thomas A. Brady, Jr, reminds us of the territorial fragmentation and peculiar characteristics of the Holy Roman Empire and the author's achievement in finding a "new way to map them" (p. xix). With reference to a clear preference for interpretations based on socio-economic circumstances rather than ideological forces, Brady credits Scott with a rejection of determinist models and an emphasis on the plurality of possible outcomes. This may serve as a timely warning for readers not to expect simple models and uniform answers.

Almost all essays have a clear social and spatial focus. Scott's work centers on the common man (gender is never an issue here) of the Upper Rhine region, particularly the Breisgau (in present-day southwestern Germany) and the Alsace (across the river in present-day France). In some of the more recent studies, the geographical scope broadens to neighboring areas such as the Swiss Confederation (chap.14), more distant parts of the Empire selected for comparative purposes (the East Elbian lands in chap. 15) and—in an important edited collection—the peasantries of Europe as a whole.[4] A

particularly distinctive feature is the integrated approach to the subject matter, both by viewing town and country as closely interrelated spheres and dealing with social, economic and religious aspects at one and the same time.

Part 1 focuses on social unrest erupting in a series of *Bundschuh* risings and ultimately the German Peasants' War of 1524-26. Scott points to the "revolutionary" qualities of the former (as yet unaffected by impulses from Lutheran doctrine, but spurred on by visions of Swiss freedom, chap. 5), the very real political threat of movements with apparently traditional and moderate demands (the *Butzenkrieg* of 1514, chap. 3) and above all to tensions among the commoners in the Peasants' War. Town councils and burghers were not always enthusiastic supporters of the rural rebels, as some pursued opportunistic policies (Waldshut, chap. 1) and others refused to cooperate outright (Freiburg im Breisgau, which the peasants had to take by force, chap. 4). A useful comparative survey, supported by tables and extensive archival references, illustrates the spectrum of urban responses emerging from the sources (chap. 6). Individual communities, furthermore, could be divided about aims and strategy and religious motives may have played a more limited role than is often assumed. Scott acknowledges the strength of individual and collective piety, but denies that it predisposed the common people towards the Reformation (chap. 2).

Part 2 divides Germany into three major economic landscapes: one predominantly agrarian; another featuring a mixture of agriculture and manufacturing based on specialized crops (such as wool); and a third characterized by mining and industrial production drawing on natural resources (chap. 7). Having argued that "the pattern of town-country-relations in the German-speaking lands ... from the fourteenth to the seventeenth centuries displayed a greater variety than in any other part of Europe" (p. 225), Scott then defines the Southern Upper Rhine as an economic region with reference to refined central-place theories (Hektor Ammann, Walter Christaller, chap. 9). Two further essays sketch the varieties of urban landscapes in the South-West of the Empire and the rationale and phases of territorial policies followed by the burghers of Freiburg i.B. (chapters 10-11).

Part 3 covers somewhat more disparate ground, including a discussion of the Alsace as an "economic bridging landscape" (chap. 12), a contextualization of a famous reform tract (written by the Upper Rhine Revolutionary, now associated with Mathias Wurm von Geudertheim,

chap. 13), a reassessment of "liberty and community in medieval Switzerland" (effectively an extended review of sections from an excellent, yet sadly neglected, new history of the origins of the Confederation, chap. 14[5]) and a comparative investigation of varieties of serfdom in Germany and other parts of Europe (chap. 15).

Readers will be impressed by the author's vast grasp of archival material, his intimate knowledge of scholarly debates in several languages and the readiness to engage with theories from neighboring disciplines (especially historical geography). Bit by bit, the essays dissect the anatomy of socio-economic structures in Upper Germany, challenging widely held assumptions and urging greater attention to varieties and alternative features. Manifold layers of commercial exchange within and between regions appear in intricate detail. Here, clearly, we see the benefits of sustained attention to a specific set of research questions within a closely defined setting. Yet among all the attention to structural features, macro-economic processes and political pressures, everyday experiences are not neglected and the sections on popular unrest offer fascinating glimpses of individuals—such as the peasant leader Jo   Fritz—whose contribution made a real difference.

The emphasis on complexity (the evidence "admits of no easy generalizations"; p. 259) carries certain risks. A vastly ambitious attempt to weave long-term perspectives, European-wide scope, terminological differentiation and theoretical reflection into a general review of patterns of serfdom in chapter 15 left this reviewer, at least, rather bewildered. The author obviously relishes the opportunity to deconstruct established paradigms, at times though with little regard to how they have helped to make the past more intelligible. As a self-declared "individualist," a historian inclined to stress the autonomy of peasant production and the economic causes of rural revolts, rather than a "communalist," who affirms the importance of village bonds and the political core of peasant risings (p. 388), Scott has always had bones to pick with Peter Blickle. Decades of near-permanent review of the latter's work have raised some valid questions—for example, on the compatibility of communal Church structures and Catholic doctrine or on urban attitudes to the Peasants' War—but ultimately bolstered Blickle's fundamental insights into the political power of the common man; the communalization of religious life on the eve of the Reformation (with its significance for the Christianization of burghers and peasants); and constitutional as well as ideological affinities between town and country. As Scott puts it in one of the latest essays reprinted here, his criti-

cal remarks “are less designed to retouch this picture, let alone expose it as a forgery, than to point out pentimenti that have hitherto been overlooked” (p. 151).

Whether “Reformation” should become the new umbrella term for the period 1350 to 1600, as the main title suggests, remains doubtful. It seems to make little sense to stretch such a well-established label beyond its most congenial habitat back into an era where reform initiatives were certainly prominent, but socio-economic transformations rather more striking. We need means and ways to overcome artificial boundaries between late medieval and early modern times, but the search for an adequate phrase or concept continues.

Overall, this collection should be highly recommended, certainly for those ready to engage with pre-modern local society in greater depth. A combination of meticulous scholarship, multilingual expertise and iconoclastic tendencies makes for demanding, but ultimately rewarding reading. The Upper Rhine region holds important clues for Germany, and indeed Europe, as a whole.

Notes

[1]. *Freiburg and the Breisgau: Town-Country Relations in the Age of Reformation and Peasants' War* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986).

[2]. *Society and Economy in Germany, 1300-1600* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002).

[3]. *Regional Identity and Economic Change: The Upper Rhine, 1450-1600* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997).

[4]. Tom Scott, ed., *The Peasantries of Europe: From the Fourteenth to the Eighteenth Centuries* (London: Longman, 1998).

[5]. Historischer Verein der Fünf Orte, ed., *Innerschweiz und Fränkische Eidgenossenschaft: Jubiläumsschrift 700 Jahre Eidgenossenschaft*, 2 vols., (Olten, 1990).

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