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The year 2021 saw an increase in publications concerning late medieval economic and social history compared with the previous year, showing the vitality of the field. In a thought-provoking contribution, Wickham offered a model for the feudal logic of medieval economies across the globe. Criticizing interpretations which have presented economies of the middle ages as subject to more simplistic versions of capitalism, he suggests that, while recent research has demonstrated

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that peasants were active in commercial exchange and markets, the demand of lords was still the fundamental driver of feudal economies. Ultimately, this meant that surplus extraction by lords, and peasants use of custom to prevent this, created developed exchange economies. However, these would not change into capitalist economies due to the limits of lordly demand, and the fact that peasants could ultimately fall back on subsistence production.

A thematic section on 'Dating of the Great Divergence' in the *Journal of Global History*, saw debate about the nature of medieval economic growth. [Goldstone](#) argues that there is no evidence of economic divergence between north-western Europe and the rest of the world before the late 1700s, as no regions saw sustained growth of both GDP per capita and population before this point. Contributions by [Broadberry](#) and [van Zanden and Bolt](#) challenge this assessment by asserting changes dating back to the late middle ages. [Broadberry](#) contends that England and the Netherlands exhibited a different growth pattern to other pre-industrial economies in that, rather than seeing fluctuations between growth and shrinking, periods of growth were followed by plateaus, meaning that gains in GDP per capita were permanent rather than transitory. This meant that the increase in income per capita following the Black Death in north-western Europe was retained even as population began to grow again after 1450. Alongside a more general critique of reliance on indirect GDP estimates driven by the agricultural sector, which tend to overestimate GDP levels before 1850, [van Zanden and Bolt](#) highlight the importance of using regression analysis to derive growth rates and so account for large margins of error. Using this approach leads them to argue that growth after 1348 was persistent in England and Holland.

[Malanima's](#) contribution provides more support for [Goldstone's](#) interpretation, arguing that, compared with modern growth, measures of pre-modern GDP per capita, real wages, and urbanization show only marginal changes, leading to a sharp turning point in 1800. He emphasizes that all pre-industrial economies relied on a biological system of energy, and it was the shift to greater per capita energy consumption through mechanical uses of fossil fuels that led to economic divergence. In his closing remarks, [Goldstone](#) reasserts his position by stating that there is no evidence of a 'divergence from the past' in any economy before 1800. Especially relevant from a late medieval perspective is his argument that reconstructed GDP series stretching back to the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries start during a period of crisis and therefore may not be an appropriately high yardstick against which to measure the post-Black-Death increase in GDP per capita. In a separate article, [Ridolfi and Nuvolari](#) provide a new GDP series for France from 1280 to 1860 using a demand-side approach based on wage and price data. For late medievalists, the key finding is that French output was higher than England before the early fifteenth century. At this point England caught up, and the economic performance of both polities was similar until the 1680s.

Key themes of many papers last year were political formation, state capacity, and the nature of seigniorial lordship. [Cox and Figueroa](#) examine the impact of European political fragmentation on urban growth between 800 and 1800. They demonstrate that polities with a greater concentration of self-governing cities saw both higher mean growth in urban population and higher growth covariance between neighbouring cities. They argue that this can be explained by the freer labour markets urban merchant governments promoted when they could challenge seigniorial lords, as seen in the well-known custom which granted serfs freedom if they resided in a city for a year and a day. [Doten-Snitker](#) examines a negative effect of political fragmentation by analysing the processes behind expulsions of Jewish communities by cities in the western Holy Roman Empire between 1000 and 1520. She argues that, while Jewish communities were made more vulnerable due to long-term processes of territorialization and the rise of theocratic understandings of Christian piety, their instrumental economic value to rulers made expulsions rare. This meant



that the roughly 100 expulsions she finds (concentrated in the fifteenth century) were due to local contexts of competition, either between elites within a polity or between local governments and external rivals, as parties could use expulsions to assert their legitimacy or autonomy or to gain an immediate windfall through the confiscation of Jewish property.

