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**Rubin, Miri. 2020. *Cities of Strangers: Making Lives in Medieval Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, XV + 189.**

The works of historians are often also important for lawyers and the study of legal history. This is not only the case when a scholar who is a historian by education focuses on the study of legal history *stricto sensu*, but also when important research in the fields of political, social and economic history is conducted, since the results of such research can provide both new data and new points of view for the study of legal history. In that respect, both empirical research (particularly the studying of sources that are new, at least in the sense of being given scholarly attention) and new syntheses can be valuable and inspiring. By way of the latter, I would like to recommend to the attention of legal historians the book *Cities of Strangers: Making Lives in Medieval Europe* by Miri Rubin, Professor of Medieval and Early Modern History at Queen Mary University of London.

The book is part of the Cambridge University Press's *Wiles Lectures* series – dedicated to the publication of lectures held annually at Queen's University Belfast, since their foundation in 1953/54 by Janet Boyd (2022a). Some of the books in the series have left a considerable mark in modern historiography in their fields (e.g. Runciman 1970), and sometimes the findings and concepts of one author were later seriously opposed by another (e.g. Hobsbawm 1990 and Hastings 1997).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The full list of lectures and publications that have resulted from them (most have been published, though not all) is available on the Queen's University website (2022b).

Being based on four spoken lectures, as most books in the series, it is not of great length, but rather offers a brief but poignant overview of its chosen subject. The first, introductory, chapter, *Cities and Their Strangers*, focuses on the meaning of the word *stranger* (*forinsecus, forensis*) in medieval Europe, on the life and culture of medieval cities, their manners of governance and the concept of citizenship. While Rubin focuses on the economic and social life of cities, their role in public administration and their significance as centres of religion and education is not neglected either. She underlines the significance of owning a plot of land in a city (a necessary, but frequently not sufficient condition for citizenship) and the personal (not familial) nature of citizenship, noting the common characteristics and varieties of urban architecture and the relative cosmopolitanism of cities compared to urban areas.

Continuing the same line of thought, the second chapter, *Strangers into Neighbours*, speaks of the movement of people in the Middle Ages (particularly in the period after the year 1000) and the attitudes of urban communities towards newcomers. Here, Rubin gives an overview of the status of foreign merchants and other travellers and temporary visitors, as well as of resident strangers and, naturally, the conditions of acquiring citizenship. Through a series of examples, ranging from England to Italy, the author shows how attitudes towards foreigners fluctuated depending on various factors. Sometimes, measures were taken to encourage the influx of foreigners (including direct invitations to desired groups, especially experts in crafts in high demand), and acquiring citizenship was a relatively simple process. In other circumstances – be those economic hardship or religious conflicts – migration was discouraged, acquiring citizenship was made harder, either *de iure* or *de facto*, and ethnically or religiously distinct groups of resident foreigners were sometimes physically assaulted or expelled from cities they had inhabited for generations.

The second pair of chapters focuses on two distinct groups that had special and largely unfavourable social and legal status in most, if not all, European cities. Chapter 3, *Jews: Familiar Strangers*, speaks of the ebbs and flows of the status of Jews in urban communities, from their early settlement in expanding and flourishing cities, to the later discrimination, persecution and expulsion from many of them. Rubin explores the ambivalent attitude towards Jews both on the grounds of their religion and the Christian views towards moneylending as their frequent occupation – indeed, this was frequently the reason they were allowed or even invited to settle in many communities. Still, even where their status was relatively good, they remained a group apart, marked by their difference and mostly excluded from any positions of government and formal civic authority.

The last chapter, *Women: Sometimes Strangers in Their Cities*, focuses on a somewhat different subject: the exclusion of women from (full) rights of citizenship, “underpinned by science, law, and religion, supported by custom, and naturalised in the public sphere through rituals and representations” (p. 71), thus underlining the similarity of their status to that of resident strangers.<sup>2</sup> Here, Rubin underlines the significance of women’s work and social roles in urban environments, yet showcases the gendered order that reigned nonetheless. This order was sometimes questioned in theory by intellectuals such as Christine de Pizan, yet numerous women, known and unknown, had to accept or fight for their place within it in practice. The chapter shows women’s social and religious roles and place before the law, focusing on the sexual peculiarities of a woman’s position – from the risks of sexual violence, particularly when travelling, to the moral stigma attached to any women who did not occupy a traditional family role, often suspected as a matter of course of being prostitutes. Rubin briefly mentions other groups “that lived in some strangerhood” – beggars, homosexuals, food hawkers and Gypsies (p. 90) – but doesn’t dwell on their position.

In the Conclusion, the author sums up the conditions of urban development in medieval Europe, underlining that “[m]ost people never became citizens, nor was it expected that they would” (p. 92), and that the status “desirable” and unwanted strangers differed drastically. She ends the book on a quote from Shakespeare’s *The Book of Sir Thomas More*, showing how in the London riots against foreigners of 1517 “you had taught / How insolence and strong hand should prevail”, underlining the long-term consequences of the ill-treatment of strangers.

