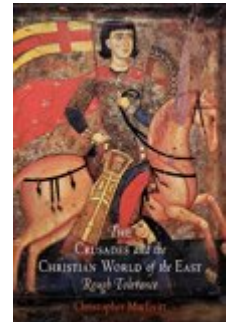


Christopher Hatch MacEvitt. *The Crusades and the Christian World of the East: Rough Tolerance.* The Middle Ages Series. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007. vi + 272 pp. \$49.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8122-4050-4.



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In March 2008, the BBC Web site reported the findings of a study on the genetic origins of the modern Lebanese population.[1] The research revealed faint but perceptible indications that individuals of western European origin had contributed to the Lebanese gene pool in the historic past—possibly a marker of intimate relations between immigrants and local populations dating back to the era of the Crusader states. This discovery added to a growing body of evidence that challenges the consensus view of relations between the ruling elites and the mass of the population in those territories. As articulated by historians such as Joshua Prawer, earlier research argued that the dominant groups, west European in origin and Latin Christian in religion, formed a small colonial-type elite with minimal linkages to the local populations they exploited. This interpretation has increasingly come into question. Archaeological work by scholars such as Ronnie Ellenblum has disclosed the existence of previously unsuspected rural settlements inhabited by populations of apparently Western origin alongside

sites inhabited by locals. Western settlement in Crusader Palestine appears to have gone further down the social scale than the Prawer model suggests. Other writers have noted that the "segregationist" model championed by Prawer is heavily based on the experience of the coastal cities and on reading the evidence of normative texts composed in the second quarter of the thirteenth century back into the very different world of the twelfth—and, indeed, on more or less explicit analogies with the equally different colonial world of the early twentieth century. Christopher MacEvitt's stimulating book explicitly rejects the Prawer model in favor of something rather messier and more complex.

MacEvitt examines interactions between the crusaders and local Christians, who in many areas formed a majority of the population. The latter were themselves a complex group, deeply divided on ethnic and religious lines. In northern Syria, substantial Armenian populations existed alongside longer established Syrian Orthodox (Jacobite) communities; both groups embraced a view of

Christ's divine and human characteristics at odds with the creed established at the Council of Chalcedon in 451. Further south, populations which looked to the Patriarch of Constantinople were more numerous; MacEvitt prefers to describe this group as "Melkite" rather than the more common "Greek Orthodox," pointing out that they were not "Greek" in any ethnic or linguistic sense. Maronites, with their own idiosyncratic view of the nature of Christ, lived in the Lebanese mountains. The Latin church was Chalcedonian in Christology but had other theological differences with the church in Constantinople; on a more political level, the crusading leadership and the rulers of the subsequent crusading states (collectively known as "Franks" in local parlance), had an ambivalent relationship with the Byzantine Empire, whose ruler dominated that church.

As a result the relationship between the "Frankish" leadership and the local Christians was complex. MacEvitt examines it from the local standpoint, privileging sources created by local Christians whenever possible and setting their reactions in the context of a long history stretching back to the late Roman Empire. He shows how a North Syrian world accustomed to fragmented authority and short-lived warlord states ruled by Muslim or Armenian adventurers could accommodate the new Frankish contenders for power. Armenian and Jacobite writers, often instinctively hostile to Byzantine claims, might be severely critical of individual Frankish rulers for their greed and pride but could also admire them, look to them for patronage, and mourn their deaths. Armenian and Jacobite clergy might involve Latin bishops in their internal disputes. MacEvitt suggests that further south, Baldwin I of Jerusalem was happy to make use of the skills of the local clergy to undercut the claims of the papal legate Daimbert of Pisa (for some reason MacEvitt spells his name "Daibert"). At Easter 1101, the annual miracle of the Holy Fire failed to occur during a service presided over by the legate at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. The fire appeared when the

Melkites took over; Daimbert's reputation never recovered and MacEvitt suspects that Baldwin may have been behind the fiasco. MacEvitt notes Frankish patronage of local Christian religious institutions, points to archaeological finds which suggest that churches might have been shared between Latin and Melkite congregations, and examines possible cultural transfers connected with the cults of certain saints. His conclusion is that the various communities lived together in the "rough tolerance" of his subtitle, not without stresses and conflict, but nevertheless coexisting rather better in practice than they should have done in theory.

MacEvitt's focus on Eastern Christian perceptions and responses provides an intriguing displacement of perspectives. It is salutary to leave the Rome-centered perspective of much writing about the medieval Christian world and be reminded that the papacy was not always the most important player. In the 1160s and 70s the aggressive and disruptive force whose incursions into the world of Eastern Christendom alarmed Jacobites and Armenians alike was not the papacy but the Byzantine Emperor Manuel I Comnenus, with his ambitions to reestablish Christian unity. The pope, Chalcedonian though he was, appeared unthreatening by comparison, and links between the parties flourished. Jacobite and Armenian dignitaries visited the papal court. The Jacobite Patriarch of Antioch attended the Third Lateran Council in 1179 at the invitation of his Latin counterpart, even writing a refutation of the Cathar heresy at his request. Armenian apocalyptic prophecies inserted a Frankish ruler in place of the Byzantine one as the Last Emperor of the Millennium.

