This volume, edited by Elena Maccioni and Sergio Tognetti, offers a timely exploration of the contested jurisdictions and multiple avenues of recourse that have always been important features of the landscape of trade. Its focus on the confluence of the development of sophisticated legal and mercantile structures in the late Middle Ages is one that harks back to Max Weber’s study of commercial partnerships and Federigo Melis’ use of notarial records.

_EHR_, CXXXIII. 565 (December 2018)
Drawing on examples from Florence, Ragusa (Dubrovnik), Pisa and Barcelona, its chapters measure the reach of merchant courts between trading centres, show the appeal of arbitration as a means of resolving disputes and uncover examples of merchant justice in surprising places from the court of the Bishop of Florence to contracts commissioning pirates on the Tyrrhenian sea. The archival sources explored by this volume, especially the Notarile Antecosimiano of the Archivio di Stato di Firenze remind us of a rich vein of material that merits renewed interest.

Merchants in the late Middle Ages seem to have been wary of legal disputes. Benedetto Cotrugli, writing in the fifteenth century, thought the profession of the merchant more challenging than that of a judge. Where brevity and the speed of response were, in his estimation, key qualities for the perfect merchant, he saw protracted court cases as the antithesis of this ideal; yet legal institutions and frameworks were integral to securing investment and settling disputes.

The reach of merchant courts was considerable. They were often involved in merchant disputes across trade routes. This reach was a product of the transmission of their statutes, resident trading communities in other cities and of their correspondence. The Florentine Mercanzia emerges as a prime example of a court that acted for its city’s merchants far beyond its own circuit of walls. Founded in the fourteenth century by Florence’s major guilds, it drew its judges from their ranks and from forestieri who were not Florentine citizens. References to the Mercanzia recur across this volume. The Mercanzia’s judgments are an important source for Sergio Tognetti’s study of the failure of the Florentine Perugini Company. Francesco Bettarini finds the Mercanzia engaged in disputes concerning Florentine companies in Ragusa (Dubrovnik). Luca Boschetto charts the Mercanzia changing structure in the fifteenth century and Lorenz Böninger presents the court of the Podestà in Florence as an alternative to the Mercanzia for German merchants in the city.

Perhaps most tellingly, Cédric Quertier has used the Mercanzia records to shed light on the subtle interaction of trade interests, overlapping jurisdictions and diplomacy in fourteenth-century Pisa. These records offer rare access to legal disputes in the city, as many of Pisa’s own legal documents were destroyed when the city was subjugated by Florence in 1406. Pisa was Tuscany’s main port and the Mercanzia, a court whose correspondence also extended to Venice, Genova, Rome, Avignon and Bruges, was acutely attuned to the interests of Florentine merchants resident there, and to shifts in its politics. The importance of the Mercanzia in protecting Florentine trade in Pisa was heightened further during the transition from the relatively favourable context of Gambacorta rule to the more hostile environment of Jacopo D’Appiano’s Pisa in 1392.

Far-reaching merchant courts were by no means peculiar to Florence and its Mercanzia. Maria Elisa Soldani’s chapter shows that the court of the Consolati Ultramarini offered a similar forum to the Mercanzia for Catalan merchants in Pisa and that its statutes, the Llibre del Consolat, were an important reference text for commercial law in late medieval Mediterranean trade that also served as a model for later Atlantic exchange. Elena Maccioni’s study of the growing influence of the Consolat de Mar as the court in which commercial disputes were resolved in late medieval Barcelona is a revealing parallel.

This impressive collection of essays, edited by Peter Crooks and Seán Duffy, will appeal to readers with an interest in medieval Ireland and England. The Geraldines were at the forefront of the English invasion, conquest and settlement of much of Ireland from the late twelfth century. They established English lordships in Ireland that were subject to the authority of England’s monarchs. They ramified into a host of lineages, the most important of which were headed by the earls of Desmond and the earls of Kildare (later dukes of Leinster). They were the progenitors of a significant proportion of the people in Ireland, and not only those whose surnames reflect their patrilineal descent. This book shows that the leading Geraldines were acknowledged as members of the English elites, and actively exercised that role to varying degrees.