Figueroa also looks at the process by which the Crown of Castile consolidated its control over pre-existing private jurisdictions. Through a dataset comprising over 1500 villages created through matching royal surveys undertaken in 1352 and 1787, he demonstrates that the Crown and lords increased their judicial power at the expense of peasant communes, military orders, and the Church. He further demonstrates that villages closer to the Atlantic coastline were more likely to come under royal control than their more landlocked neighbours, positing that this was due to greater commercial opportunities, but this did not hold true for villages under ecclesiastical control. This reveals the complexity of interactions between power-holders and wider socio-economic factors in processes of state formation. In a study of late medieval Guelders, **van der Meulen** challenges narratives of progressive state centralization, finding that seigniorial governance remained stable over this period. He shows that both the number of seigniorial lordships, and the families governing these, remained remarkably stable between c.1325 and c.1570. He argues that this was not due to lordly resistance, or a weak state, but instead demonstrates an active collaboration between princes and lords, with seigniorial institutions acting as 'an interface between the top-down perspective of the princely administration and the bottom-up viewpoint of local communities' (p. 52).

For England, **Thornton** examines the phenomenon of 'sub-kingship' through a case study of the Isle of Man, whose lords claimed a variety of powers and jurisdictions which typically belonged to the English Crown and who were addressed using royal titles. He emphasizes that this challenges a neat distinction between Crown sovereignty and a territorially-bound aristocratic authority seen in many typologies of medieval lordship. **Boston** carries out a quantitative study of multiple lordship (in which a tenant owed allegiance to two or more lords simultaneously) between 1066 and c.1216 using a study of 194 knightly families from the Midlands. She finds that between 33 and 51 per cent of families held land from multiple lords, and multiple lordship was prevalent from at least 1135. This leads her to challenge interpretations which have seen the rise of multiple lordship as destabilizing the feudal-honorial political system of relations between great lords who held land directly from the Crown (tenants in chief) and their free tenants.

Turning to Italy, **Fochescato** examines the relationship between political institutions and fiscal capacity through the unique case of Sienna after the Black Death, which saw an expansion of political participation among social groups, in comparison to the more oligarchic governance of other Italian city states. Using a new reconstruction of the city's finances from 1337 to 1556, he demonstrates that a more participatory government led to a relatively progressive taxation system which relied less on indirect taxation of citizens and more on the taxation of non-local economic agents. However, he also argues that this system was heavily reliant on the larger regional macro-economy, leading to Sienna's downfall under conditions of economic decline from the late fifteenth century onwards. **Leeson and Piano** seek to explain the use of mercenaries by Italian rulers between the mid-thirteenth and mid-fifteenth centuries despite their poor reputations among contemporaries. They develop a simple model based around the effect of military composition on a ruler's political position: While citizen armies were more reliable and less likely to plunder their own polity, they also had local political knowledge and a strong interest in who ruled them; conversely mercenary armies were less reliable and highly likely to plunder their employer's polity, but they had little incentive to depose the ruler. Therefore, they argue that the less politically stable a ruler's position was, the more likely they were to use mercenaries. They



support this through a qualitative assessment, comparing politically stable Venice, which continued to use citizen armies, with unstable Florence, which increasingly used mercenaries from the late thirteenth century onwards.

[Martoccio](#) focuses on non-violent forms of expansion through a study of the market for city-states in Italy between 1300 and 1600. Through detailed studies of the Florentine purchases of Lucca (in 1342) and Pisa (in 1405), he highlights the importance of private creditors, in the form of diasporic communities of city families, often made of political exiles, as crucial funders of city purchases. More widely, he argues that the market for city-states reveals ‘a language of empire filled with the vernacular of the marketplace’ in which buying, rather than conquering, a city was seen as the morally correct form of expansion for merchant communities (p. 98).

