Law and History in the Latin East

Review Number: 1837

Publish date: Thursday, 1 October, 2015

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ISBN: 978-1-4724-4196-6

Date of Publication: 2014

Price: £81.00

Pages: 348pp.

Publisher: Ashgate

Publisher url: http://www.ashgate.com/default.aspx?page=637&title_id=1216161007&edition_id=1209352831&ca

Place of Publication: Farnham

Reviewer: Stephen Donnachie

This volume, of 24 articles previously published elsewhere by Peter Edbury, covers subjects upon which years of dedicated research have made him an authority. It is a delight to see collected here for the first time some of the most essential and insightful works that have been a leading part of Edbury's detailed investigations for the past decade and more. By bringing together these papers the reader can clearly see the steady progression and development that Edbury's research has taken and is amply rewarded in the fruit that it has borne. The volume presents a comprehensive and detailed examination of key historical texts that any historian who has had cause to study the Latin East will have encountered at one point or another. This collected edition of Edbury's articles in one volume provides an excellent point of reference for all those who wish to investigate the often very confusing, and for many the seemingly impenetrable, subject matter that are the various legal texts of the Latin East, and the relative minefields that are the Old French Continuations of William of Tyre. Speaking from my own experience, for someone whose research and doctoral thesis required a firm comprehension of the relations between these sources and their respective manuscript traditions, these articles are invaluable. This volume lays out the current state of Edbury's findings on these matters after years of research and scholarship. In this regard the publication should be one of the first ports of call for any who wishes to familiarise themselves with the intricate histories of these vital sources and how scholarship has approached them. This volume helps to fill a void that historians of the Crusades and the Latin East have been struggling with for some time.

While there are five separate subdivisions of the work in which papers are collected around a particular theme the volume can be seen as consisting of two distinct halves and this partition in many ways defines the book and how it is approached by the reader. The first half of the volume, comprising of the first 14 articles, is focused upon the 13th-century legal texts and narrative sources that Edbury has published upon considerably. The first seven move from a discussion of the position of vassals and military service in the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem to an examination of the legal texts of John of Ibelin, Phillip of Novara and the Assizes of Antioch where these roles and responsibilities appear. The articles then move thematically onwards from the texts to a discussion of women as well as the non-Frankish and non-Christian populations of the Latin East and their position as defined by those legal texts. The next group of papers, articles eight to 14, constitute the core of this work and will be the most valuable to readers. Here Edbury covers the origins and development of the Old French translations of William of Tyre and the numerous extensions and later

adaptations of the Archbishop's work in the 13th century that have come to be known as the Continuations. This is a very confusing and complicated subject and the progression of papers sets out the evolution of Edbury's findings on the topic. The ordering of papers and Edbury's style of language make what otherwise might appear as a very dry and dense subject engaging and readily accessible. The Old French William of Tyre and the numerous Continuations have been topics that have occupied many minds for many years. Edbury does an excellent job of covering the previous scholarship and presenting the current state of investigations in a straightforward and clear manner. For those unfamiliar with the field this provides an excellent point at which to jump directly into the subject matter and familiarise oneself with its details without being overwhelmed.

In these first 14 papers Edbury covers a considerable amount of ground, not only in the topics explored, but also in connecting the culture and civilisation of the Frankish states of the Latin East to wider discussions of Western European society. The first two papers examine the nature of fiefs, vassalage and military service in the Kingdom of Jerusalem and how they developed from the 12th to the 13th centuries. Edbury picks up ideas and arguments presented by Susan Reynolds in her work *Fiefs and Vassals: The Medieval Evidence Reinterpreted* (1) and explores how they might apply to the Latin East. The Latin East, while very similar in many regards to the Latin West, and experiencing many of the same issues, was nevertheless faced with its own unique problems. It is these situations that in turn affected its social and legal practices. In the first half of the volume Edbury asks some very important questions, highlighting critical issues that historians of the Latin East need to address and consider more widely in their own work. Just how much of an impact did the events of 1187–92 have upon the Latin East and the development of Frankish civilisation? How might the formation, customs and practice of law in the Latin East compare with that of the wider 'Norman World' and the realms of Western Europe in general? How many of our assumptions about the history of the Latin East and its historical protagonists have come from a simple and uncritical reading of source material and how might our interpretations be changed with further insight into these documents? How well served are we by the present editions of these sources upon which we are so dependent? How overlooked have the roles of women been in the frontier societies of the Latin East? Edbury does not provide answers to all of these questions; such a task would be beyond what a single volume could hope to accomplish. Yet Edbury does provide us with a place to start and offers examples of how we might try to address these issues. The second paper considers the legal ramifications of the years after 1187 and how the influx of new arrivals and changing political landscape shaped the society of the 13th century. The seventh paper considers the formation of the legal practices of Antioch in the later 12th century with some comparison to contemporary Anglo-Norman affairs. Paper 13 examines the changing characterisation and negative representation of the Templar Grandmaster Gerard de Ridefort through his depiction in different surviving versions of key narrative sources. Paper 12 highlights many of the problems we are currently faced with in using the Continuations of William of Tyre, while paper 14 presents the reader with a new edition of *Annales de Terre Sainte*. Finally in the fifth paper Edbury examines the legal place of women in the Kingdom of Jerusalem. Firm conclusions to these questions are a long way off but Edbury is one of those best placed to discuss them.

