
Book Reviews

The Catalan Expedition to the East: From the *Chronicle* of Ramon Muntaner. Translated by Robert D. Hughes with an introduction by J.N. Hillgarth. Barcino/Tamesis. 2006. 163 pp. £14.99 paperback. ISBN 1 85566 131 4.

The thirteenth and fourteenth centuries saw the composition of a number of accounts by soldiers of campaigns in which they took part, written not in scholarly Latin but in the author's own vernacular. Among the most celebrated are Geoffrey of Villehardouin's and Robert of Clari's descriptions of the Fourth Crusade and John of Joinville's *Life of St Louis*, which is an account of the Seventh Crusade's disastrous expedition to Egypt in 1248–50. This new translation from the medieval Catalan by Robert Hughes brings to the reader of English the work of Ramon Muntaner (1265–1336) and his narrative of the adventures of a company of mercenaries in the near east in the years 1303 to 1311. As J.N. Hillgarth makes clear in his introduction, Muntaner's account of the Catalan company forms part of a much larger chronicle which covers the years 1205 to 1328 and celebrates the achievements of the royal house of Barcelona. The section translated by Hughes, however, deserves to be made available separately because of the intriguing detail it gives about fourteenth-century warfare.

When, in August 1302, peace was declared between Charles II of Naples and Frederick III of Sicily, Roger of Flor, a renegade Templar and leader of a band of Catalan and Aragonese mercenaries in Frederick's service, faced the problem that the treaty of Bretigny was later to pose for the English Free Companies of the Hundred Years War. Some means of earning a living had to be found for himself and his men (pp. 36–37). He therefore contacted the Byzantine emperor Andronicus II Palaiologos (1282–1328), offering to fight for the emperor against the Turks who had overrun most of the Byzantine eastern provinces in Asia Minor. The offer was accepted. The company travelled to Constantinople, where Roger received the title of grand duke and the hand of the emperor's niece in marriage, and his men

were promised generous rewards for their service. They were then unleashed on the unsuspecting Turks, who were driven out of Cyzicus (pp. 55–56).

Unfortunately, relations between the Catalans and their Byzantine paymasters soon deteriorated. Muntaner claimed that the Byzantines paid the mercenaries in debased coin (p. 66), though he does not mention the habit of the Catalans of plundering the emperor's subjects as ruthlessly as they did the Turks. In a ham-fisted attempt to rid themselves of their erstwhile allies, the Byzantines had Roger of Flor assassinated in April 1305 (pp. 73–75), only to have unleashed on them the fury of the Catalans, who proceeded to ravage imperial territory in Thrace from their base in Gallipoli for several years thereafter. The Byzantines were relieved of the Catalan menace only when the company moved south to enter the service of the Duke of Athens. When he too reneged on the agreement, the Catalans seized control of the duchy of Athens and placed it under the crown of Aragon (pp. 152–53). There the adventure came to an end, and the Catalans remained in control of Athens until 1388.

Muntaner was an eyewitness to many of these events since he himself was a member of the company, and was given the job of commanding the garrison at Gallipoli when the main body of the company was out foraging (pp. 29, 38, 61, 75, 104). His descriptions of battle scenes are extraordinarily vivid and memorable, such as the incident when a Byzantine mercenary attempted to flee with his wife on horseback closely pursued by three Catalans. When it became clear that escape was impossible, he kissed his wife, then killed her and dispatched two of his pursuers, before he too succumbed (p. 101). It is also the detail that makes Muntaner's tale so compelling. He tells us how much a fourteenth-century mercenary could expect to be paid, ranging from four ounces of gold a month for a heavily armoured horseman to one ounce for a footman (pp. 39–40). He describes the careful arrangements for billeting the troops and reimbursing their hosts, and mentions that the company employed scribes to attend to such matters (pp. 51–52, 98).

Historians of medieval warfare will be grateful to Robert Hughes for making this text available. An index of names would have been helpful to trace some of the more obscure individuals through the chronicle. More use could perhaps have been made in the footnotes of the work of George Pachymeres, the contemporary chronicler who gives the Byzantine version of events, especially as there is a new edition and French translation by Albert Failler (Paris, 1984–2000). These minor quibbles aside, one can only welcome this readable translation, published as it is in accessible paperback form.

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