

Godfrey of Bouillon: Duke of Lower Lotharingia, Ruler of Latin Jerusalem, c.1060-1100

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The second publication to appear in Routledge's *Rulers of the Latin East* series, Simon John's new book charts the career of Godfrey of Bouillon, a person who was, as the author notes, 'by any estimation ... a significant historical figure' (p. 1). The reason for this, as most will know, is Godfrey's role in the First Crusade, during which he earned immortal fame for his exploits – at Jerusalem anyhow – and ended the venture ruling the Holy City itself. Yet, as is laid out in the introduction to this book, Godfrey has not been particularly well served by earlier biographies, and although important work has emerged since the last of these in 1985, no one has yet systematically brought together his crusading career with the socio-political background of his family and early life (pp. 3–4). Herein lies the rationale behind this book. This is no simple life-history, though. Instead, John sets out to follow the path of so-called 'cultural biographies' (such as John Gillingham's seminal *Richard I* (1)), and thus uses Godfrey (and the ways in which he is presented by contemporary authors) as a prism through which to interrogate the events and cultural forces which shaped the path of his life (pp. 4–5). Over the course of five chapters and an epilogue, therefore, John seeks to resituate and re-evaluate Godfrey's life in the religious and political climate of Western Europe in the late 11th century, and through this to better understand his involvement in the First Crusade and the foundation of the kingdom of Jerusalem.

The book begins, as one would expect, with a chapter devoted to Godfrey's 'Ancestry and parentage'. In this, John explores three core aspects: Germany and the western empire in the 11th century; the careers of Godfrey's maternal ancestors (the entertainingly named Godfrey the Bearded, his grandfather, and Godfrey the Hunchback, his uncle) as dukes of Lotharingia, and their relationships with the papal reform movement, the bishops of Liège, and the monastery of St Hubert in the Ardennes. Naturally, as well as the lives of his parents, Eustace II and Ida of Boulogne are examined too, thereby establishing the circumstances into which Godfrey and his brothers, and fellow crusaders, Eustace and Baldwin, were born. Godfrey's kin group, the Ardennes-Bouillon family, emerge as powerful potentates, who used the fragmentation of royal power during the ninth and tenth centuries to accrue significant clout as dukes of Lotharingia (upper and lower), and to forge important dynastic relationships. However, their position became more fluid with the coming of the 11th century, increased intervention from German rulers (Henry III and Henry IV), as well as the

growing power of the Church. This is seen in the careers of Godfrey the Bearded and Godfrey the Hunchback. The former, in response to the division of Lotharingia between he and his brother by Henry III, rebelled twice, albeit unsuccessfully, before embarking on a new career in northern Italy by marrying Beatrice of Tuscany (a move which similarly caused tension with the German ruler). Yet, with the succession of the young Henry IV in 1056, Godfrey the Bearded was returned to favour and remained loyal for the rest of his life. Meanwhile, he used his northern Italian base to emerge as a steadfast supporter of the reform papacy, by lending his military might to end the repeated schisms which grew around contested papal elections in the 1050s and 1060s – a pious streak which was reinforced at the end of his life through a supplication and donation to the abbot of St Hubert. The career of Godfrey the Hunchback got off to a rockier start, as he challenged the aforementioned donation and faced personal embarrassment because of his estrangement from his wife (and step-sister), Mathilda of Tuscany. Nonetheless, he became a crucial ally of Henry IV and even developed a personal relationship with the great reforming pope, Gregory VII (who appears to have envisaged his participation in a venture to aid the Byzantine Empire in 1074). The coming of the ‘Investiture Contest’ in 1075 challenged these relationships, however, and when Godfrey the Hunchback was murdered in Frisia in 1076, he may well have done so an excommunicate. Still, this did not prevent the parents of the book’s eponymous hero, Eustace II and Ida of Boulogne, from establishing themselves as key players in what followed: the former became actively engaged in the Norman Conquest of England, while the latter developed close ties with the reform movement through the abbey of Cluny and the St Anselm of Bec, who may also have known Godfrey. Through this chapter, therefore, John aptly situates the Ardennes-Bouillon family as powerful agents in the political climate of 11th-century Europe and as important allies of the Church and the reformist papacy.

