Renaissance and Reformation
Renaissance et Réforme

Rubin, Miri. Cities of Strangers: Making Lives in Medieval Europe

Angela Zhang

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Lastly, in addition to paperback, the book is available as an open access eBook on Cornell University Press's website. There is also a mobile-friendly companion website with images that Rothman discusses throughout the book, accessible via links embedded in the eBook. However, no images appear in the printed book. Luddites, traditionalists, and those without internet access may find this somewhat frustrating. That said, the eBook-to-website experience is fantastic.

ROBERT JOHN CLINES
Western Carolina University

Rubin, Miri.
Cities of Strangers: Making Lives in Medieval Europe.
The Wiles Lecture Series. Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 2020. Pp. 204 + 5 b/w ill., 2 maps. ISBN 978-1-1084-8123-6 (hardcover) $85.95.

Miri Rubin's monograph comes from her 2017 Wiles Lecture at Queen's University in Belfast. By tradition, lectures from the Wiles series are turned into monographs and published by Cambridge University Press with a goal to making the themes accessible to the public as well as to an academic audience. Thus, this book is meant to be an introductory overview on the concepts of foreignness and belonging within European cities in late medieval Europe. It is a short monograph, consisting of ninety-eight pages of text, a testament to its first conception as a lecture. Nevertheless, Rubin goes into a fair amount of detail and covers the breadth of Europe from London to Riga, a testament to her skill as a historian. She lays out a theoretical and temporal groundwork for future historians to refine. As such, *Cities of Strangers* is a synthesis of secondary sources highlighting the changes in perceptions of those living in urban areas in the late medieval period.

By looking at Europe through a comparative lens between cities, Rubin focuses on big ideas and general trends, particularly the social changes of pre- and post-plague Europe. A large pan-European view is rare among historians of urban life, who tend to use one or two cities as a microcosm of urbanity. However, Rubin demonstrates the possibility and the necessity of synthesizing

these individualized histories of cities into one that evaluates long-term trends. She does not do this through a political standpoint; instead, she emphasizes that urban centres throughout Europe had varied forms of oversight, from self-government to a seigneurial system. Her comparative method traces the philosophy of urban communities through medieval theorists such as Galbert of Bruges, Brunetto Latini, Dante Alighieri, and Bartolus of Sassoferrato, emphasizing a common cultural heritage of morality and community good. Such ideas evolved from a shared heritage of Christianity between the European cities she discusses. Using a highly Christianized framework allows Rubin to work across a large geographic and temporal area.

Rubin introduces the book not as a complete monograph but as a set of interlocking essays that underpin her interest in migration and settlement in both past and present. Each essay follows a pattern. Rubin establishes the concepts involved in each chapter and then traces their changes in the late Middle Ages in the aftermath of the plague. Each chapter contributes to her general major argument that economic prosperity brought social integration, while disaster, plague, and economic depression created chasms that exacerbated pre-existing ideas of exclusion and the creation of a persecuting society. Another major theme throughout the study is the porousness of borders when it came to marking strangeness. This comes out through the changes in attitudes towards strangers, both new and old. Changes in ideas and attitudes are understood as inseparable from the material and social realities of urban communities.

In four chapters, *Cities of Strangers* examines the various categories of citizenship and belonging in the medieval city. In the first chapter, Rubin introduces the idea of urban belonging as a conceptual one, summarizing the social and economic changes that led to mass urbanization between 1000 and 1500. By establishing the parameters of strangeness, she analyzes the concept in detail in her subsequent chapters. Chapter 2 deals with the policies governing strangers during the growth of non-state networks that encouraged settlements of foreigners in different cities. Major political and economic movements, such as the creation of the Hansa League or the relocation of the papacy to Avignon, led to legislation that governed movement and settlement while also contending with the problem of jurisdiction. Rubin's highlighting of the various entities that controlled and defined strangers, whether monarch or townsfolk, demonstrates that concerns were similar in urban centres across Europe. Chapters 3 and 4 examine Jews and women as case studies in foreignness. These case studies

reveal an important point: population size does not mitigate the perceptions of strangers. Despite women making up at least half the population of urban landscapes and Jews often making up a very small minority, they could still be analyzed in terms of their foreignness. This point validates the main argument carried through Rubin's four chapters: the porous and fluid nature of the concepts of strangeness are based on social and cultural variables of perception rather than statistics and demography.

One of the most interesting points to come out of the text is the treatment of women as strangers. By placing women as outsiders, Rubin opens a new way of analyzing their roles in the heavily gendered societies of late medieval Europe. While women were a ubiquitous part of the urban landscape, the anxiety they produced with their presence was evidence that they were seen as transgressors, and thus strangers, in the public sphere. The idea of the city as a moral community can be found in the attempts to limit women in the economic and political world through the language of urban morality. Thus, gender is indispensable in our understanding of foreignness in urban life.

It would be easy for a review to critique the broadness of the analysis, but this is not the point of *Cities of Strangers*. Rubin's book provides a method of comparison between European cities based on regulatory frameworks for those deemed different. She draws a common thread through her four chapters that demonstrates how various categories of strangeness change over time. It offers insight into future attempts to define "strangers" or "foreigners" across different political and social realities. For historians of urban communities, Rubin emphasizes the linguistic and conceptual frameworks of "otherness" with which future historians will be able to communicate across temporal and geographic boundaries. Much like the strangers in Europe's cities, belonging and strangeness are categories of change that are constantly in flux and subject to perception, however far or near in reality.

ANGELA ZHANG
York University