The Black Death and subsequent outbreaks of plague remain core topics in the field. Two articles focused on the origins of the disease. [Barker](#) challenges the famous narrative of the origins of the Black Death in Europe being due to the catapulting of infected bodies into the besieged city of Caffa, emphasizing that the plague arrived after the end of the siege according to a petition made by the town’s residents. Instead, she shifts the geographical focus to the port of Tana and argues that it was the trade in grain, which restarted in 1347 due to the end of an embargo, that led plague to move from the infected lands of the Golden Horde to Europe. Combining paleogenetic and paleoclimatic evidence with more traditional historical sources, [Slavin](#) focuses on the origins of the *pestis secunda*, the second significant outbreak of plague in Eurasia and North Africa in 1356–1366. He argues that, unlike the Black Death, this plague spread from a reservoir seeded in Hesse in south-central Germany. This challenges a solely ‘metastatic’ model of plague transmission from east-to-west, where plague is spread between ports via maritime trade, showing that plague could also be spread contiguously via inland trade routes. In a long-run approach focusing on the impact of the Black Death, [Siuda and Sunde](#) examine the relationship between demographic shocks and the timing of the fertility transition. They find that German cities that saw greater exposure to plague (as proxied by total plague outbreaks in that city) saw an earlier fertility transition. This in turn supports interpretations which have seen the Black Death as leading to permanent shifts in Malthusian equilibria, and thus significant to long-term economic development, through an unified growth framework approach.

Shifting towards more general histories of disease, [Curtis](#) explores the demographic history of late medieval Holland. Through the novel use of a register of graves dug and bells tolled at the Sint Bavo church, he has created a dataset of the deaths of 10 360 people living in the town of Haarlem between 1412 and 1547 which crosses the medieval–early modern divide. His results indicate that late medieval Holland was subject to significant epidemic disease, that there were multiple mortality regimes across the fifteenth century, that women were more badly effected by crises than men, and that late medieval mortality crises were potentially more severe than those of the early seventeenth century. [Brozou](#) et al. examine the skeletal remains found at two Danish leper hospitals. Through isotopic analysis and radiocarbon dating, they demonstrate that leprosy patients had similar predominantly meat-based, rather than fish-based, diets to the wider Danish population, that this diet was largely communal, and that most patients came from the local area. These results support the documentary evidence, which suggests that local communities contributed financially to leper hospitals who took patients from them, but challenge the notion that these institutions had a monastic-style diet.

The intersection of legal and economic history continues to be a source of articles for this period. Sparky Booker provides the first study of sumptuary laws as a distinct set of legislation in the English colony of Ireland for 1297–1541. These laws differ from other European examples in that they focused on ethnic distinctions between the ‘English’ and ‘Irish’ rather than gendered or



socio-economic differences. [Booker](#) argues that this was in part due to an economic context of relative poverty after the Black Death, which meant that only a small elite could afford to buy luxury items. Consequently, laws focused on trying to ensure that elites purchased luxury goods rather than preventing lower-status individuals from acquiring these. Using a quantitative approach, [Cavell](#) examines the litigation of Anglo-Jewish women in the Exchequer of the Jews between 1219 and 1281 to challenge an artificial division between the legal autonomy of Jewish women and lack of autonomy for Christian women found in much of the traditional historiography. She finds that Jewish women made up around 10–20 per cent of litigants and appeared in court as widows or as married women (usually with their husbands), and in this way their experiences reflected that of Christian women in medieval jurisdictions. Her results also emphasize the important role of Jewish women in supplying credit as seen by the fact that debt and detinue (wrongful detention of goods) litigation was the only form of lawsuit in which women were more likely to appear as plaintiffs rather than defendants.

In an article adding to our knowledge of the institutions protecting property rights in late medieval England, [Brand](#) examines the right of a widow to claim lands on the death of her husband that were held by his close relatives (which this relative had explicitly agreed to include in the husband's dower) through the legal action of dower *ex assensu*. Through a sample of 60 claims recorded in the Plea rolls from between 1199 and 1307, [Brand](#) shows that, because written evidence was not necessary in agreeing dowers, these legal cases required the testimony of witnesses who had been at marriage ceremonies to determine the relative's consent to the dower. However, witnesses, who were often from the families of the bride, were not entirely trusted by courts, leading them to be incorporated into fact-finding juries who tried to assess the truthfulness of their claims.

Two articles explored the way the law defined and supported the revenues gathered by the Church and Crown. [Lewis](#) examines legal distinctions around forms of tithes (the church's right to 10 per cent of income for its maintenance) which were developed by canon lawyers in the twelfth century. He highlights the division drawn between personal tithes (paid by an individual to the church they attended) and praedial tithes (paid on the produce of lands in the parish where a church lay) and argues this was developed to prevent monastic and mendicant orders siphoning off tithes from the parish by persuading payers to attend monastic churches rather than their local church. Ultimately, this division led to the disappearance of the personal tithe, as it was considerably less valuable than the praedial tithe and very difficult to pursue at law. [Hannay](#) examines how the English Crown sought to protect its right to various profitable feudal incidents (payments associated with lordship) in response to the recourse to 'feoffments to uses' by free landholders, a legal mechanism which allowed tenants to devise land by will. He demonstrates, in contrast to earlier studies, that the royal government was able to use provisions under the Statute of Marlborough of 1267 into the fifteenth and early sixteenth century to effectively challenge losses of income by feoffments to uses, revealing Henry VII's early campaign to improve royal revenues.

