

Ronnie Ellenblum, *Crusader Castles and Modern Histories* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), ISBN: 100521860830.

In *Crusader Castles and Modern Histories* Ronnie Ellenblum addresses two of the big questions that lie at the heart of crusader studies: the relationship between European settlers in the Levant and the local population, and the impact of the Crusades on wider European and Muslim cultures. Ellenblum's innovative and comprehensively argued work determines the imperatives that drove crusader settlement and fortification in the Holy Land. His conclusions define relations between Franks, local populations and Muslim powers in terms of a continuous economic, social and technological dialogue.

In this book Ellenblum continues the process of exploring the interaction between East and West begun in his study on *Frankish Rural Settlement in the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem* (Cambridge, 1998). Having demonstrated that Frankish settlement in the countryside was far more widespread and intense than previously believed and often associated with Eastern Christian areas, here he analyses the impact of the changing military and technological situation on the development of Frankish fortifications in the Levant. Importantly, he identifies that most crusader castles were not constructed in response to a climate of fear, but formed economic and social centres away from areas under external threat.

The book is divided into four parts: the first half concentrates on the historiography of the Crusades and the second half on influences on crusader fortification. Initially Ellenblum traces the development of crusade historiography from a pan-European dialogue into separate national narratives with a detailed review of 'nationalist' approaches typified by Joseph-François Michaud and Heinrich von Sybel. The emphasis on national contributions, Ellenblum argues, partially supports the notion that nation-states create national identities and thus geographically limit

national histories and mythologies. With space determining the borders of 'legitimate history', countries create 'golden ages' that reflect the actual borders of the nation-state even if they lack ethnic, religious or linguistic connections. This leads to an interesting perspective on modern Israeli attitudes towards Palestine and the Crusades.

Ellenblum moves on to consider colonial and post-colonialist discourses and their impact on models of crusader settlement. Here Emmanuel Guillaume Rey, Gaston Dodu and Claude Reignier Conder are used to highlight the vision of intercultural harmony and enlightened governance prevalent in French and British histories of the Crusades from the late nineteenth century. This sets the scene for a comprehensive review of Raymond Smail's and, especially, Joshua Prawer's anti-colonialist reactions. In viewing the western settlers as an exploitative elite set aside both spatially and economically from local subjects, the anti-colonialist tradition made assumptions on demography, cultural interaction and security that are contested by Ellenblum. He then examines the impact colonial and anti-colonial paradigms had on their understanding of crusader settlement and architecture by focusing on castle design, European and Near Eastern influences on Frankish settlement in the Holy Land, and definitions of terms such as 'city' and 'castle'. These chapters all lead the reader to consider the existence of an intercultural dialogue, an acceptance of the diverse nature of medieval settlement and a conclusion that fortifications were not all constructed for purely military reasons.

Having established problems with existing perspectives on crusader settlement and fortification, the author focuses on the concept of borders and introduces geographical theories on space, centres and spheres of influence to argue against the existence of linear political borders in the Middle Ages. From this base, Ellenblum asserts that the complex shared sovereignty of parts of the Levant undermines the existence of a defended linear border between Frankish and Muslim territories. In an empirically based survey of crusader fortifications, Ellenblum crucially

establishes that previous theories on the spatial distribution of castles neglected to locate structures temporally as well as physically. Thus, they included castles that did not exist at the same time in a mutually supporting defensive system that underpinned a belief in a climate of fear among Frankish settlers. To establish a more subtle understanding of crusader fortification in the twelfth century, Ellenblum proposes three time frames: an initial phase of Frankish invasion and expansion (1099-1115); a period of relative security and peace (1115-67); and increasing pressure on the Latin East from resurgent Muslim powers (1167-87). He then uses textual and archaeological evidence aided by maps of military expeditions and settlement to show that many castles were built during the periods of Frankish expansion and stability, far from areas of external threat. He concludes that many fortifications were centres of settlement with economic and administrative functions as well as a military purpose. It is in the later period that one sees more sophisticated castles being built in response to the growing Muslim threat.

Ellenblum consolidates his argument with a detailed study of the architectural development of Frankish fortifications in the Levant. Based on an ongoing interaction between the attributes of attack and defence, he explores the impact of the evolving Muslim threat on crusader castle design, from the likely length of a siege prior to successful intervention by Frankish land forces, to the development and use of heavy siege weapons. It was, the author asserts, the reduction in the capability of Frankish land forces and the increased use of heavy siege weapons by the Muslims that led to the construction of ever more resilient fortifications, culminating in concentric castles. It is here that an anomaly emerges: in comparison to previous detailed argumentation the assertion that the Franks adopted a fortification based defensive culture is unconvincing (pp. 276-84), as is his view that 'cowardice' was behind Frankish reluctance to face the Muslims in battle in 1183 (pp. 278, 281).

Ellenblum's close analysis of the impact on the design and distribution of crusader fortifications

by non-military functions and geography as well as perceived threat levels, the dialogues between East and West, and attack and defence is a significant addition to the history of the Latin East. The author reminds us that all spheres of human activity create their own geographies. These should be approached empirically without territorial or political presumptions and with consideration that the production of history is always an embedded process.

Stephen Bennett¹

University of London.

¹ Stephen Bennett's (bennett_stephen876@btinternet.com) academic interests are primarily in medieval military history with emphasis on military science and the art of war, representations of close combat, and the interplay between military cultures in the Near East and Iberia. He holds a BA (Hons.) in Humanities (1990) and an MA in Defence Diplomacy (2005). He is also a graduate of Royal Military Academy Sandhurst (1991) and Spanish Command and Staff College (2004). He is presently undertaking a part time MA in Crusader Studies at University of London.