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On January 10, 1308, King Edward II of England (r. 1307-27) commanded the arrest of the Order of the Knights Templar throughout his dominions. This was his delayed response to the pressure exerted by Pope Clement V (r. 1305-14) and Philip IV, king of France (r. 1285-1314), who had himself arrested members of the international military order in his own territories in the previous year on what are now largely perceived as trumped-up charges. It set in train measures for the seizure, short-term royal management, exploitation, and ultimate distribution of the Templars’ estates and properties, to be found in most counties of England and parts of Wales and Ireland following the expansion and consolidation of their profile and interests since the twelfth century. Such processes created an archival windfall that has recently prompted scholars of the order, previously principally interested in its military aspects, to examine estate and stock management, property development, and trading activities, and thereby the economic, social, and agricultural impact of the order and its successors over several centuries. In this pioneering case study, J. Michael Jefferson exploits the archive, with much success, to examine the order’s estates in a single English county over the longue durée. He traces in extensive, often forensic detail the fate of the Templar estates in Lincolnshire from the expansion of their territorial portfolio in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries to their dissolution in the fourteenth, and then the tortuous transfer of the estates to the Hospitaliers over the next two hundred years. In so doing, he provides a vast wealth of new data and insights into the Templar economy, farming practices, and life in general, which will be obligatory reading for scholars across several disciplines. Nevertheless, while an impressive study, there are issues with how Jefferson presents and marshals his evidence that somewhat reduces the overall impact of the volume.

The analysis follows a basic chronological structure over nine chapters (with an introduction and conclusion), from the inquest into the Templars’ lands undertaken by Geoffrey fitz Stephen, master of the order in England, in 1185 to the restoration of the Order of St. John of Clerkenwell during the Counter-Reformation of Queen Mary (r. 1553-58). Across fourteen appendices, Jefferson also provides summary translations of, for example, deadstock and livestock accounts; lists of corrodians, land acreages and rental income, and churches and mills; and comparative lists of lands held in Lincolnshire by the Templars and Hospitaliers. It is worth noting, though, that the author provides no editorial apparatus or commentary and that any reader wishing to verify his readings is thrown upon the original record. The author
and publisher deserve warm congratulation for
the range of twenty-five clear maps and architec-
tural illustrations that work well with the append-
dices and perfectly supplement the main text. There
is also a full bibliography and a general in-
dex.

The introductory chapter provides a useful if
necessarily cursory narrative of the genesis,
growth, descent, and afterlife of the two main mil-
itary orders in Europe. It lays the historiographi-
cal foundation for the study by placing it within the
context of the pacesetting research into the Tem-
plar economy of Helen J. Nicholson and Phil Slav-
in.[1] Likewise, it addresses the historiography of
the Templar estates in England, agricultural prac-
tice, and estate management. A strange structure
here—not by chapter or theme but by an explora-
tion of what others have argued and a tacking on
of Lincolnshire—leads to a lack of flow and a
choppy narrative.

More egregious, however, is the discussion of
primary sources, an issue that permeates the en-
tire volume. Given the devotion of five of the nine
chapters to the so-called King’s Survey of 1308-13,
the reader is presented with scant introduction to
or analysis of the records created, their format,
structure, condition, or the bureaucratic processes
behind their compilation, though their content is
extensively analyzed. The principal record on
which Jefferson relies is the unedited, unpub-
lished enrolled account created by the Exchequer.
[2] This is, in fact, a fair copy final account com-
piled from particulars (many lost) submitted by
local commissioners, whose very nature and dip-
ломatic structure may conceal innumerable (and
incalculable) details of both property and adminis-
trative activity. Similarly, though we are told that
the accounts are “discontinuous and incomplete”
in their chronological coverage, there is little at-
ttempt to step back and really question what that
means for the statistics presented (p. 50). Only on
page 119, for example, do we first learn of the lack
of extant accounts for July 1309 to Michaelmas
1311. The enrolled account is predicated on “a per-
functory survey” hastily carried out, but there is
insufficient discussion of that survey in what fol-
lows (p. 58). Indeed, only on page 150 are we first
told that the account for the preceptory of Wil-
loughton, ending on July 30, 1309, was “centrally
accounted in a particularly abbreviated style un-
like the previously fulsome account for each man-
or.” Likewise, only amid a discussion of the effects
of the dissolution of the Hospitaler Order in 1540
do we discover that Edward II administered the
Templar estates through his wardrobe not the Ex-
chequer, funneling funds much more closely to his
person and therefore surely affecting the analysis
of the accounts’ veracity and value due to the po-
tential of the commissioners to undervalue re-
sources. This is all the more frustrating as Jeffer-
son discusses the format of the 1338 report sub-
mitted by Philip de Thame, master of the Hospital-
lers in England, to Grand Master Elyan de Villan-
ova (dealt with in chapter 8) in great detail. This is
despite its publication by Lambert Larking in 1857
(The Knights Hospitallers in England: Being the
Report of Prior Philip de Thame to the Grand Mas-
ter Elyan de Villanova for A.D. 1338). These are
not minor quibbles but fundamental to the under-
standing of the form and function of the accounts
and should have underpinned the interpretation.
Moreover, the entire analysis suffers from appar-
ent gaps in Jefferson’s archival trawl. No refer-
ence, for instance, is made to the particulars of ac-
count of the Lincolnshire commissioners sent to
survey former Templar lands in 1323-4; indeed,
that period is hardly addressed at all.[3] There is
also no evidence of an examination of the memori-
da rolls of the Exchequer—those rolls that docu-
ment the mechanics of the processes of audit—to
assist in tracking the activities of royal account-
ants or the transfer of parcels of former Templar
estates in the early fourteenth century.[4] Such la-
cunae, necessarily outlined early in this review, do
somewhat overshadow what is in every other re-
spect an excellent addition to the literature.
The first main chapter deals with fitz Stephen’s 1185 inquest, which determined to assess the location, extent, nature, and value of Templar estates in England and Wales. Here we have a very clear, succinct, and informative discussion of the topography of Lincolnshire, demonstrating the diverse impact of wold, heath, fen, and coast on farming practices and agricultural productivity across the five preceptories; the distribution of properties, chapels, and mills; and, especially, the early patronage of the order in the county. Lincolnshire emerges as a county similar to Yorkshire, full of small parcels of land—most smaller than 100 acres of a total acreage of 17,531—at a low value with which the order was endowed (pp. 30-32).