Financial history was also the focus of several articles. [Bolton and Guidi-Bruscoli](#) examine the bill of exchange through an intensive study of the operations of Filippo Borromei & Partners, for 1436–1438. By combining ledgers for the bank's branches in Bruges and London, they are able to look at the use of bills in practice rather than theory. This leads them to argue that recent interpretations have placed too much emphasis on bills as a tool to profit from exchange rate fluctuations, which would have been difficult for contemporaries to predict. Instead, they stress the role of bills as a way to transfer capital across Europe quickly and their flexibility, which meant they could be used by merchants for a wide variety of transactions. Meanwhile, [Orlandi and Toscano](#) focus on the operations of the Datini company of Barcelona in the early fifteenth century. Through an analysis of 1038 money transfers recorded by the company in 1403–1404, they also find that bills



were primarily used to transfer funds for commercial operations. However, they argue that bills were, in addition, used for speculative activity by taking advantage of exchange rate oscillations and highlight that, while rates could be affected by money supply through trade flows, they were surprisingly stable. Principle component analysis suggests that geographical and macroeconomic factors were key determinants of exchange rate variation, the former likely being due to information flows and the later being due to the importance of commercial activity as an economic driver.

English state finances were discussed in three contributions. [Daniel Booker](#) provides a reinterpretation of the ‘custodial experiment’ of 1204 under King John, in which more than half of English shires were converted into custodies, whose custodians, rather than paying a fixed farm, instead directly accounted to the Crown for their revenues. He argues that, rather than being an evolution of royal practices, the experiment instead sought to apply new techniques of baronial land management to Crown finances, as lords switched from leasing to directly managing their lands. [Cassidy](#) engages in a detailed study of the daily operations of government finance during the reign of Henry III. Using a set of four memoranda of issue, which to date have been little studied, he examines the flow of cash in and out of the Exchequer. These reveal payments of transactions by instalment, the use of tally sticks along with cash, and the recording of lump sums representing sets of smaller payments. This leads him to the wider conclusion that the Exchequer records were not used to balance or make budgets but instead to ensure the accountability of officials. In *The English Historical Review* [McCallum](#) examines Edward II and Edward III’s attempts to raise loans from the English church. He traces the origins of these attempts to the closing off of other sources of revenue due to the collapse of Italian banks and political crisis in the 1310s, but highlights the Crown’s ultimate failure to develop the Church as an important group of creditors (churchmen lent just £50 000–£60 000 from 1307 to 1377). While bishops and abbots were willing to make significant loans due to their political connections, most churchmen were reluctant to lend, as they already contributed to high taxes and were concerned, particularly during the reign of Edward II, that loans would be used to challenge the church’s special privileges.

Agricultural history saw more attention in comparison to 2020. In a special edition of *Continuity and Change*, contributors studied ‘alternatives to expropriation’, examining case studies in which, despite processes that could have led to proletarianization, peasants remained on their land. [Arnoux](#) challenges narratives of commercialization which stress the linear transition from in-kind to cash rents through a study of the market for grain annuities in thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Caen. He reconstructs a system where religious institutions used their substantial cash income to pay peasants money for supplying cereal rents which could be consumed and sold in a speculative market. This provided credit to peasants, ultimately guaranteed by their land, but did not lead to the expropriation of their property. [Furió](#) contrasts the English, Dutch, and Italian experience of the expansion of credit leading to peasant expropriation with late medieval Valencia, where this did not take place. He demonstrates that this was due to the different objectives of urban and seignorial creditors, who sought secure rents (and especially annuities) as returns on their investments. In turn, this led to an active land market among peasants, who used credit for a wide variety of reasons, but no fundamental changes in the agrarian system of smallholding.

