

Editor's Introduction

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This special issue explores a nexus of problems relating to political power, legal authority, and social regulation in the medieval and early modern periods. It begins with a symposium on Marjorie McIntosh's *Controlling Misbehavior in England, 1370–1600* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998). Here six contributors—Paul Seaver, Barbara Hanawalt, R. H. Helmholz, Shannon McSheffrey, Peter Lake, and McIntosh herself—grapple with a series of issues raised by this challenging analysis of over 260 leet courts active in the administration of local justice in villages and market towns from the fourteenth to the seventeenth century. Focusing on local jurors' responses to forms of misconduct that ranged from scolding, eavesdropping, and nightwalking through sexual and alcoholic excess to hedgebreaking, vagabondage, and sheer poverty, McIntosh's book provides an encyclopedic catalog of disorderly English behaviors. But it also does much more than this. For by disregarding the Chinese wall that conventionally demarcates medieval and early modern fields of study, *Controlling Misbehavior* questions a constellation of received assumptions, opinions, and arguments about the relations among order, disorder, religion, and the state in premodern England. Arguing that the imperative to regulate misconduct lay in mundane local concerns rather than in the ideology of puritan religion, McIntosh constructs a novel (yet venerable) genealogy for social control grounded in medieval court records.

Paul Seaver's introduction to the symposium is designed both to acquaint readers with the basic arguments advanced in *Controlling Misbehavior* and to situate its claims within the secondary literature. Underlining the historiographical importance of McIntosh's refusal to segregate medieval and early modern experiences, Seaver also draws particular attention to the rich potential which the local court records she has employed hold for future scholarship. In their contributions to the symposium, Hanawalt, Helmholz, and McSheffrey deploy a diverse range of records to elaborate key issues raised in *Controlling Misbehavior*. Hanawalt uses evidence from studies of manorial court rolls, based on village and family reconstructions, to locate McIntosh's findings within an even longer chronological perspective. Drawing on works by J. Ambrose Raftis and his students as well as her own research on felony

cases from 1317 to 1347, Hanawalt urges historians of misbehavior to probe more deeply into the social dynamics of criminal disorder and control in local communities. Helmholtz shifts the chronological frame forward, using later medieval and early modern ecclesiastical court records of prosecutions brought against persons who had harbored men and women engaged in unlawful sexual relations to address issues of misconduct. Like McIntosh, he emphasizes continuity over change, finding that harboring was recognized—and prosecuted—as an important offense long before the advent of puritan sensibilities. Shannon McSheffrey, in contrast, argues for the importance of change and of religious convictions. Analyzing the regulation of sexual behavior in the later fifteenth-century courts of London and Coventry, she presents evidence of a highly gendered style of orthodox Catholicism that encouraged local elites (and thus the jurors of local courts) vigilantly to maintain discipline and order in their communities. Peter Lake's contribution to the symposium explores the wider growth of the disciplinary impulse, with the expansion of central government regulation. Situating McIntosh's study alongside both traditional and revisionist narratives of state formation, he concludes by addressing the vexed question of the relationship among puritanism, conflict, and control in early modern England. McIntosh's response returns the reader to the chronological, social, and political challenges posed by *Controlling Misbehavior* and offers some reflections on future research agendas.

The research article and reviews that follow the symposium offer further perspectives on English efforts to control social behavior and to limit political misconduct. Rosamond Faith assesses studies of manorial courts and peasant society that lay groundwork upon which both McIntosh and Hanawalt have built in their research; L. R. Poos's review of recent works on urban trade provides a framework for understanding the economic context of social conflict in medieval England. Robert Tittler's article on civic portraiture in provincial towns before the Civil War explores the cultural devices employed by urban elites confronted by the daunting task of legitimating the post-Reformation polity. Alastair Bellany's review of the politics of literature in the seventeenth century takes the opposite tack, focusing on the role played by cultural forms in promoting disorder within the state. Finally, Geoffrey Clark's survey of recent publications on the financial revolution provides a salutary reminder that the local conflicts and disorder that flourished in both medieval and early modern England failed to prevent the precocious development of a highly successful, militant, and imperial state in modern Britain.