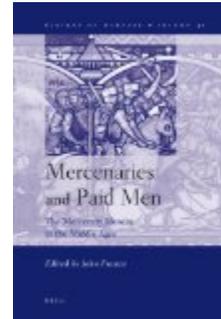


John France, ed. *Mercenaries and Paid Men: The Mercenary Identity in the Middle Ages*. Leiden: Brill, 2008. 415 pp. \$145.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-90-04-16447-5.

Reviewed by William Urban (Department of History, Monmouth College)

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Defining a Medieval Mercenary

This stimulating collection of conference papers illustrates the changing nature of military history today. The combination of Whig and Puritan history that made mercenaries into representatives of the bad old days is disappearing. Historians are looking at them again, some wanting to understand how the process of recruiting foreign (or more local) warriors worked in social, economic, and political terms; some recognizing that Machiavelli's contemporaries had good reasons for ignoring his ideas; and some even seeing mercenaries as a step toward national armies.

In his introduction to this volume, the editor of these papers, John France, notes that “mercenaries have never had a good press,” and then explains that this is to be expected of the most brutal and degraded of soldiers, known for their cruelty, their destructiveness, and their propensity to change employers easily (p. 1). After having thus established the popular (and often the scholarly) stereotype, France uses the rest of his introduction to summarize the numerous high quality papers that then modify this classic definition in many ways.

David Crouch, “William Marshal and the Mercenariat,” opens the collection with a short summary of the career of a nobleman often described as a mercenary made good, William Marshal. Crouch then demonstrates how Marshal's willingness to distribute largesse, protect the weak and helpless, and remain loyal to his lord separated him from mercenaries who did not exhibit such “noble behavior” (p. 27). This restatement of the traditional for-

mula suggests that nobility meant more than knowing which fork to use (a concept that few would have understood, of course), but was instead based on aristocratic attitudes that the lower classes and competing orders did not share. A noble might have married the rich daughter of a merchant, but would have held his nose while doing so and none of his friends would have mentioned it later. This is an important point, because newly rich mercenaries were challenging the social status of the nobility, and defining behavior was among the ways in which the nobility attempted to rebuff social upstarts. “The generation of William Marshal,” Crouch argues, “was the one in which [his] social class took a step towards becoming self-consciously hierarchical” (p. 30).

In “Revisiting Mercenaries under Henry Fitz Empress,” John D. Hosler then looks at the succession conflicts of the twelfth century in England, and concludes that the widespread employment of mercenaries (especially Welsh) began at that time, not in the thirteenth century, as some have argued. Kelly DeVries, “Medieval Mercenaries: Methodology, Definitions, and Problems,” investigates the “foreign” aspect of the stereotypical mercenary, stepping back in time to the late Roman Empire and the Varangian Guard before revisiting the Hundred Years' War. In all cases, it is impossible to establish pure ethnicity—all armies were of mixed origins. He asks in conclusion (after saying that soldiers were always paid), if they could earn more, why should they not take the money, no matter what army they served in?

Guido Guerri dall'Oro, "Les Mercenaires dans les Campagnes Napolitaines de Louis de Grande, Roi de Hongrie, 1347-1350," provides a detailed study of the mercenaries (mostly Italians, but some Germans) hired by Louis the Great for his innovative campaign to Naples. Louis went home, but the mercenaries remained to terrorize the peninsula for decades. John E. Law investigates a minor, but important, mercenary family in the Papal States in his contribution, "The Da Varno Lords of Camerino as Condottiere Princes." He argues that ultimately, every mercenary's career was intertwined with that of his employer, and when the employer went down, so did the mercenary.

In "Beneath the Battle? Miners and Engineers as 'Mercenaries' in the Holy Land (XII-XIII siècles)," Nicholas Prouteau describes the widespread use of foreign experts (many Armenians, some Muslims) employed by both Christians and Muslims. Their origins and religious beliefs were unimportant, he argues, all that mattered was competence. John H. Pryor, "Soldiers of Fortune in the Fleets of Charles I of Anjou, King of Sicily, ca. 1265-85," investigates naval mercenaries (who were sometimes pirates). The records were destroyed in World War II, but he argues that the need to pay the wages of these large bodies of men was clearly a great strain on the kingdom's taxpayers. Richard Abels discounts most individuals usually identified as mercenaries in "Household Men, Mercenaries and Vikings in Anglo-Saxon England." There was simply too little money in the economy of that era to support true mercenaries (the Frisians in the fleet being a likely exception); the best the kings could do against the Vikings, he argues, was to pay one group to protect them against the rest. There were indeed paid retainers by 1066, but the relationship of employer and retainers was still based on lordship, love, and loyalty.

Bernard S. Bachrach, "Merovingian Mercenaries and Paid Soldiers in Imperial Perspective," takes on the complicated problem of nomenclature. What was a *stipendarius*, an *amicus*, and an *armiger*? What was the difference between warriors in *foederati* and those in an *obsequium*? Because we do not understand well the technical terms and their changing meanings, we must be cautious, Bachrach argues. The *obsequia*, he writes, were probably mercenaries, while paid militiamen were not. In his essay "The Early Hungarians as Mercenaries 860-955," Charles R. Bowlus presents a revisionist version of the Hungarian invasions of the Carolingian Empire. That is, he argues that historians who continue to teach that the development of the knightly warrior was a response to Hungarian invasions have simply failed to read the

available literature—there were too few Magyars to have caused the damage attributed to them. Until 955 feuding German lords had hired them as archers; the massive raid of that year by unemployed warriors ended in disaster when a flood on the Lech River prevented them from escaping their pursuers. The surviving Magyars found farming and herding more profitable than using the land for horse pastures, as would be necessary if they were to continue hiring themselves out for war.

