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David S. Bachrach, *Religion and the Conduct of War c.300-c.1215*. Woodbridge, UK: Boydell Press, 2003. iv + 216 pp. Notes, bibliography, and index. \$75.00 U.S. (hb). ISBN 0-85115-944-3.

Catherine Hanley, *War and Combat, 1150-1270: The Evidence from Old French Literature*. Cambridge, UK: D.S. Brewer, 2003. iii + 261 pp. Table, notes, bibliography, and index. \$75.00 U.S. (hb). ISBN 0-85991-781-9.

Review by Malcolm Barber, University of Reading.

Only a generation separates the Battle of Hastings from the First Crusade, yet they seem to belong to quite different eras. Although William the Conqueror's soldiers were fighting under a papal banner and had confessed their sins on the eve of battle, they were still required to do penance for the blood they would shed the following day. The first crusaders, on the other hand, believed in the view of the author of the *Gesta Francorum*; if they died in the course of the expedition, their souls flew straight to Heaven because their sins had been remitted in return for taking part in the holy war.[1] As far as the papacy was concerned both causes were just, but at Hastings nothing changed the long-held belief that all killing--whatever the circumstances--was sinful, whereas at Dorylaeum, Antioch, and Jerusalem, the participants were assured that they had earned salvation for their praiseworthy courage in taking on the unbelievers. In the second half of the eleventh century, ecclesiastical perceptions of those who fought underwent a crucial change: the imposition of penance for the sin of homicide was replaced by the incentive of remission of sins in return for defence of the faith.

The consequences for Latin Christian society were profound. An increasingly self-confident aristocracy appropriated for itself a status hitherto largely absent and celebrated its elevation with the creation of its own vernacular literature of epic and romance. Even though this improvement in status owed much to the church's promotion of what Guibert of Nogent famously defined as a new way for laymen to attain salvation through holy warfare, this literature, being entirely class orientated, took little account of ecclesiastical views.[2]

The history of these changes is shown in these two very different but complementary books. David Bachrach's sources include chronicles, charters, conciliar decrees, sermons, and treatises of the early medieval church--a culture exclusively Latin and the preserve of an educated elite. Catherine Hanley's raw material is to be found in the vernacular literature that burgeoned in Anglo-Norman and French lands from the mid-twelfth century onwards. Of course, vernacular did not replace Latin, but it did offer an alternative focus of attention for a noble class previously dependent for its codes of behaviour on models supplied by clerics, who often did not share its values or sympathise with its aspirations.

For the soldiers of the Christianised Roman Empire in the fourth century and after, there was a fundamental need for reassurance that the occupation which they followed, with its inevitable risk of sudden death, would not lead them into irretrievable damnation. At the same time, commanders wanted forces confident in the righteousness of their cause. As in so many areas, therefore, the price of success for the Christian Church was its willingness to compromise with existing thought patterns; there was no chance that the pacifism of the early Christians would survive the incorporation of the church into the mainstream of political life in the early middle ages. The result was the development of an increasingly nuanced system of penance and repeatable confession for soldiers, closely tied both to the state of mind of the participants and to the nature of their opponents--a situation that enabled the

church to insert its own moral and ethical concerns about the conduct of warfare into the value systems of early medieval warriors. In this sense there is an underlying continuity with the era of the crusades in that, for the holy warrior, motivation determines the legitimacy of his killing of others, a concept underlined by St. Bernard's distinction between "malicide" and homicide. A concomitant of this view was the sharpening of the distinction between Christians and non-Christians; the slaughter of Muslims, pagans, and heretics was quite different from the killing of one's co-religionists. Thus the rites and ceremonies that the Christian Church superimposed upon the Roman and Germanic warriors helped to enforce what Bachrach calls "a sense of corporate identity" which, by its nature, excluded outsiders (p. 39).

For the self-conscious aristocracy of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries this exclusivity opened the way for the creation of a new code of noble behaviour, secular in nature and with scant reference to ecclesiastical constraints. Hanley's aristocrats were "self-validated" by their knightly prowess, tales of which they never tired of hearing (pp. 162, 180-81, 226). It is a literature centred upon the achievements, feelings, and motives of the knight; even "the worship of the lady" incorporated in romance was little more than another vehicle for expressing these knightly values. Similarly, while there were many and varied motives for crusading, the one element common to all the noble participants seems to have been the status which it brought. God's approval necessarily remained crucial, for, like their early medieval predecessors, did they did not wish to be damned, and the crusaders continued to need clerical services in the form of preaching, hearing confession, prayers, and masses. However, like the courtly lady, crusading is a means of projecting knightly values in the vernacular literature, not of enforcing the morality of the church. Not surprisingly, an aristocracy coalescing around dubbing ceremonies, coats of arms, real and fictional genealogies, and tightened inheritance customs, produced a literature far more suited to its true mores than those offered by the church.