Over the five succeeding chapters, Jefferson navigates the detailed lists of income and expenses of the Templars’ manors, the inventories of movable and salable livestock, standing crops and stored grain, individual buildings, and itemized equipment produced by Edward II’s agents in the first six years of his reign. These produce a detailed examination of arable and pastoral farming, including two chapters dedicated to sheep farming and the estate personnel, to demonstrate changes in farming practice between the Templars and the royal agents and individuals to whom they were farmed out in the 1310s and beyond. This is the heart of the volume and includes some research gems of wide import. In an opening analysis of the preceptories, the administrative, spiritual, and social heart of estates, Jefferson demonstrates that each had “its own unique physical characteristics” (p. 43). Through a combination of the documentary accounts and speculative employment of the scant archaeological record—only South Witham has been subject to an extensive survey—all beautifully illustrated with striking maps and archaeological plans, he argues for the close alignment of estate management practice with the abbey/grange model of the Cistercians. Furthermore, in discussing the evidence of a functioning lime kiln for mortar and marling at Temple Bruer in the 1311 inventory for that preceptory, as well as evidence of domestic finery (spoons, cups, etc.), Jefferson argues convincingly against the decline Eileen Gooder had apparently demonstrated for Temple Balsall in Warwickshire.

Chapters 3-4 examine the balance of arable and pastoral farming on the former Templar estates and the transition between “sustainable agriculture” and “exploitation” following the dissolution of the order (p. 65). Jefferson takes a finely tuned comparative approach between the major manors of the four surviving preceptories of Aslackby, Eagle, Temple Bruer, and Willoughton, South Witham having been previously abandoned. He suggests the Templars were at the forefront of technological innovation in, for example, marling and using legumes and hired labor for weeding to increase the fertility and productivity of the thinnish soils particularly in the Wolds. One fascinating observation regarding the proportion of wheat—the most valuable cash crop—being allocated by the Templars to their *famuli*, the specialist estate workers, implies a “growing social pressure from the laboring classes to be paid in high-quality grain” on the eve of the Great European Famine of 1315-18 (p. 80).

It is perhaps in the domain of sheep farming, however, where the most important research findings are brought forward in chapter 5. Lincolnshire, one of the country’s most important wool-producing counties for the European fine cloth trade, has a surprisingly small literature on the subject. But, by careful reading of the surviving accounts and inventories, Jefferson posits several important new findings that expand and enhance our knowledge. Take, for example, his calculation of fleece weights of an average of 1.5 pounds, which implies the breeding of “a very small, horned animal, with a short fleece of fine, high-quality wool” (pp. 97-98). Moreover, the distribution of flocks of differing sizes between preceptories reveals the varied contributions to productivity and profitability made across the estates.
A fascinating statistical analysis highlights the maintenance of sizable flocks of wethers—castrated male sheep—at Aslackby, Temple Bruer, and Willoughton but their complete absence from Eagle, where ewes and lambs were predominant. This strongly suggests a specialization of purpose on each preceptory, with Eagle acting as a breeding station, and “a degree of managerial finesse which far transcends mere manorial flock differentiation” and speaks to a “commonality of approach across the Lincolnshire estates” (p. 101). This is further exemplified by the approach to disease, notably the skin disease scab, periodically prevalent from the 1280s, which rendered fleeces unsalable. The accounts reveal around a greater than 10 percent incidence of scab in 1308 and 1309, with lambs and gimmers, the young female breeding stock, worst affected (p. 105). They also show the purchase of expensive palliatives, such as mercury and verdigris. Overall, Jefferson convincingly demonstrates the extent to which the Templars’ Lincolnshire estates were geared toward large-scale commercial wool production on a similar model to that more famously practiced by the Cistercians. Alongside innovative animal husbandry, evidence is marshalled of the assiduous preparation of the clip; the use of uncontracted famuli labor, the equivalent of the Cistercian lay brethren, the conversi, who manned the monastic granges; toll exemptions; and, perhaps most tellingly, the forward selling of wool by advance contract. Such was the apparent commercial value of the estates that Edward II used Lincolnshire wool from sequestrated estates to repay huge debts in kind to his Italian bankers, the Bellardi of Lucca.