MacEvitt's concentration on Eastern Christian sources, however, does have the defects of its virtues. The Maronites disappear from the story altogether, presumably for lack of sources: there is no Melkite-authored chronicle to match Matthew of Edessa for the Armenians or Michael

the Great for the Jacobites. As a result it is much harder to get a handle on Melkite perceptions from sources interior to that community, and MacEvitt's handling of Melkite perspectives is correspondingly less assured. The nature of his sources also creates a North Syrian focus on Antioch and, particularly, Edessa. While this is a valuable corrective to Jerusalem-centered accounts, it would be hard to argue that the ephemeral County of Edessa, with its tiny Frankish elite, is an entirely satisfactory model for the whole Latin East (especially now that one has to accommodate Frankish peasant settlers into the picture for the Kingdom of Jerusalem). The count of Edessa had to engage more or less intensively with Armenian warlords and Jacobite abbots in order to maintain his tenuous hold on power. MacEvitt recognizes the problem, but notes (fairly enough) that the first two kings of Jerusalem had both started out as lords of Edessa and suggests that they brought "northern" perspectives to bear on ruling the kingdom. While this claim may be true, is hard to demonstrate.

MacEvitt is most comfortable working with ecclesiastical sources. The chapter in which he examines the social and legal status of Eastern Christians in the Kingdom of Jerusalem is the least convincing in the book. He is no doubt correct in his argument that serfdom did not exist there, at least not in the sense that term is usually used in western European legal textbooks (but did it ever exist anywhere in quite those terms?). His claim that Eastern Christians became knights is more problematic. It seems a long stretch to assert that an Armenian who donated land to the Hospitallers in 1129 was necessarily showing his adoption of Western knightly values (p. 153), and many of the men he identifies as local knights appear to be deracinated Armenian warriors who had moved south from Edessa in the train of Baldwin I or II--warriors, certainly, but possibly closer to the Flemish mercenaries of contemporary Western warfare. His efforts to identify local "knights" yield a rather meager harvest, and one is left with

a distinct sense that such figures, while they did exist, were much thinner on the ground than MacEvitt would like to imply. His argument that one did not have to convert to Latin Christianity to take on knightly status implies a degree of formal "denominationalism" rather at odds with his stress on the fluidity of boundaries between the various Christian groups, which would render the whole issue of "conversion" somewhat moot--if Franks could pray at Melkite shrines and patronize Jacobite holy men without ceasing to be "Latin," presumably a Melkite could take communion from a Frankish priest without ceasing to be Melkite.

The biggest weakness in MacEvitt's account, however, falls on the Latin side of the equation. He coins the term "ecclesiastical ignorance" to cover situations in which Latin clergy and laity chose to interact with, say, Jacobite clergy in ways which glossed over the fact that, strictly speaking, the Jacobites were heretics. While attentive to Latin sources, he does not subject them to the intensive reading he gives to Eastern Christian ones, contenting himself with the observation that they have little to say about local Christians. As a result, Latin perspectives (especially ecclesiastical ones) remain rather murky. His account hints that Latin rulers favored Jacobites and Armenians over Melkites and that churchmen found Jacobites in particular more congenial interlocutors than the more "orthodox" Melkites. It may be that recondite issues of Christology were less salient in the minds even of Latin bishops than more earthly issues of power and authority. University-trained theologians were rare animals in the twelfth-century Latin East and, whatever the defects of Jacobite and Armenian theology, they were markedly more respectful of papal primacy than their Melkite counterparts. These issues are not teased out with the sophistication and subtlety that MacEvitt employs when dealing with Eastern Christian attitudes.

The book ends somewhat abruptly. MacEvitt argues that the botched ecumenism (or theological aggression) of Manuel Comnenus was responsible for the breakdown of the world of "rough tolerance" by undermining Armenian and Jacobite church leaderships, sowing disunity in these groups, and forcing those who were not prepared for reunion on Byzantine terms to define what they stood for. As a result, he argues, religious identities became far more fixed and rigid--somewhat like the "confessionalization" process in post-Reformation Germany. While this may be true, his account leaves the Latin church almost entirely out of the picture (one might suspect in that case that the defining moment would be the Fourth Crusade) and does not treat the process as it worked out on the ground in the last quarter of the twelfth century. It is a rather disappointing end to a fascinating if not always convincing book. Perhaps we can hope for a sequel to carry the story forward.

Note

[1]. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/sci/tech/7316281.stm> .

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