

agreements and tensions, of challenges at the national and international levels, and above all the role that, through personal and political relationships, the ICW inherited from the AFUW and its idea of women's rights, especially at the level of couples and families. On the other hand, the chapter demonstrates how, from 1960 onwards, the WIDF was increasingly oriented towards emphasizing the claims of African women, mostly through *Women of the Whole World*, which hosted articles by African activists about daily life, family responsibilities, and militancy, as exemplified in the case of Sira Diop (p. 265). The author also stresses the commitment of African women at the transnational level, in the African–Asian women's conference (Cairo, December 1960), and in the construction of the pan-African women's union, renamed the Pan-African Women's Organization (PAWO) in 1974.

This book is of great value for historians on women's movements across national borders and will inspire scholars to study the Cold War period and anti-colonialism from the perspective of French and African women's politics. The balance between the individual trajectories of women and the collective histories of groups and associations also stands out, offering avenues for research into the points of contact and ambivalence in the political biographies of individual activists and in collective groups. What is missing, in my opinion, is also the main innovation in the field of research on women's activism. The author does not contextualize the politics of women's groups in the political landscape of existing parties. The lack of contextualization does not mean ignorance of political parties on the part of the author; for instance, the documentary references also cover the PCF (Archives départementales de la Seine-Saint-Denis, Bobigny) and the RDA (Archives nationales du Sénégal). However, the starting point of the research seems not to be the derivation or the more or less strong connection of women's groups with existing political parties, but the relationship between forms of women's activism in a context of colonialism and anti-colonialism.

This approach allows for a transnational perspective – in line with the postcolonial, decolonial, and Afro-feminist literature of recent decades – not only because the author studies more than one national context, but also because she does not confine individual biographies or group histories within the interpretation of a national case nor, indeed, within the context of the link to a political party.

Giulia Strippoli

School of Social Sciences and Humanities, NOVA University of Lisbon, Lisbon, Portugal

E-mail: giuliastrippoli@fcsb.unl.pt

doi:10.1017/S0020859023000147

FRENCH, KATHERINE L. *Household Goods and Good Households in Late Medieval London. Consumption and Domesticity after the Plague.* University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia (PA) 2021. xvii, 314 pp. Ill. Maps. \$65.00. (E-book: \$65.00.)

Katherine French's previous publications on the history of religion and gender are well-known to historians of late medieval England. Her recent work has focused

on the role of material culture in medieval social life, and it is the ownership and management of material possessions in late medieval London which is the subject of her latest monograph. In line with the “material turn”, which began in anthropology in the 1980s and then spread to many other disciplines, French does not treat material objects as simply one more form of evidence with which to supplement the documentary sources for late medieval England. Instead, she seeks to show how, within domestic relationships, “people and their things are entangled in dense and unpredictable ways, with material culture structuring behaviour and interactions and creating unexpected dependencies with unforeseen circumstances” (p. 1). Material objects are particularly important for the study of consumerism within medieval society, especially as so much of our documentary evidence is concerned with the supply side of the economy. Medievalists such as Maryanne Kowaleski and Chris Dyer have shown how the rise in wages and decline in food prices, and the consequent increase in demand for manufactured goods that underlay the “consumer revolution” of the eighteenth century, were to some degree anticipated in the period after the arrival of plague in 1348, when England’s population fell by around a half and did not begin to recover until the early sixteenth century. Rising incomes created by the labour shortage of the period meant an increased demand for goods as, to the horror of contemporary moralists, those lower down the social scale sought to emulate the lifestyle of their superiors. Fashions began to change more rapidly and merchants and manufacturers both responded to and stimulated an increase in demand by making a greater range of goods available.

It is the impact of plague and the rise of consumerism that are central to French’s account of the evolving lifestyle of London’s merchants and artisans as changes to houses and their furnishings altered the ways in which people lived and thought, and in how they played out their gender roles. Before the plague, London was “densely populated but houses were sparsely furnished” whereas afterwards Londoners had “more space in which to live and they would fill that space with more possessions which they would use in new ways” so that “even those of modest means would eventually embrace changing consumption and domestic habits” (pp. 17–18). The main sources for these conclusions are the wills and inventories of London merchants and artisans. Wills, which were usually made shortly before death, survive for Londoners for this period from four ecclesiastical courts (the Commissary Court, the Archdeacon’s Court, the Consistory Court, and the Prerogative Court of Canterbury) and from the city’s own Husting Court. Most wills are for male testators, with women’s wills, mostly those of widows, making up sixteen per cent of French’s sample of 3,009 wills from the Husting, Commissary and Prerogative Courts. Far fewer inventories than wills survive for late medieval London, with only 140 being available for the entire period. They could be compiled for a variety of reasons, but those used here were mainly linked to the recovery of a debt, to someone’s conviction for felony, or to probate, although the latter are rare before the mid-fifteenth century.