The final chapter (chapter 6), based on the royal commissioners’ accounts of 1308-13, examines the workforce on the estates, their dependents, and the beneficiaries of royal favor. It considers those involved with agriculture; the famuli; craftsmen and seasonal workers; the Templars’ clerks and corrodians, including women; those members of the order imprisoned in 1308 after their arrest (these are named but no biographies are attempted); and those who bought standing crops or who were given livestock by royal agents. Intriguingly, this last group included such luminaries as William Melton, controller of Edward II’s wardrobe and future archbishop of York, who in 1309 leased the estate at Willoughton for four months with a large flock of ewes, an incidental but valuable insight into the business activities of one of the king’s closest clerical friends. Such asset stripping was not apparently restricted to royal favorites: Jefferson astutely notes the ease with which the Crown could lean on the Templar estates for prise and purveyance during the failed Scottish campaigns of Edward’s early reign. More broadly, an examination of the employment of the famuli throughout the estates and of the contracting of labor for the harvest highlights nuanced management practices, while evidence from the accounts points toward enhanced diet at harvest time, reinforcing the findings of Christopher C. Dyer.

On November 28, 1313, Edward II officially mandated the transfer of the former Templar estates to the Hospitallers, in accordance with an edict of Clement V. In chapters 7 and 8, Jefferson details this laborious and, in some cases, fruitless and frustrated process. Taking a step-by-step narrative approach and building on the broader surveys of Nicholson and Slavin, he demonstrates that the estates essentially became “pawns in a game of shifting fortunes played by the crown, the baronage and the papacy, which began in the spring of 1312” (p. 154). Unsurprisingly, the Crown, those members of the political community who had gained awards of estates, and the descendants of donors to the Templars offered stern resistance. This truculence was exacerbated by Edward’s military failures, internal political strife, the forfeiture of those who opposed the king following their defeat in 1322 and Edward’s own deposition in 1327, and the effects of climate catastrophe and animal disease that struck in the decade or so from 1315. By 1338, indeed, when Prior

H-Net Reviews
Thame reported to the Hospitaller Grand Master, there remained much to be settled. Worse still, the level of dereliction of manorial buildings highlights the deleterious effects of Crown management and leasing over the previous twenty-five years. The real value of Jefferson's analysis across these two chapters lies in the novelty of his association of the 1308-13 accounts with the previously better-known report and the unequivocal demonstration that in Lincolnshire former Templar property was continuously denied to the Hospitallers to a much greater extent than hitherto allowed.

The ninth and final chapter brings the story forward two centuries, though little explanation is offered as to why there is no analysis of the intervening period, leaving the reader with an unexplained informational black hole. In two further documentary vignettes Jefferson skillfully places the Valor Ecclesiasticus of 1535, the prelude to the Hospitallers’ dissolution in 1540, and Queen Mary’s restoration of the order by letters patent of 1557 under the microscope. He slots local phenomena, such as the Lincolnshire Rising of 1536 and the grant of the Hospitaller estates locally to Robert Tyrwhitt, one of the Valor commissioners, into the broader national and international context of religious reform and popular turmoil. Such is the impression given of vultures picking over the carcass of a dead animal in the reign of Edward VI that it can occasion little surprise that Mary’s attempted restoration of all Hospitaller properties to the preceptories of Willoughton, Temple Bruer, and Eagle showed only “a mere approximation of the original estates but one which aimed to compensate the new order for losses to secularisation and poor recordkeeping” (pp. 223-24).

Overall, Jefferson has produced a valuable survey of documentary flashpoints in the long history of the estates of the Knights Templar in Lincolnshire. His detailed analysis will provide scholars of a range of disciplines, and not simply those limited to the Templars themselves or to ecclesiastical and social history and archaeology, with a wealth of information on estate management and farming practices, logistics, employment practices, and diet, to name but a few, with which they can begin to answer their own questions. While there are essential caveats relating to some aspects of the archival survey, this is a study that deserves to be widely read.

Notes

[2]. The King’s Survey of 1308-13, E 358/18-20, The National Archives, Kew, Richmond, UK (hereafter TNA).

[3]. King’s Remembrancer: Extents, Inquisitions and Valors of Forfeited Lands, Templar Lands, 1323-24, E 142/106, TNA.

[4]. Memoranda rolls of the Exchequer, series E 159 and E 368, TNA.

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