These themes continue in the second chapter, ‘Godfrey’s career in the West, c.1060–1095’, in which John traces Godfrey’s early years, from his position as second son, to his eventual emergence into power as heir to Godfrey the Hunchback. This was no simple process, however, as between 1076 and 1087, the young Godfrey was unable to immediately enter into his inheritance as duke of Lower Lotharingia. Rather, Henry IV transferred him to Antwerp, most likely because he was still too young (and too close to the French sphere of influence) to be trusted with the duchy. At the same time, Godfrey faced important challenges to the other Ardennes-Bouillon familial estates, threats which served to monopolise his attentions for much of the next decade. Nevertheless, as John notes, Godfrey was able to court enduring links with the bishops of Liège and the abbey of St Hubert, even to the point of supporting the institution of the Peace of God in the former’s diocese in 1082. Through this, Godfrey is situated within the underlying trends of elite piety that characterised the careers of many of those who eventually joined the First Crusade (which is discussed in the following chapter). What has long puzzled academics in this regard, though, is Godfrey’s apparent involvement in Henry IV’s campaigns in Italy during the early 1080s, in particular the siege of Rome in 1084, as this set him truly within the anti-reform movement. Crucially, John challenges this, outlining the severe deficiencies in the evidential basis for Godfrey’s involvement in Italy (as well as for his relations with the emperor), and arguing instead that his family’s history of support for papal reform, his own early forays into ecclesiastical relations with nearby institutions, and his preoccupation with securing his domains against external threats, all speak against his participation in imperial, anti-papal military ventures far from the Ardennes-Bouillon heartlands. It is accepted that, once Godfrey finally emerged as duke in 1087, he was not beyond placing his own political needs above those of the Church, as seen through his interactions with the unpopular new bishop of Liège, Otbert, whose actions in the early 1090s threatened even St Hubert. However, above all else John seeks to portray a young Godfrey who lacked the resources, security, or far-sighted political ambition to look much beyond his own domains.

How the message of the First Crusade might have reached Godfrey, and the reasons behind his positive response, are the subject of the third chapter, ‘The coming of the First Crusade, 1095–1096’. Here, John looks to more firmly place Godfrey within the broader processes which led many other aristocratic figures to take the Cross. He does so by considering the familial and ecclesiastical networks which might have underpinned the transmission of the crusading message into Lotharingia and how these would have also served to prime the young duke to join the venture. Following a neat summary of the preaching of, and

background to, Urban II's call to arms at the council of Clermont in November 1095, it is noted that the pope had been in recent communication with key areas whose ecclesiastical borders sat alongside, or even overlapped with, Godfrey's estates, including Rheims, Cambrai, and Liège. Moreover, such transmission is made more likely by Godfrey's familial background of support for the reform papacy, and his ties to key religious institutions and movements, like the Peace of God and the abbey of St Hubert. Alongside this, John highlights how the broader kinship network of the Ardennes-Bouillon, with ties that stretched far into the crusading heartlands of northern France, could similarly have influenced his decision, just as other familial groups (most prominently the Montlhéry clan (2)) served to provide several participants in the crusade. Godfrey's involvement is thus considered an unsurprising affair, particularly in light of the diminished power of the ducal seat, which left him with fewer reasons to remain in the West and much less to leave behind. Indeed, while John accepts that Godfrey exhibited the conventional piety of the contemporary aristocracy, he also outlines the attraction of a new beginning in the East for Godfrey, with a clear sense that the duke – who sold nearly all his estates to fund the crusade – ultimately had no intention of returning. Godfrey is thus presented as an important case study for understanding the multi-faceted nature of crusader motivation, as those impulses considered pious clearly sat alongside those of a more material nature. It might be suggested, though, that John is uncharacteristically tentative here in pushing this argument to its fullest potential conclusion. Indeed, the evidence of Godfrey's sale of lands, an enigmatic coin emblazoned with *GODEFRIDUS IEROSOLIMITANUS* (p. 104), and a charter evidence implying that he had departed in search of 'eternal inheritance', all suggest a man profoundly dedicated to placing his future in the Holy Land (which, itself, could be viewed as a supremely pious act when seen within the pilgrimage tradition (3)). While John uses this section to interact with the debate over whether the charters issued by departing crusaders can really provide an insight into the personal motivations of the donor (as Jonathan Riley-Smith first argued, but which Jean Flori has since challenged (pp. 103–4)), it might therefore have been possible for the author to make a more forceful intervention in the debate regarding whether materiality and piety ever actually competed, or if they were simply two sides of the same coin.

The fourth chapter covers rather more familiar ground, at least for those with a background in the history of the First Crusade, such that it is needless to summarise the details of the venture here. What this chapter does do, however, alongside outlining the course of the crusade, is to hone in on Godfrey's part in the unfolding events. As a result of the nature of the available source material, John is somewhat hamstrung in this, for it is only really the *Historia* of Albert of Aachen, produced in the West after the crusade (probably by 1103 for materials pertaining to the First Crusade) but seemingly composed from the testimony of returning participants, which provides anything close to an 'eye-witness' testimony for much of the Lotharingian experience of the crusade. Consequently, through little fault of the author, this chapter can at times read as something of a precis of Albert's text, albeit with interesting asides, commentaries on the narrative motivations which lay behind certain aspects of this work, and the incorporation of what evidence can also be gleaned from the other sources. What emerges is the portrait of a figure who was part of the elite group of leaders from the early moments of the crusade, but who was overshadowed by those with bigger pockets (Raymond of Toulouse) or more overt military nous (Bohemond of Taranto) – a fact which may also have been influenced by a rather unfortunate ursine encounter, which potentially incapacitated Godfrey for several months. Indeed, it is noted that it was only really during the long months outside Antioch where he appears to have won lasting fame for his feats of arms (which gave rise to the tale, oft repeated and elaborated, that he bisected a Muslim opponent). Moreover, it was in the last months before the capture of Jerusalem in July 1099 that Godfrey grew into a leading light of the crusade, one who became (or at least was presented as) the figurehead for popular enthusiasm and dedication to the Holy City. Yet, as John notes, while Godfrey did position himself smartly by allying himself with the crusading cause and the pious concerns of the main force – who desperately sought to push on to Jerusalem while the other leaders prevaricated – the reality of his rise was as much down to Bohemond's departure and Raymond's own innate ability to alienate himself from those around him as anything Godfrey actively instigated. Nevertheless, regardless of the extent of his own agency or luck, by the time Jerusalem fell to the crusaders, it was Godfrey who was the recognised leader, the figure who attracted the most respect and praise, whose actions left a lasting impression on those who wrote down those momentous events for posterity.