J. W. Rowlands, "Warriors Fit for a Prince: Welsh Troops in Angevin Service, 1154-1216," argues that contemporaries saw most of these troops as the lord's men, not as mercenaries, so modern historians should do the same. In "Urban Military Forces of England and Germany, c. 1240-c.1313, a Comparison," David S. Bacharach finds that both city militias and city naval forces were important, especially in Germany. The king of England often paid his militias, he also points out, but the Holy Roman emperor rarely did.

Stephen Morillo employs a sociological quadrant in his essay, "Mercenaries, Mamluks and Militia: Towards a Cross-cultural Typology of Military Service," with axes labeled "Political Determination," "Economic Determination," "Socially Embedded," and "Socially Unembedded." Using this method, he argues that true mercenaries fell into the quadrant marked by "Socially Unembedded" and "Economic Determination," militias and feudal warriors fell opposite them, and political armies and stipendiaries were in the quadrants in between.

Eljas Oksanen, "The Anglo-Flemish Treaties and Flemish Soldiers in England 1101-1163," takes up the long feud between Stephen and Matilda earlier discussed by Hosler, looking at the money-fiefs held by the counts of Flanders who made their subjects available for hire when needed. While one might think that the counts had made themselves into mercenaries themselves, Oksanen argues that the arrangement acquired a symbolic importance akin to an oath of fealty. It gave the counts an alternative to their obligations toward France, and gave the royal English combatants an alternative to relying on fickle vassals.

In "The Origin of Money-Fiefs in the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem," Alan V. Murray notes that though the first crusaders captured only a few cities in the Holy Land, the rest—which remained in Muslim hands—then had to pay the crusaders a handsome tribute for the right to import and export goods. This provided the conquerors the money needed to support their small armies and to welcome newly arrived knights. Whether these knights

and other warriors were mercenaries is open to debate, but Murray argues that the arrangement provided a very practical resolution of several intertwined and difficult problems.

“Mercenaries and Paid Men in Gilbert of Mons,” by Laura Napran, demonstrates that Hainaut was indeed as important as contemporaries believed, largely because it, like Brabant, was a significant source of mercenaries. Napran also points out that the chronicler, Gilbert of Mons, clearly indicated the difference between paid men, mercenaries, and auxiliaries. Andrian R. Bell, “The Fourteenth Century Soldier—More Chaucer’s Knight or Medieval Career?” studied muster lists of knights and soldiers to see how many of them had military experiences similar to those of Chaucer’s worthy man. He found that the fictional career of Chaucer’s character might not have been so unusual, and that there was a wide variety of military experiences. As others, especially Terry Jones (in *Chaucer’s Knight: Portrait of a Medieval Mercenary* [1980]), have noted, where the knight fought may have been less important than where he did not fight—he seems to have skipped the Hundred Years’ War, thus he did not fight for his king. Bell ends with a question: was Chaucer intending to support a popular peace proposal of the times—to end wars in Christendom, to ensure peace by an English-French marriage—and urging listeners to join in a new crusade against the infidel?

Spencer Gavin Smith, “What Does a Mercenary Leave Behind? The Archeological Evidence for the Estates of Oswain Lawgoch,” notes that not only did families lose their properties, but also that even their buildings were removed from the land. Carlos Andrés Conzález Paz retells the story of the White Company and other mercenary units of the Hundred Years’ War and the importance of some lesser-known commanders in “The Role of Mercenary Troops in Spain in the Fourteenth Century:

the Civil War.” Sven Ekdahl, “The Teutonic Order’s Mercenaries during the ‘Great War’ with Poland-Lithuania (1409-11),” uses surviving treasury documents and chronicles to analyze the process by which grandmasters raised troops once the crusades had ended and the once plentiful flow of volunteers had dried up. To those who read German, Ekdahl is a well-known scholar of medieval military history. The notes give a good overview of his many publications and the breadth of his investigations, especially those involving the 1410 battle of Tannenberg/Grunwald.

“Scots Mercenary Forces in Sixteenth Century Ireland,” by Muriósa Prendergast, traces the complicated family rivalries in the Emerald Isle that brought in the Scots, where they were paid in land, thus inserting a new dynamic into a land already laid waste by long and blood feuds. In “The Irish Mercenary Tradition in the 1600s,” Ciarán Óg O’Reilly lists the many European wars in which Irish troops distinguished themselves. Though somewhat evading the question of why these same Irish soldiers fought so poorly at home, he notes that their willingness to fight to the death may have come from a simple love of war and a desire for glory.

This final essay thus rounded off the conference nicely—what began as a discussion of values and profit ended with a suggestion that warriors sometimes just loved to fight. Restoring peace, O’Reilly seems to suggest, would have to involve more than simply providing mercenaries with better-paying means of making a living. The rulers and clerics of the Middle Ages were not dealing solely with men seeking profit, but men displaced by war and famine, men seeking to escape a boring existence, men without an inheritance, and men doing what men enjoy—engaging in physical activity, competition, and perhaps, as Huckleberry Finn put it, escaping from the “sivilizing” efforts of womankind.

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