Naturally, the standards derived from such a class-based literature—loyalty, fighting ability, physical courage, merciful treatment of defeated enemies—applied only to other nobles, not to common soldiers or the civilian population. Even consideration for noble women was only relevant in quite specific circumstances. It was a world created for knights in which the clergy—useful for performing the appropriate ceremonies—are present only because of their relationship to this central element. Thus, epic literature was designed to appeal to its audience by providing realistic and recognisable contexts; throughout the ages male aristocrats have been both hugely knowledgeable and deeply preoccupied with the details of military and equine equipment and its use. At the same time, however, the audience was well aware of the conventions, so that often realism had to give way to the ultimate end of glorifying the knight whose heroism is shown by (for example) his ability to triumph over an impossibly large number of opponents. Not surprisingly, women are present mainly to feed this male vanity, in that beautiful and fertile females readily fall in love with the hero—sometimes when they have not even seen him. Romances pay more attention to narrative consistency and individual feelings, as well as setting themselves the higher goal of offering what was coming to be regarded as exemplary behaviour to their audience, but the attitudes and susceptibilities of the noble warriors remain at their heart. Even so, contrary to common perception, they did not replace epic, which continued to be popular even when this new genre became well established.

The church's engagement with the problems of soldiering at least offered the opportunity to impart moral lessons on proper behaviour, but for most individuals this seems to have impinged more strongly on fears of damnation than upon any considerations of personal conduct during actual conflicts. Thus Bachrach shows that at the battle of Muret in 1213, Simon of Montfort's men were clearly worried that launching an attack on fellow Christians might be punished in purgatory, especially as the rapidity with which their commander required them to strike meant that many had had no time for confession. Assurance of heavenly reward from Bishop Garsias of Comminges was apparently not enough; they needed confirmation of this from the other bishops as well (pp.144-47). In many ways, peer pressure

reflected in their own literature seems to have been more influential on actual conduct, since Hanley believes that—in the romances at least—there are standards to which aristocratic warriors might aspire, if only in their treatment of each other. None of this applied beyond these narrow circles; neither pagan Rome nor medieval Christendom had much consideration for those outside their own polity, whether they were Germanic barbarians, heretics, or “Saracens.” Thus, the Cathars, who considered that the Catholic Church was the real Babylon and believed themselves to be the true heirs of the pacifism of the early Christians, were ironically the most spectacular western targets of the crusading attitudes of the High Middle Ages.

Both books are conventional in structure. Bachrach follows a straightforward chronological path, while Hanley sets out the reality and ideals of warfare in the first part in order to provide a context for a more specialist literary analysis, which is the core of her work. In Hanley’s case, Part I is less confidently handled, reflecting the book’s origin as a doctoral thesis essentially based on Old French literature rather than upon medieval military history as such. Neither book revolutionises the subject, but both bring a satisfying expertise to bear upon an activity of fundamental importance to medieval life. They can profitably be used in conjunction with recent work on perceptions of warfare in the High Middle Ages by John Gillingham and Matthew Strickland.[3]

Warfare places men under stress. These two books, through the use of very different sources and methodologies, show how medieval men coped with that stress, and sought such reassurance from both their religious mentors and their secular peers as would enable them to function in their own military environment.

NOTES

[1] Rosalind Hill, ed., *The Deeds of the Franks and the other Pilgrims to Jerusalem* (London: T. Nelson, 1962), p. 40.

[2] Guibert of Nogent, *Dei Gesta per Francos*, edited by R.B.C. Huygens, Corpus Christianorum, Continuatio Mediaevalis 127A (Turnhout: Brepols, 1996), p. 87.

[3] J. Gillingham, “1066 and the Introduction of Chivalry into England,” in *Law and Government in Medieval England and Normandy*, edited by G. Garnett and J. Hudson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 31-55; and M. Strickland, *War and Chivalry: The Conduct and Perception of War in England and Normandy, 1066-1217* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

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