The first chapter of the book surveys London before the Black Death, contrasting its social conditions with those of the post-plague period. This is the period when the evidence is most problematic since there are no wills from the ecclesiastical courts before the plague, with the series of Commissary Court wills beginning only from

1374 and the Prerogative Court wills dating only from 1384 onwards. Wills do survive for the Husting Court from as early 1258 but the abbreviated versions enrolled there deal mainly with real property rather than with moveable wealth, especially in the pre-plague period when only thirteen per cent of wills from the period 1344 to 1348 mention movables. Similarly, of the 140 inventories, only seventeen exist for pre-plague London, and so French has to supplement these with the information contained in thirty-five inventories from King's Lynn, which were compiled for a royal tax in 1290. Whilst acknowledging that the pre-plague evidence is "admittedly thin", French sees the wills of this period as showing that the houses of Londoners in this period were "not brimming with possessions" and argues that even the better-off citizens "lived in cramped and minimally furnished rooms" (p. 37), which may seem surprising given that London merchants were some of the richest in the land, even at this date. She contrasts these conditions with those of the post-plague period when thirty-nine per cent of Husting wills in the period 1364–1368 and forty-four per cent in the years from 1384–1388 contain movable goods. Moreover, she refers to this as evidence of "a marked increase in movable goods", one which was in line with the "well-documented rise in consumption after the plague", although here, as elsewhere, this rise is largely taken for granted rather than its extent or chronology being demonstrated for London itself (pp. 31–32). Yet, in themselves, these figures concerning the number of Husting wills that mention movables do not actually allow us to see an increase in the wealth of testators since, after all, one hundred per cent of testators, both before and after the plague, would have owned movable goods, irrespective of whether such goods were referred to in the enrolled versions of their wills. French herself also admits that the growth in the proportion of enrolled Husting wills mentioning movables may, to an extent that cannot now be known, partly be the result of changing scribal practices; it was undoubtedly such a change in recording practices, rather than any real change in the ownership of goods, which reduced the proportions of the Husting wills that referred to movables to three per cent in 1404–1408 and zero per cent in 1424–1428 (pp. 31–32).

The remaining chapters focus on the uses that Londoners made of their possessions, and on their relationships with them, in the post-plague period. Chapter Two shows that possessions had not only an economic, but also an affective value, with this emotional investment being evident in the contrast between the utilitarian ways in which goods are listed in the probate inventories compiled by appraisers and the more personal and emotional descriptions of the same goods in the wills of testators themselves. Beds, for instance, had a moral and symbolic worth, as well as a monetary value, having powerful associations with lineage, family, human vulnerability, and the lifecycle. Chapter Three looks at house design, arguing that richer Londoners now had more rooms for their possessions, and so used their domestic space differently, although even those in smaller dwellings also had similar kinds of furnishings, albeit on a more modest scale. Although the households of the aristocracy and gentry were models, merchants and artisans did not simply mimic their superiors but instead adapted existing practices according to their own purposes and priorities.

Chapter Four examines household management in terms of how possessions were stored and cleaned. Here, the focus shifts to changes in the fifteenth century. Although French rejects the view of historians such as Caroline Barron that the

century after the Black Death was a “golden age” for women, on the grounds that patriarchy was still the norm (something that the proponents of a golden age have never challenged), she nonetheless accepts that this was a period when new opportunities and choices were available to women. By contrast, the mid or “late” (p. 127) fifteenth-century economic slump led to a backlash that saw women driven out of better jobs in manufacturing and into domestic work, which, whether at a supervisory or a labouring level, was increasingly regarded as a female task. Unfortunately, the main evidence cited for such a change comes from York and Coventry, rather than from London itself, which, in terms of its share of England’s population, trade, and wealth, was booming in the late fifteenth century. Chapter Five looks at changes in cooking and eating habits and argues that such changes could threaten notions of household hierarchy, particularly those relating to gender, although the evidence offered for this consists of two fictional narratives in which women leave their houses and husbands in order to eat and drink with their female friends. Chapter Six focuses on women’s role in a number of areas: in healing, in which brooches, beads, rings, and girdles were employed for their supposed medicinal properties; in childbirth, where there was an expanding market for items such as girdles and apotropaic gemstones; and in childcare, where toys and child-size furniture were now more widely available. Finally, Chapter Seven turns its attention to domestic piety and to the increasing use of affordable devotional items, including holy water stoups and rosaries, although the evidence for this shift is strongest in the late fifteenth century rather than it being an immediate response to the Black Death itself.

As we have seen, a number of the claims made here, particularly about the relationship between change in gender roles and the economic trends of the period, and about the precise extent and chronology of changes in consumption patterns after the Black Death, may need further elaboration. As always with medieval social and economic history, the patchy and problematic nature of our evidence makes arriving at firm conclusions difficult. Nonetheless, in its exploration of how households functioned in late medieval London, in its emphasis on the historical specificity of the nature and meaning of housework, in its focus on shifting gender roles, and in bringing together documentary and archaeological evidence, this is an important and pioneering study and is likely to be a springboard for further discussions of material culture and for future debates about the changing role of women in late medieval England.

Stephen H. Rigby

University of Manchester, Manchester, United Kingdom

E-mail: s.h.rigby@manchester.ac.uk

doi:10.1017/S0020859023000159

SAMUEL K. COHN, JR. *Popular Protest and Ideals of Democracy in Late Renaissance Italy*. Oxford University Press, Oxford 2022. xx, 260 pp. Ill. £75.00.

This volume continues the research conducted by the author in his earlier *Lust for Liberty*, devoted to popular uprisings in Italy, France, and Flanders between 1200