

## BOOK REVIEW

*Städtische Wirtschaft im Mittelalter: Festschrift für Franz Irsigler zum 70. Geburtstag*, ed. Rudolf Holbach and Michel Pauly (Cologne: Böhlau Verlag, 2011; pp. 378. €54.40).

The overall quality of German *Festschriften* usually reflects the specific research qualities of the honorand. In this case, most of the thirteen articles offered on the occasion of the seventieth birthday of a social and economic historian as important and productive as Franz Irsigler, represent considerable contributions to a series of topics including medieval markets, industries and urbanisation. Irsigler himself is a multi-faceted medieval historian who has published very widely on the economic structures of medieval towns, rural communities, 'marginal groups', commercial networks, international markets, witchcraft, credit, lordship and guilds, to name but some of his interests—so many, indeed, that it must have been difficult for the editors of this volume to select the most representative themes for this book. The editors, Rudolf Holbach and Michel Pauly, have chosen to focus on the medieval urban economy because, as they state in the first lines of their introduction, Irsigler himself has recently argued that economic themes have been somewhat neglected in German urban history. Historians of urban settlement dealing with the medieval period have predominantly adopted political, legal, social and cultural approaches, or else they have devoted themselves to *Alltagsgeschichte*.

Inevitably, in the genre of *Festschriften*, the heterogeneity of a volume's constituent parts can be a difficult problem. Here, however, this difficulty is partially solved as most of the contributions are not merely detailed case-studies but have a more general ambition. Thus, not only using existing historiography but also numerous original sources, Josef Zemlicka provides the reader with a clearly written, concise and very useful synthesis on Prague's commerce with western regions of Europe during the early and central middle ages. Francesca Bocchi, the leading expert on the morphology and other spatial aspects of medieval cities in Italy, offers a highly informative account, published here in English, on the various functions of the public *piazza* of communal Italy. Readers who do not have Italian will greatly benefit from this article. And the same might also be said of Rosa Smurra's piece on urban palaces, which offers an interesting insight into these public buildings constructed by urban authorities which were adapting to changing socio-economic and political circumstances.

For his part, Roman Czaja presents a clear and useful description of the crisis in Prussian trade around 1400, in which commerce is studied within the full socio-economic context of factors of demand and supply in artisanal production in the North Sea area. Here also, an up-to-date account is provided of those historiographical problems close to Irsigler's own spheres of interest. This is what this volume does in general; particularly the contribution by Hans-Jörg Gilomen on consumption credit in Basel and Zürich (including an index of a list of debtors); that by Harald Witthöft on the salt production of Lüneburg; and the essay by Volker Henn on later medieval pharmacists and

spice merchants in German towns—all of which present solid introductions to the topics treated. Almost all of the articles are very well grounded in an abundance of original source material, and contribute to specific debates in economic history; only Ferdinand Oppl's piece on the archives of a papal legate in his own Wiener Stadt- und Landesarchiv does not really align with the principal economic themes of this book. In contrast, the economic historian will find much to admire in the both empirically and conceptually rich ways in which Michel Pauly and Martin Uhrmacher apply central place theory to the case of the town of Luxemburg, and also in Rudolf Holbach's well-documented study of the medieval textile industries between the Meuse and the Rhine. One should also congratulate Knut Schulz for yet another contribution to the history of medieval industries, in this case the iron industry around the River Steyr in Austria. What makes this book most useful is that so many major medievalists from the German-speaking areas, Central Europe and, to a lesser degree, Italy have contributed to it, even if I was less than convinced by Carl-Hans Hauptmeyer's prolegomena to a *longue durée* modelling of the pre-industrial economy (although I have sympathy for his approach and the utility of such attempts). Overall, this book is not just another heterogeneous *Festschrift*; it is a fine collection of solid contributions to medieval European urban history.

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