In the final chapter, John considers the aftermath of the crusade and the last months of Godfrey's life, exploring his part in establishing the fledgling kingdom of Jerusalem between July 1099 and his death in July 1100. As is well known, in the aftermath of the crusade, Godfrey was elected ruler of the Holy City. Yet, much ink has been spilled in discussing the important question of Godfrey's title, as although he clearly wielded considerable authority, the notion of a secular king in Christ's own patrimony remained a thorny issue for the ecclesiastical participants of the crusade. Instead, it appears Godfrey adopted a dual title, one of *advocatus* of the Holy Sepulchre and prince of the city, with John making the astute point that his German background helped to facilitate such a fluid approach, for it mirrored imperial conceptions of the dual nature of power and a ruler's responsibilities to both the people and the Church. In doing so, it is argued that Godfrey was also continuing his policy of aligning his views with those of the masses, as this scenario pleased the most number of people without diminishing his ability to actually lead. As John suggests, it clearly made little difference to his authority, or conceptions of his legitimacy, for there is no evidence of opposition to this appointment. Likewise, Albert's inclusions of three visions which promoted the divine providence of Godfrey's elevation at Jerusalem help to reveal how it might have been understood in the West. Here, though, it could have been interesting to push a little further on the title of 'prince', for this has important parallels with how Bohemond of Taranto styled himself in Antioch, and Tancred of Hauteville in the Galilee, and could suggest some underlying pressures of competition amongst the remaining leaders. However, John does point to the genuine fragility faced by the early settlers, noting how prickly relations with Raymond of Toulouse (who was ousted from the Tower of David in somewhat devious fashion) hampered the veracity of early military operations, and the real difficulties faced in attempting to assert power over the nearby coastal cities of the Levant, particularly Arsuf, which resisted repeated assaults. Nevertheless, Godfrey is presented as a capable leader, one willing to negotiate and manoeuvre as best served his interests, and who had actively begun the process of installing the secular and ecclesiastical infrastructure a fledgling state would need. Had he not died suddenly in July 1100, we are left to wonder

what might have been.

Next comes a brief conclusion, which neatly summarises the overarching analytical threads and reminds the reader of one of the most important points made: that ‘modern historians cannot overlook the experiences of Godfrey, duke of Lower Lotharingia, if they are to fully understand the career of Godfrey, First Crusader and ruler of Latin Jerusalem’ (p. 225). As an epilogue, and something of a holding pattern for what looks set to be an exciting follow-up work, John outlines the long-term memory of Godfrey’s crusading exploits across the 12th and 13th centuries. Here, he explores Godfrey’s place within the successive waves of the telling and re-telling of the crusade, and how such processes only served to increase his reputation. Such was the fervour for this, that his heroism was enshrined (and greatly enhanced) through *chansons* and a broad literary canon. In short, Godfrey became the very epitome of crusading, one who was set up as an ideal to emulate (and whose model was indeed followed), such that he was included within the elite pantheon of the so-called ‘Nine Worthies’.

In many ways, this epilogue says something very profound about Godfrey’s life: more was written about him in death than there ever was in life. Indeed, his reputation and memory cast a shadow this book has sought to look beyond, to reconstruct the ‘real’ Godfrey, or at least to better understand the world he inhabited. In this, it succeeds. It is deeply researched and clearly presented, and while there are some rare moments this reviewer would have liked to have seen more analytical push, and I would certainly have enjoyed more than the tantalising glimpse into the work on Godfrey’s memory, this book deserves to be read and enjoyed by anyone with an interest in the political world of 11th-century Europe, the religious climate that spawned the First Crusade, and the problems faced in establishing the Latin East. As a brief final note, the standard of printing for the pictures is rather poor, particularly given the disappointingly prohibitive price-tag.

Notes

1. J. Gillingham, *Richard I* (London, 1999).[Back to \(1\)](#)
2. See e.g. J. Riley-Smith, *The First Crusaders* (Cambridge, 1997).[Back to \(2\)](#)
3. See e.g. A. Jotischky, *The Perfection of Solitude: Hermits and Monks in the Crusader States* (University Park, PA, 1995).[Back to \(3\)](#)

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