

Hilton's *Bond Men Made Free*, first published in 1973, has been reissued after Hilton's death in 2002, with a new introduction by Christopher Dyer. It remains a key work on the English Peasants' Revolt of 1381 in that it places the Rising in the context of a general European pattern of class conflict. The first few chapters look at this broader context and, while few historians agree with the continuity of unrest from the ninth century to the fourteenth, the attempt in Chapter 3 to assess the similarities of various mass movements in the fourteenth century is a valuable one.

Although Hilton had previously written about women's contribution to village life,<sup>1</sup> he has little to say about women in this book (women do not even figure in the index, although that is also true of more recent studies of the 1381 Rising).<sup>2</sup> Despite the title of the book, "Bond Men Made Free" (a reference to a statement in a sixteenth-century petition), the rebels are sometimes mentioned as 'men and women'.<sup>3</sup> However, given Hilton's Marxist approach, class relations are far more important to his argument, and gender is largely overlooked.

As Dyer says in the new introduction, the book now needs supplementing with more up-to-

date studies. While Dyer does mention some of the work that has been undertaken on the Rising and on peasants since the book's original publication, he does not comment on gender as a new approach. Sylvia Federico wrote in 2001 that women's involvement in 1381 had been "overlooked and ignored" and this still seems to generally be the case.<sup>4</sup> For those who want to incorporate this element into their teaching of the Revolt, I would recommend setting Federico's essay—which assesses women's involvement as rebels, as victims and in the imagination of contemporary writers who use gender symbolically to make certain points about the rebels—alongside classic studies such as Hilton's.<sup>5</sup>

It might seem unfair to critique Hilton's book for not doing what he clearly did not set out to do, so I shall give the last word to Hilton and his comments on the study of women from his earlier essay:

It should not be necessary to write a separate history of half the human beings in any social class. We must, however, do so whether or not we believe that all women through history have constituted a class oppressed by all men or whether we believe that women's class position was more important than their sex. [H]istorians, female as well as

male, are socially conditioned so that they naturally focus on the male landowners, the male heads of households, the male litigants, the male criminals, the male workers. This is to a certain extent unavoidable because of the way the records present the situation, but it is also due to their own conscious or unconscious selection for examination of those whom they consider to be playing the "important" roles in society.'

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#### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>R.H. Hilton, 'Women in the Village', in *The English Peasantry in the Later Middle Ages: The Ford Lectures for 1973 and Related Studies* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975). Pp. 95-110.

<sup>2</sup>E.g. Steven Justice, *Writing and Rebellion: England in 1381* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994); Alastair Dunn, *The Great Rising of 1381: The Peasants' Revolt and England's Failed Revolution* (Stroud: Tempus Publishing, 2002).

<sup>3</sup>E.g. pp. 184, 223.

<sup>4</sup>Sylvia Federico, "The Imaginary Society: Women in 1381," *Journal of British Studies*, 40 (2001): 159-83, (p. 159).

<sup>5</sup>See also W.M. Ormrod, "In Bed with Joan of Kent: The King's

Mother and the Peasants' Revolt," in *Medieval Women: Texts and Contexts in Late Medieval Britain. Essays for Felicity Riddy*, ed. by Jocelyn Wogan-Browne et al. Turnhout: Brepols, 2000. 277-92.

<sup>6</sup>Hilton, "Women in the Village," 95.