

will attract readership by people who still have not realized the Westphalian system is an anachronistic myth, but perhaps the book would have needed to include contributions from historians working on the modern period to make that happen.

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Katherine L French, *Household Goods and Good Households in Late Medieval London. Consumption and Domesticity after the Plague* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2021). 314 p. ISBN 9780812253054.

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Katherine French's impressive new book examines the changes in domestic material culture in the houses of London's merchants and artisans c.1300-1540 and how these changes fostered new behaviours, identities, and gender roles. The increase in the abundance and variety of household goods across Europe following the Black Death of c.1348 has been widely catalogued by social and economic historians. French moves beyond this cataloguing and is instead concerned with what effect these objects had on the people who owned and interacted with them: how did all of this 'stuff' shape the cultural practices of late medieval London's mercantile classes? This focus positions this book in an increasing seam of multidisciplinary scholarship on material culture which begins with the understanding that things have the power to shape socio-cultural systems. For French, the changing objects she identifies are not merely symptomatic of wider cultural changes but were themselves active participants in these changes. She convincingly argues that these household goods 'directed occupants' activities' (p. 77) and fostered a mode of living distinctive to late medieval merchants and artisans.

The book opens with three contextual chapters which introduce the reader to urban living and material culture in the later Middle Ages. The first outlines how people lived in London before 1350, the second focuses on domestic objects and the systems of economic and affective value in which they operated, and the third provides an overview of changes to London's domestic spaces after the plague. These chapters masterfully synthesise a large amount of historiography and pro-

vide valuable overviews of a wide array of concepts including the specialization of domestic spaces, the bullion crises and recession of the fifteenth century, demographic change, developing notions of privacy, and the role of objects in shaping and negotiating identities.

The remaining chapters are thematic and constitute four case studies of how changes to domestic material culture created, altered, or destabilized household hierarchies and gender roles. Chapter 4 focuses on housework and examines how the increasing amount of household objects intersected with wider cultural changes, legal categories, and ideas about cleanliness and order to produce new gendered practices of organization and household management. French historicizes the developing connection between women and the domestic sphere and shows that the gender coding of objects associated with cleanliness such as basins, and ewers did not become pervasive until a century after the plague (p. 127). Chapter 5 examines how changes to foodways, the purchase, preparation, and consumption of food and drink, introduced anxieties about the orderliness of houses. She combines the evidence for changes to cooking and dining equipment in wills and inventories with contemporary ballads to reveal increased anxieties about how these new foodways permitted women choices which 'disrupted expected hierarchies and behaviours' (p. 153). Chapter 6 discusses the material culture of caregiving, both medical and childrearing, and traces an increase in testamentary bequests of objects with healing or apotropaic associations between women, supporting the presumption that women were responsible for caring for the household in this period. French also argues that the same bequests show that women used objects associated with childbirth to memorialize the event and to shape future births within their kin network or their parish. The increasing access to objects therefore gave women some agency and control over medical crises (p. 189). The final thematic chapter focuses on devotional activities and their associated objects. French identifies that devotional activity in the houses of merchants and artisans was situational, tied to objects not spaces (p. 193), and tracks a proliferation of such objects during the fifteenth century. She argues that devotional objects encountered within these houses contributed to the 'privatization of the mass' (p. 216) and that the similarities between the cleanliness and order required for household management and those required for effective piety contributed to the conceptualisation of housework as a devotional activity for women.

The methodology employed by French is perhaps the book's biggest strength. French combines quantitative and qualitative methodologies which allows her analysis to move effortlessly from the macro to the micro scale. As a result, alongside comprehensive statistical analysis the book is peppered with detailed micro-biographies and accompanying images of object types such as mazers (p. 33-34), beds (p. 63-71), and holy water stoups (p. 196-197), which outline their economic, social, and culture significance. This both wonderfully enlivens the material world of late medieval London and makes it readily accessible for the non-specialist.

The arguments in this book are well supported by French's extensive work with London's archival sources. Her principal analysis is grounded in surviving probate material, namely wills and inventories drawn from across London's civic and ecclesiastical courts. The source material is expertly critiqued and French's methodology and sampling are clearly communicated in both her introduction and in two detailed appendices (p. 8-14; p. 221-230). My one, very small, criticism is that whilst French decided to include inventory material from King's Lynn to supplement her data on pre-plague houses and their objects, she decided not to include additional supplementary inventory material for her post-plague data. There are dozens of inventories belonging to merchants and artisans from King's Lynn, Bristol, Norwich, and a host of other urban centres which might have added further rich examples of how domestic material culture helped to shape a specifically urban mode of living. French herself concludes that residents in English cities were exposed to similar objects, behaviours, and ideas during this period (p. 26) and does include qualitative testamentary examples from beyond her initial sampling scope, such as the will of Alice Lord from Westminster (p. 125). However, this criticism reflects my own desire to read more of this book than was written, rather than a flaw in the methodology itself.

This is an important, well written, and accessible book which will be of great interest to scholars and students of material culture, the later Middle Ages, and gender alike.

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