On the pages of this book, a legal historian might find plenty of familiar matter: mention of city statutes and formal rules for gaining citizenship, trials and verdicts, legal measures adopted against undesired behaviours or groups of population, the opinions of Bartolus of Sassoferrato and Baldus de Ubaldis. This in itself might warrant it attention. However, what makes the book particularly valuable is the fact that legal matter is presented alongside other information, not strictly legal in nature, but highly relevant for the understanding of the legal measures and the circumstances in which they arose. In other words, the social, economic, political and religious context in which the legal norms existed is richly provided. Naturally, it is not always analysed in relation to law – but that is precisely where a legal historian could step in, inspired by this book, and continue the in-depth research in the field of their own expertise. We are reminded, in clear and illustrative

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<sup>2</sup> Such parallels were drawn previously for other societies, perhaps most notably for ancient Athens (Kennedy 2014; Divac 2021).

ways, by both general abstractions and concrete examples, not to view the population in medieval cities through a dichotomy of citizens and foreign visitors, but to apply to both categories many additional, intersectional filters of social status, religion, gender, ethnicity, etc. Merely analysing which of them explicitly found their place in the law, and which influenced citizens' (and strangers') lives only *de facto*, and why, might comprise an entire new book.

It must be said that, while *Cities of Strangers* is primarily focused on Western Europe – understandable given the author's primary research focus – it does also provide a number of examples from Eastern, or at least Central Europe (e.g. Poland, Hungary, Dubrovnik/Ragusa), not ignoring Scandinavia or Muslim Spain. However, there is one notable absence: the city of cities of medieval Europe, Constantinople, is not even mentioned in the entire book,<sup>3</sup> and the same goes for the country whose capital it was – by whichever name (Byzantium, Rhomaian Empire, Eastern Roman Empire...). Naturally, one could give a number of reasons that would justify the exclusion of Constantinople (or Rhomaian cities in general), from the scope of such a book: it has already received scholarly attention in recent decades (Magdalino 1996; Matheou, Kampianaki, Bondioli 2016<sup>4</sup>), and its ancient roots and position as the capital of an (old and still vital) empire make its position distinctly different from that of most, if not all, medieval cities. However, it should be at least mentioned and those reasons stated. Instead, the Rhomaian Empire is completely overlooked, as if it were not part of Europe – indeed, the dominant state in its entire eastern half for the better part of the Middle Ages – and the Holy Roman Empire is even sometimes referred to merely as “the Empire”, as if it were the one and only. Omissions such as this one, unfortunately, contribute to the specific form of orientalism the Eastern Roman Empire has been subjected to by later Western researchers (see e.g. Angelov 2003; Marciniak 2018; Neville 2019, 5–21), as much as it might not have been the author's intention.

Being a brief overview, of course, the book cannot cover all topics related to its main subject. The aforementioned legal historian might wish for a more in-depth legal analysis<sup>5</sup> – and the same would likely be true for experts in any other narrow discipline. One might regret not finding much on the classical roots of the city (and not the state as we know it now) as the primary political organism (see, e.g. the texts in Rapp, Drake 2014), and a fatherland

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<sup>3</sup> Not counting the mention of Margaret of Constantinople, countess of Flanders (p. 54).

<sup>4</sup> A notable addition younger than the book reviewed here is Basset 2022.

<sup>5</sup> On this topic, though focused on medieval England, see Kim 2001.

to be loved and protected at any cost (Kantorowicz 1951). Interesting non-standard cases that the book does not mention could be raised – for example, the political acceptance into citizenship of obvious foreigners who did not live in the city, such as foreign nobles and even rulers. For example, Emperor Stefan Dušan of Serbia was awarded Venetian citizenship in 1350, along with his wife and son (Ferjančić, Ćirković 2005, 192), and the phenomenon was all the more frequent for ordinary nobles, although not all (political) rights were usually granted with such citizenship (Olard 2007, 162).

One could also elaborate on the issue of relationships between cities, particularly maritime republics, and the countries in the hinterland, and the difference between those that could be said to have sovereign city-state status and those that had a high degree of autonomy, but were nevertheless subjects of kings and emperors on whose territory the city was located. Rubin makes a brief attempt to touch upon the issue when speaking of the mutual influence of urban statutes and legal transplants between them: “The statutes of Ragusa/Dubrovnik of 1227 borrowed a great deal from the laws of Venice – its most important commercial partner – even though it formed part of the kingdom of Hungary” (p. 35), referring to Lonza (2012). Unfortunately, this reasoning contains an error: not only was the Statute passed in 1272 (this is obviously a simple typographical error), but Ragusa was *not* a part of the kingdom of Hungary at the time. It was, in fact, subjected to Venice – making the transplant much more logical than it would otherwise seem – and only came under Hungarian rule in 1358, which is clearly indicated in Lonza’s quoted article.

To summarise, *Cities of Strangers* is a book well worth reading for anyone interested in medieval history, and I would particularly recommend it to legal historians. Some factual omissions that have occurred outside the author’s main field of expertise do not reduce its overall value. In this book, the reader will find a well-written overview of a massive and complex subject, mature in thought and accessible in style. For a beginner, it will be a wonderful introduction to the world of medieval cities in general, and to the problem of the (legal) treatment of strangers and other specific groups in particular. For an expert, it will be a rich trove of inspiration for further research.

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