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Elena Bellomo. *The Templar Order in North-West Italy (1142-c.1330).* The Medieval Mediterranean. Leiden: Brill, 2008. xii + 464 pp. $186.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-90-04-16364-5.

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A Treasury of Detail

With this volume, Elena Bellomo significantly advances our understanding of the Order of the Temple: It will stand alongside Alan Forey's *The Templars in the Corona de Aragón* (1973) as a fine regional study of the order. Such a study is unusual in any language, but downright rare, and therefore especially welcome, in English.

The first part of this book presents an analysis of the presence of the Templars in northwestern Italy, defined as the western portion of the Templar administrative district known as "Lombardia" (that is, the Valle d'Aosta, Piedmont, Lombardy, Liguria, and Piacenza, but not Emilia or the Romagna). It represents an immense amount of archival work, as well as inclusion of a wide range of material from secondary sources, especially those in Italian. It makes a valuable contribution to an English-speaking world sadly but increasingly ill-equipped to access the Italian originals.

The second part (over one hundred pages) offers a discussion of Templar houses known to have existed in the region, with a short disquisition on unconfirmed houses as well. This information is followed by a list of known houses, prosopographical catalogs of Templar personnel in Lombardy and Italy, and an extensive bibliography.

The book is not an item to pick up and put down lightly. Very technical, it conveys a huge amount of detail about a relatively small area. The documentation is so dense that at times it reads like an extended catalog rather than a book. But these qualities are not necessarily negative. Indeed, in this case the author provides a very rich resource for the serious scholar.

Buried in the mass of detail are some interesting insights. The relationship of local Italian magnates–some of them, such as the Montferrats, who were quite significant players in the crusades–to the Templars is examined in detail, and the Templars are shown to have been significantly enmeshed in local politics and customs, something which fits well with the research into Templar liturgical practices done by Simonetta Cerini and others. The author notes that the Temple and the Hospital seem to have had their beginnings in the region at about the same time, and that in general good relations seem to have prevailed between these sometime rivals. There appears also to have been good rapport between the Cistercians and the Templars (p. 154); unsurprising, perhaps, given the role the Cistercians played in the Templars' origins, but nevertheless not always true elsewhere.

There are some tantalizing aspects of Bellomo's research, as well. In northern Italy, bishops sometimes assigned hospitals to the Temple (p. 216, for example), though there is scant evidence that the Templars actually operated them. Templars were also involved in some places in parochial activities such as penitential exercises and funerals, though the local bishops were not generally in favor of such actions. Even more interesting, Bellomo demonstrates that a large number of Templar brethren served not only as papal *cubicularii*, but also in other capacities, including that of treasurer and marshal. The Templars involved in these roles were not necessarily minor players–many, such as Giacomo da Montecucco, were masters and therefore powerful men in command of significant resources in their own right. Peter of Bologna, the procurator-general of the order, was at Boniface VIII's court, though it is not entirely clear if he held office there. Even where members of the papal household were not formally Templars, they sometimes had connections to the Temple; Boniface's master of law and chaplain was probably a relative of a Templar, and it is likely that papal *cubicularius* Giacomo de Pocapalea was related to a Templar master of central and northern Italy in the 1290s. This insight is not new, but Bellomo's attention to prosopography offers impressive reinforcement for the claim.[1]

There is a school of thought which has argued in the past that the Temple was a deeply troubled institution by the early fourteenth century; this school has adherents today as well. It is clear that, financially at least, the Temple was healthy in Italy in the years after 1291: scattered across northern Italy, says Bellomo, were "busy, efficient units capable of providing a solid local footing for the Order and producing resources the the Temple could draw upon on a continuous basis" (p. 178).

Related to this line of thought is the idea that the Templars were charged with so much, and confessed (under torture, to be sure) to so much, that surely they must have been guilty of *something*. This position too has its adherents, even today. But here again, Bellomo's work is not supportive. She notes that under the guidance of Rinaldo da Concorezzo, the Council of Ravenna ruled that torture invalidated confessions, and that anyone who had confessed under duress should be ruled innocent; the Council allowed Templars to clear themselves by compurgation. In addition, in Pavia laity and churchmen alike protested against the process and in favor of the Templars, and Bellomo notes the previously known fact that of the Italian prelates who attended the Council of Vienne, only one voted to prevent the Templars from defending themselves–the rest were in favor of giving them a chance. Clearly, the Templars did not suffer from wide unpopularity in northern Italy, at least.

The book offers much more to inform, suggest, and provoke. Like most of Brill's books, this one is astronomically expensive. But no serious scholar of the Templars can afford to be without it, and Bellomo has proven her right to be considered among the best of those scholars.

Note

[1]. See, for example, Malcolm Barber, *The Trial of the Templars* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 244.

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