[Schofield](#) explores why the pre-Black Death period in England and Marcher Wales, despite the existence of competitive land markets and economic conditions that favoured commercial grain production, did not see lords and wealthier peasants seek to force poorer cultivators off their land. With particular reference to the lordship of Dyffryn Clwyd, he highlights the essential conservatism of lords, the servile association with unfree land, a lack of sufficient capital among even wealthy unfree tenants, and the fragmentation of landholdings as preventing this process.



However, he highlights that other forms of expropriation of property rights, if not full seizure of land, were potentially part of thirteenth century commercialization through the existence of credit markets and short-term leases of land. [Schofield](#) also provides an introduction drawing these studies together (and an additional paper on nineteenth-century Palestine). He highlights the wider historiographical point that alternatives to expropriation challenge Brenner's formulation that nascent capitalism leads to proletarianization, as they reveal the existence of market structures alongside traditional landholding practices.

[Sales i Fava](#) investigates the livestock-rearing practices of peasants in Catalonia between 1330 and 1370. Using a sample of 3082 sales and *comenda* contracts (leases) for livestock recorded in the notarial registers of Les Gavarres, he challenges the notion that Iberian livestock rearing was underdeveloped. Instead, he uncovers a commercialized pastoral economy, where peasants engaged in the market for animals to weather the crises of the fourteenth century and gain some economic autonomy from their lords. In a study of the common forests in the Italian Alps controlled by the Republic of Venice beginning in the fifteenth century, [Bonan and Lorenzi](#) examine how timber was marketed to provide a new perspective on the exploitation of common resources. They point to the importance of relational networks between the local communities who managed woodland and the merchants who sold timber, which allowed these groups to cooperate for mutual benefit.

In a pair of articles at the intersection of environmental and agricultural history, [Shepherd](#) explores the economic landscapes of thirteenth century Scotland. In *Rural History*, [Shepherd](#) combines fragmentary taxation sources with place-name and topographical evidence for the central uplands of Buchan to challenge the idea of a dichotomy between rich arable lowlands and poor pastoral uplands, instead showing how such regions were dynamically interconnected. While relatively remote, he suggests that the uplands were in per-capita terms as successful as surrounding arable lands and may have been an important source of wool for Aberdeen's export trade as part of a mixed pastoral economy. Meanwhile, in *Landscape History*, [Shepherd](#) examines the boundary clauses of the Fedderate Charter (c.1200) in which the last native duke of Buchan granted three upland areas in exchange for lower-lying areas. In the context of the paucity of sources for the economic history of medieval Scotland, the charter provides useful evidence of at least one sheepfold and potentially for the engrossment of common upland pastures. [Costello](#) similarly challenges the notion of uplands as marginal environments in the middle ages. Through a comparative analysis of environments across Britain and Ireland, and drawing on a wide range of archaeological evidence, he argues that a 'glocal' (global and local) perspective is vital in explaining why agriculturalists colonized and continued to occupy uplands. He highlights that a focus on external factors such as population increase, climatic shifts, and growth of demand in markets needs to be balanced with local variables such as geological suitability, available non-agricultural resources, and pre-existing cultural landscapes.

Turning to wetland and coastal environments, [Crouch](#) examines the reclamation and estate building projects of Hugh de Puiset, Bishop of Durham from 1153 to 1195, in the East Riding of Yorkshire. Utilizing on a set of previously unknown Durham Episcopal Acts (usefully reproduced in an appendix to his article), [Crouch](#) shows how Hugh drained wetlands in Howdenshire through the creation of new dykes, developing an open field system at Laxton and building up a new administrative class to run the estate. In doing so, he collaborated with the pre-existing population of clerical and secular landowners through strategic grants of his land which benefited both parties. [Pickles](#) provides a long-run history of a medieval intertidal fishing weir, which was likely established before the Norman Conquest at Whitby. As regards late medieval history, [Pickles](#) argues that the weir endured in the eleventh to sixteenth centuries due to its



embeddedness in the relationship between the Abbey of Whitby and its tenants in landscapes of 'lordship, parochial allegiance and commercial cooperation' (p. 365). It also provided a way for tenants to use their labour and practical knowledge to renegotiate relations of production with their lords. [Bailey, Wain, and Sear](#) combine documentary historical work with an environmental science approach to explore changes to the Suffolk coastline between 1250 and 1600. They find that erosion and accretion increased dramatically due to climate change, and this had varied economic effects, leading both to the decline of the port of Goseford as its access to the sea became blocked as well as to providing new opportunities for reclamation in the sixteenth century which were not available in 1250 despite similar economic incentives and technical know-how. They also reflect on the ways that communities' reactions to changes to the coastline in the past can help us think about adaptability in the context of contemporary climate change.