The second half of the volume stands in contrast to the first. While papers one to 14 covered discussions of the documents upon which our knowledge of the law and history of the Latin East is based, the remaining ten papers focus upon a more direct exploration of historical events themselves. Papers 15 to 24 cover aspects of the history of Cyprus, the writing of Cypriot historical sources as well as the practice of crusading. The history of Cyprus is another area that Edbury has published on extensively and as such its inclusion here is not surprising. In these later papers Edbury covers a wider range of topics in a much shorter space. These topics range include the socio-political relationship between Latins and Greeks on Cyprus, the island's place in the trial of the Templars, the preaching and organisation of the crusading movement in Wales, and the historical memory of medieval English chroniclers writing in the aftermath of the Second Crusade. Given the greater variety of topics covered in these later papers the second half of the volume appears noticeably less centralised and more uneven. This second half comprises of ten papers originally divided into three subsections whereas the first half contained 14 papers split into two subsections. With each new subsection

there is a change of focus in the articles and a steady move away from the contemplation of source material to historical themes. The most visible change comes in the final subsection of papers, 21 to 24, which cover the crusading movement generally. Given that the volume's emphasis is on law and history in the Latin East, this final section seems a little out of place, as neither of these subjects are covered directly in its papers. The wider scope and subject matter of the latter half of the volume leaves the reader a little lost and disorientated in comparison to the first half which was much more dedicated and directed, though individually the papers are all insightful and of great merit. Paper 24 provides an excellent overview of the pontificate of Celestine III. This is an often overshadowed but important period in the history of the medieval Church between the Third Crusade and the accession of Pope Innocent III. Paper 16 examines the noteworthy affairs of the De Montfort family in the Latin East, exploring their movements and rise to influence across the Mediterranean. Edbury here explores the western European aristocratic diaspora of 12th and 13th centuries, an area now receiving far more attention and ripe for future study.

These papers do overlap to a certain extent with the previous half of the book; for example papers 15 and 20 examine charter material, and their use as sources is reflective of the earlier discussion of legal source material. Likewise paper 18 and its exploration of the relationships between Latins and Greeks on Cyprus is reminiscent of the articles five and six which cover the legal roles of women and non-Franks in the Kingdom of Jerusalem respectively. Indeed, the articles covering Cyprus and later narrative writing, papers 15 to 17, fit rather well with those that come previously, and could very well have provided a thematic conclusion to the volume. Yet as a collection the choice of these ten papers appears disjointed and out of place. Edbury's preface to the volume is dominated by a discussion of the legal and narrative documents that are the basis for the first part of the book. The later papers covering Cyprus and crusading are not mentioned. The preface foreshadows the focus of the volume as a whole. While the first half of the volume posed some very important and far reaching questions that need to be addressed by historians of the Latin East and the Crusades the same cannot as readily be said for the second half of this work. Though the papers are thought provoking they do not explicitly draw out questions and prompt a wider debate in the same fashion. This may be a result of the first half comprising of papers where research is still ongoing and for which more concrete and detailed answers have yet to appear. The first half therefore contains a series of works still in progress where much more remains to be done, whereas the second half includes papers on individual subjects that are largely self-contained. Though the subjects of these papers are quite varied, they still fall within the wider concepts of law and history that are the central themes of this volume, even if they do begin to move away from the Latin East.

While the title suggests a clear-cut dichotomy between the discussion of the law and legal practices of the Latin East on the one hand, and the recording, writing and interpretation of its history on the other, this distinction is less than one might at first imagine. While the array of papers ranges from the detailed exploration of legal treatise and narrative sources to specific investigations of historical events, Edbury demonstrates consistently throughout the relative overlap between the two areas. He regularly and deftly shows the significance of approaching legal and narrative sources and considering their impact on the formation of historical memory and our interpretation of history. Even in the later discussions of Cyprus the importance of these treatise and sources continues to appear, whether in the foundation of the Templars and the reputation of Gerard de Ridefort in William of Tyre and his continuators, or the dating and circumstances of the death of Henry I of Cyprus from extant charter material. A thorough examination of the source material and its development by later copyists and editors aptly shows how such critical investigations into the writing of history and law directly affects its interpretation and transmission. In these collection of papers Edbury shows just how entwined these concepts are and how historians might be better served by taking more time to stop and consider their relative impacts upon each other.

In summary, the volume is an erudite collection of vital and significant articles that are of vast benefit to any who wish to investigate further the law and history of the Latin East in its writing, transmission and interpretation. It poses a series of fundamental questions that have yet to be fully addressed but offers an excellent place to start in exploring their answers. In coming to the end of this book one was left with a few

questions that had arisen and on which more ink might be spilled in the future. How much of an influence did the legal treatises created by the different states of the Latin East in the 13th century impact upon each other? How far did their theories, practices and implementation overlap and how did creation of one contribute to the formation of others? Just as the laws and society of the Latin East were affected by the events of 1187, how too were they impacted upon by 1291?

Notes

1. Susan Reynolds, *Fiefs and Vassals: The Medieval Evidence Reinterpreted* (Oxford, 1994).[Back to \(1\)](#)

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