SERIES EDITOR'S FOREWORD

The cluster of revolts which followed the Black Death of the mid-fourteenth century have received surprisingly little attention since the late 1960s when they had an obvious topical attraction for academics. The English Rising of 1381 has been the exception, with continuing interest fuelled by an exemplary volume of sources edited by Barrie Dobson, which first appeared in 1971, and a flurry of scholarly publications to mark the 600th anniversary of the rising. The student who wished to set the English experience in a wider European context remained, however, dependent on two markedly contrasting treatments from the early 1970s, those of Rodney Hilton and of Mollat and Wolff. Professor Sam Cohn has now come to the rescue. The generous selection of source material in the present volume makes available, in most cases for the first time in English, not only material relating to the post-plague 'cluster' but comparative material on earlier and later outbreaks. It is now possible to chart popular protest in France, Italy and the Low Countries across the best part of two centuries. The famous examples – the Jacquerie and the revolt of the Ciompi – take their place not as isolated outbreaks but as peaks on the graph of European disaffection.

But the book does more than provide material for courses on late medieval history, valuable as that is. It points the way towards a new interpretation of medieval popular unrest, which calls into question existing assumptions about its causation and efficacy. Not all those assumptions have been the creation of medievalists. Many have surfaced in the general surveys of popular revolt produced in recent years. Early-modernists and their more modern colleagues have always been inclined to see the medieval as 'other': as something that can be confidently defined as the opposite of whatever is taken to be characteristic of modernity. Professor Cohn here demonstrates that this simply does not work – and nor do the modern taxonomies of revolt or rebellion which some writers have tried to impose on the medieval experience. The result is an important addition to the *Medieval Sources* series which not only embodies the latest research but will prompt more.

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