Trade and markets naturally saw attention from researchers in 2021. [Smit](#) studies the production of silk by Muslim manufacturers in Sicily. While previous interpretations have argued that Sicilian commercial life was severely disrupted in the twelfth century, which led it to be dominated by Italian merchant towns, [Smit](#) suggests this interpretation is due to a reliance on sources such as the Cairo Genezia and Genoese notarial records and that other material such as *jarā'id* (registers of Muslims bound to estates) show that significant numbers of silk workers were still present in this period. Instead, he argues that the silk industry, and more widely the Islamic community of inland Sicily, only became unproductive after the deliberate policy of expelling Muslims under Norman kings in the thirteenth century. Using optimal stimulated luminescence, a technique which measures radiation to date roads in natural soil materials, [Vletter and Speck](#) examine the Harderwijkerweg, a medieval trade route in the central Netherlands. This method agrees with historical evidence in dating the road to the period between the thirteenth and nineteenth centuries and demonstrates the potential of this approach to reliably date wheel tracks in sandy regions in future studies. Taking a long-run perspective, [Federico, Schulze, and Volckart](#) examine the integration of wheat markets across Europe from 1348 to 1913. Using a dataset encompassing approximately 580 locations, they find that, while improvements in market efficiency (seen in the co-movement of prices) were an early-modern phenomenon, European-wide price convergence began at the end of the middle ages in the fifteenth century. Moreover, England enjoyed significantly higher integration than the rest of the continent from as early as the fourteenth century, an exception they suggest will be important in the future analysis of the roots of the Little Divergence.

Two articles examined inequality. [Alfani](#) summarizes recent work on pre-industrial inequality for a wide variety of European regions. This largely shows 'monotonically' increasing wealth and income inequality except for the hundred-years following the Black Death. He argues that this recent data undermines arguments which suggest that economic growth 'necessarily' caused inequality following the Kuznets model and instead highlights a number of sufficient causes of inequality, including demographic factors, institutional change, and proletarianization. [Dumolyn, Ryckbosch, and Specke](#) look at the consequences of inequality through an examination of the Flemish Revolt of 1379–1385, in which textile workers, in alliance with other social groups, rose up against the count of Flanders. Through an analysis of the goods confiscated from 286 rebels in Bruges in 1383–1384, they reconstruct the wealth of textile workers, finding that, while these were certainly not destitute, their material living conditions were significantly worse than other town dwellers, leading to significant inequality. This leads them to challenge the characterization of medieval revolts as primarily 'political' in much recent literature and argue that socio-economic factors were also important.

Two contributions use wage evidence to examine historical living standards. [Horrell, Humphries, and Weisdorf](#) present a new series of estimates of family living standards in England



between 1280 and 1850. This moves away from assumptions based on an adult man working 250 days a year at casual wage rates by combining data on male, female, and children's remuneration with estimates of days worked per year and participation rates which vary by age and gender. For medievalists, the most interesting findings are that families enjoyed a slightly higher standard of living before the Plague than estimates based on male farm wages suggest (although still around subsistence level), and that the notion of a post-plague 'Golden Age' is supported but that this was short-lived, with family incomes falling in the Tudor era due to a loss of female earnings. De Plejit and van Zanden draw on wage estimates from across Europe to examine the gender wage ratio between 1300 and 1800. They argue that in southern Europe discrimination against women led to them be paid around 50 per cent of male wages irrespective of productivity and market forces. North-western Europe saw a different pattern: While women were still discriminated against, their remuneration was also determined by labour scarcity, leading them to be paid more in relative terms in the tight labour market following the Black Death.

