



How Medieval Europe was Ruled.

Edited by Christian Raffensperger.

Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2024.

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How Medieval Europe was Ruled. Edited by Christian Raffensperger. Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2024. ISBN 978-1-032-10016-6. Xvi + 242pp. £35.99.



cholarship on rulership in medieval Europe has overwhelmingly focused on monarchy. More often than not, the monarchies of England and France have been understood as the main paradigms for exploring the evolution of royal power (and rulership more generally) in the pre-modern world.

This very welcome collection of essays seeks to challenge these prevailing attitudes and explore the different forms of rulership in medieval Europe. Rather than outrightly rejecting the royal paradigm, the collection aims to foster a dialogue between established approaches to monarchical rule and the emerging and exciting research on aristocratic and urban rulership. Moreover, the collection seeks to look past the dominant 'Western European' model of interpretation and draw comparisons with other regions of Europe (and indeed beyond). One of the main strengths of this volume is the geographic range under investigation: the fourteen essays cover different forms of rulership from medieval Iberia to Byzantium and from Norway to Khazaria.

The introduction by Christian Raffensperger provides a broad overview of recent developments in the historiography of medieval European rulership and the reader is directed to some of the main debates. A core objective of the volume is to demonstrate how power was rarely exercised in a vacuum: royal rulership was often dependent on aristocratic (nobles, dukes, etc.) ecclesiastical (bishops, abbots, abbesses, etc.), and urban lordship to ensure the effective running of a kingdom.

In the first chapter, Simon Doubleday examines how these relationships worked in eleventh-century Léon-Galicia. By focusing on the surviving will of a priest named Ecta, the chapter explores the various symbiotic connections between the crown, the bishops and abbots, and the nobility in upholding royal authority.

In the second chapter, Lois Huneycutt examines the roles of queens within the Anglo-Norman realm. The chapter offers a masterclass in demonstrating that queens were just as effective and active as their male counterparts. Moreover, contemporary chroniclers fully expected queens to assume the mantle of leadership when required; the idea that queens played a limited role in the administration of their realms is very much a more recent notion and the chapter dispels many of these misconceptions.

In the following chapter, the reader is transported to Khazaria. Working across a range of sources in different languages (Greek, Arabic, and Latin) Alex Mesibov Feldman

investigates how the enigmatic Khazars ruled their realm. The chapter offers fascinating insights into the Khazars' decision to adopt Judaism in the early ninth century and how this affected their lordship. Emir O. Filipović's chapter examines the dynamic between the ruling house in Bosnia and the nobility, demonstrating the level of power held by the regional aristocrats and their capacity to shape the formation of the kingdom during the high and late medieval period.

Katalin Szende's contribution deals with the issue of urban rulership in Hungary. Compared with other regions of Europe, urbanisation occurred relatively late in Hungary. The granting of royal charters to newly established towns should largely be seen as an attempt to promote economic activity in these centres, rather than necessarily promoting a greater degree of urban autonomy.

Paul Knoll's chapter explores the history of high and late medieval Poland. It is clear from reading this chapter alongside Filipović's contribution that Poland bears comparison with Bosnia: a certain but limited degree of centralisation did occur but the kingdom largely remained a patchwork of entities with the aristocracy enjoying a range of freedoms and powers.

The theme of stepping beyond purely centralised frameworks is continued by Nathan Leidholm who considers the challenges faced by would-be centralising Byzantine emperors in ruling the most distant parts of their multi-ethnic empire. Erin L. Jordan explores how rulership functioned within the Crusader states. Often it is assumed that a Western-style method of governance was imposed upon the newly created entities: the chapter challenges this notion and reveals that the Christian minority elite developed a collaborative model to meet the challenges of ruling a land surrounded by hostile forces and bereft of resources and regular supplies. Kirsi Salonen examines how the Papacy established a very effective and wide-ranging bureaucracy that eventually came to penetrate every aspect of daily life in Christendom: the chapter offers a rich case study for exploring the different levels of bureaucracy that underpinned Papal power. Hans Jacob Orning explores a similar theme in how the kings of Norway attempted to rule their vast realm. By the 1260s, the Norwegian monarchy ruled the largest conglomeration of lands in Europe. The heterogeneous nature of the kingdom made it very difficult to pursue any meaningful form of centralisation and the kings were eventually forced to delegate authority to regional magnates. Oftentimes historians can become too reliant on a single source for studying their chosen topic. Christian Raffensperger's chapter explores the pitfalls of such an approach in an enlightening chapter on Kyivan Rus:

Raffensperger considers what a combination of chronicles and law codes can reveal about the complexity of ruling a kingdom in medieval Eastern Europe. Jonathan R. Lyon's contribution investigates how decentralised states were governed. Using the example of the Holy Roman Empire, Lyon reveals how families such as the Babenbergs, Habsburgs, and the Wittlesbach dynasty of Bavaria engaged with imperial rule: while their power derived from local and regional centres, they were also active in shaping the governance of the empire. Edward Schoolman's chapter offers a sweeping survey of rulership in early medieval Italy, tracing the evolution of governing practices from the immediate post-Roman period down to the Ottonians. In another richly illustrated piece, the chapter delineates the various intersections between urban and regional power centres as well as aristocratic and royal governance. The final chapter, by Kiril Petkov, focuses on the Bulgarian state from its inception in the late seventh century through to its collapse in the wake of the Ottoman conquest in the early fifteenth century. Petkov's chapter investigates the difficulty of reconstructing the early history of Bulgaria but also demonstrates how the polity (and the rulership of the territory) was shaped by Bulgaria's relations with often hostile neighbours. The book also contains a series of detailed maps covering the various regions under examination and has a helpful index.

Overall, this is a very impressive collection of essays. As noted, one of the main strengths of the volume is the sheer range of regions under examination. The broad geographic and chronological sweep of case studies will make this collection attractive to a very wide audience. On one level, the essays offer an excellent summary of recent work on specific areas of Eurasia. Naturally, this will be of interest to scholars working on these regions. However, on a wider level, the volume will be an important point of reference for scholars interested in comparative approaches to medieval European history. While this collection has focused mainly on the theme of rulership and lordship, the essays should also be useful to those interested in cultural, economic, and social history.

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