



Baldwin of Jerusalem, 1100-1118

Susan B. Edgington

New York: Routledge, 2019

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Baldwin I of Jerusalem, 1100-1118. By Susan B. Edgington. New York: Routledge, 2019. ISBN 978-1-4724-3356-5. 204 pp. £115.

Baldwin of Boulogne was a relatively minor member of the Northern Frankish nobility in the late eleventh century. As the third son of Count Eustace II of Boulogne, he was unlikely to inherit any lands, and had originally been marked for a career in the church before pursuing the life of a knight. However, Baldwin's participation in the First Crusade (1095-1099) catapulted him to international importance, when he became the first Latin Count of Edessa and then the first Latin King of Jerusalem. Indeed, it was through Baldwin's determined and bellicose efforts that the nascent Kingdom of Jerusalem survived the first precarious decade of its existence. Yet despite the spectacular rise of Baldwin, from a non-inheriting third son to the crown of Jerusalem, he has never been the subject of a dedicated biography. Susan B. Edgington has produced a focused and engaging study for the *Rulers of the Latin East* series, which explores not only the different stages in the extraordinary career of Baldwin I, but also the nature of the key sources for his life through which he must be viewed by historians.

This concise volume comprises of ten chapters that can be divided into two distinct sections. The first five chapters take the form of a traditional biographical narrative, exploring the life of Baldwin chronologically from his birth in the early 1060s to the first year of his reign as the king of Jerusalem in 1101. The final five chapters provide thematic discussions on topics such as warfare, administration, and relations with the church during the eighteen years of his reign, from 1100 to 1118. This shift in style can be a little bit jarring for the reader initially, as some details on the events of Baldwin's rule in Edessa, his coronation, his early reign in Jerusalem, and his relations with the Latin Church are dealt with more thoroughly in later chapters away from the narrative that they would otherwise illuminate. However, by employing this change in style mid-way through Baldwin's career, Edgington avoids becoming bogged down in any unnecessary contextual discussion of the First Crusade and the early years of the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem. A wealth of literature already exists upon these subjects, and they have been wisely minimised in the text so that the reader does not lose sight of Baldwin along the way. By keeping the narrative focused on Baldwin's actions during the First Crusade, he appears as a clearly defined and more nuanced commanding figure in the campaign, when he has traditionally been overshadowed by more celebrated crusading personalities and cast in a secondary role, notable only for his Armenian and Edessan adventures. Edgington places greater emphases on these actions and their importance to the wider strategy of the First

Crusade, while the volume's philological approach better illuminates Baldwin's personality and the development of the ruthless and pragmatic traits that would later serve him well as King of Jerusalem. Similarly, his responses to the challenges he faced as king are not lost among a narrative of consistent warfare, invasion, and counter-invasion that characterised the early years of the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem. Rather, the thematic chapters enable a broader analysis of Baldwin's reign, revealing the influences upon his governing policies and his ruling personality as a monarch.

In his early life, Baldwin appears as a loyal, dependable, and increasingly experienced figure who supported his brother, Godfrey of Bouillon, as a potential heir to his lands in Lotharingia. This role was carried through into the First Crusade, where Baldwin, as part of Godfrey's contingent, often acted as his principal lieutenant. It was during the First Crusade, and in particular his ambitions concerning the county of Edessa, that Baldwin's determination and ruthlessness to succeed politically began to emerge. Though these characteristics have led both contemporaries and modern historians to view him less favourably than Godfrey, they were ultimately beneficial to his reign as the first Latin King of Jerusalem. As a king, Baldwin was a ruler who was always on the move. He appears as a strong, personally courageous, and dynamic leader with clear priorities that defined the manner of his kingship. His long running conflict with the Patriarch of Jerusalem, his relations with the Latin Church, and diplomacy with the Italian mercantile cities were all shaped by his need to finance the defence of his new kingdom. Baldwin pursued these objectives single-mindedly during his reign, and though in the case of the Italian merchants his decisions were detrimental to the Latin kingdom in the long term, they were practical and ultimately necessary for the security of the realm.

It should be noted that there is little in the way of an introduction to this work, and the author goes straight into the biography of Baldwin from the very first page. Discussions of source material and historiography are brought up in the specific chapters where they are most relevant, and Edgington deftly weaves these debates into the analysis of Baldwin's career and character. Edgington's critical study of the source materials fleshes out and clarifies many of the scholarly discussions that surround Baldwin, including the circumstances of his acquisition of Edessa, his selection and coronation as king of Jerusalem, and his rivalry with Tancred, prince of Galilee, and Daimbert of Pisa. The source material for Baldwin's life prior to the First Crusade is limited, while those sources that cover his later life are often more concerned with the greater events in which Baldwin was participating than with Baldwin himself. Indeed, two of the most detailed accounts that give us an insight into Baldwin as a man—William of Tyre and

Albert of Aachen—are both far removed from Baldwin in time and space respectively. Consequently, Baldwin as an individual does become a little lost in some of the later thematic sections, but Edgington does an excellent job of making the most of the available source material and exploring the wider forces at play that helped shape Baldwin's kingship. Inevitably, there must be some measure of reasoned speculation on the part of the biographer, but Edgington's familiarity with the source material is amply demonstrated, and the author adroitly teases out details from conflicting accounts to form a more complete and compelling image of Baldwin.

Edgington presents Baldwin I not as a good man, but rather a man who was good at being a king. Baldwin was the right man at the right time, and was exactly what the Kingdom of Jerusalem needed during its formative years. Similarly, this excellent biography, which brings together and expands upon many of the strands of the current research on Baldwin I, is exactly what scholars of the Latin East have needed.

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