Urban history continues to see attention. [Haemers](#) examines the operation of stews (private brothels) in the Low Countries. He finds that the tenants of brothels (who ran these enterprises) were often women, acting either as independent widows or with their husbands. Relatively high rents suggest brothel tenants were wealthy, but generally the owners of brothels excluded their tenants from political power. Evidence from the sales of the goods of sex workers upon their death also suggest these women could accumulate enough wealth to place themselves among the middling sort of their towns, and overall [Haemers](#) argues that stews were not marginal places but socially embedded in cities. Through a comparison of the interaction between women and town councils in Antwerp and Bilbao, [Vandeweerd](#) challenges the 'north-south thesis', which suggests that women had more economic agency in north-western as opposed to southern Europe. In an analysis of ordinances and court cases from 1400 to 1560, she demonstrates that, while the regulation of work by craft guilds restricted women's autonomy in Antwerp, women in Bilbao were able to contest their town council more directly as a group. However, while women in Bilbao are more visible in the sources, the analysis of tax registers reveals that they were not necessarily in a superior economic position compared with their Flemish counterparts.

In *Northern History*, [McCallum](#) investigates a conflict between a group of burgesses and a royal official, Robert Wawayn, in Scarborough (Yorkshire) in the early fourteenth century. He argues that, while the conflicts took place in the context of wider political and social crisis in the 1310s, they primarily grew out of the oligarchical nature of town government, which allowed a small clique to control a handful of offices. This was combined with grievances focused on town liberties and the level of royal taxation. The events at Scarborough can be seen as part of a transformative period in 'crown-town' relations, which saw burgesses take an increasing role in national politics. [Berry](#) crosses the medieval-early modern divide to investigate the communities formed by immigrant goldsmiths in London between 1480 and 1540. She finds that, while much of the rhetoric of this period was anti-immigrant, in reality skilled migrant labour brought knowledge of foreign fashions and was thus useful to the Goldsmiths' Company, meaning that they provided a system of registration and monitoring which allowed both masters and journeymen to work, especially prior to the 1530s. Moreover, immigrants themselves changed their working practices in response to the wider environment, with many only staying for a period of a few years and becoming contractors rather than working in large workshops.

Through the isotopic analysis of osteological data gathered from three Portuguese cities, [Toso et al.](#) examine the impact of the twelfth- and thirteenth-century Christian conquests of Islamic territories on diets. They find a switch across both Muslim and Christian populations from an early-medieval predominantly terrestrial diet to a late-medieval diet in which marine resources were



significantly more important. They further suggest that this expansion of fish consumption sowed the seeds of Portugal's marine economy and thus for global expansion in the early modern period.

Finally, two wider studies of the history of violence made significant arguments concerning the late middle ages. [Keyword and Baten](#) examine the relationship between violence and human capital formation in Europe from 500 to 1900. Measuring elite numeracy through the proxy of the share of rulers' whose birth year is recorded in biographical sources, and interpersonal violence by the share of rulers murdered, they argue that a decline in violence is correlated with an increase in elite numeracy in western Europe from 1100 onwards. They argue that this led to a divergence in development patterns between western Europe and the rest of the continent by 1400. [Schwerhoff et al.](#) provide a sceptical analysis of the quantitative data famously used by Steven Pinker to argue for the decline of violence in Europe from the late middle ages onwards. They argue that recording of homicides changed across time and space, sources are fragmented leading to extrapolation, and the population figures by which rates are calculated are suspect. This leads them to suggest that historians must focus on analyzing violence through rich case studies in their social context instead of reducing these to data points.

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(iii) 1500–1700

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Articles published in 2021 in the fields of early modern social and economic history show that both continue to be alive and well. The literature surveyed here captures an ever-expanding range of topics: women's work once again received attention, textile history was very well represented, and the year witnessed a small but notable resurgence in histories of land, agriculture, and agrarian capitalism compared with the previous couple of years. Authors across this range of topics found new ways to contribute to long-standing debates and already vibrant areas of research including enclosure, custom, and the poor law. Others explored less well-trodden ground; for example, by employing material culture in their efforts to reconstruct economic histories, or building race, immigration, and cultures of belonging and exclusion into our understandings of early modern society and economies.

Appropriately for a historian of gender, I turn first to the substantial body of research published this year that explores women's lives, and more particularly, women's work. For the *Review*, [de Pleijt and van Zanden](#) present a comparative wage series for female, unskilled day labour between