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Les Stratégies Matrimoniales (IXe-XIIIe siècle), ed. M. Aurell (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013; pp. 363).

Although most historians are comfortably aware of the importance of marriage in binding medieval society together, it is still a comparatively rare pleasure to find a volume of essays that focuses on it exclusively – and especially one bearing quite so unromantic a title as *Les Stratégies Matrimoniales*. Indeed, it might be thought that this constitutes reason enough, on its own, for a review. More to the point, though, it should be emphasized that, like medieval marriage itself, *Les Stratégies Matrimoniales* represents an exercise in corporate bridge-building: in its particular case, between scholars investigating medieval marriage in a whole range of ways, and from a variety of different perspectives. It is worth adding that a review here, in *EHR*, could serve as a faltering step towards closing one specific gulf, namely that between Anglophone and French medieval studies – a gulf that is much easier to deplore than it is to put right.

Born out of a two-day colloquium, *Les Stratégies Matrimoniales* takes its place as volume fourteen of the series entitled ‘*Histoires de famille: la parenté au Moyen Âge*’. Both the series as a whole, and this particular volume, were created under the auspices of the distinguished French scholar Martin Aurell, best known to English-speakers for his work on the ‘Plantagenet empire’ (2003; English translation, 2007). *Les Stratégies Matrimoniales* contains some twenty papers in total. The vast majority, of course, are in French; the remaining five are in English. Excluding the introduction and conclusion, the book is divided into three sections. However, this structure is not quite watertight, indicating the difficulties of pulling a work like this into a balanced and coherent whole. The first section examines

aristocratic marriages within the context of dynastic politics. Whilst the majority of these papers are devoted to France itself, there is also a substantial nod towards a French outlier, southern Italy during the Norman conquest. The second section – which goes under the brutal title of ‘Échanger des femmes et des terres’ – focuses particularly on Aurell’s beloved Plantagenets, and on the Iberian peninsula. That said, it is pleasing to see the parameters widen at the end of this section, with studies of the Frankish Morea and on the early marital history of the Habsburgs (the very beginnings of ‘Tu, felix Austria, nube’, as Cyrille Debris notes on p. 211). The third section is noticeably looser, encompassing everything else. The editor, Aurell, has provided a catch-all label: ‘législation civile, normes canoniques et imaginaire matrimonial’.

If the volume has an overarching aim, then it is to escape from the shadow of Aurell’s maître, Georges Duby, and, in particular, to get beyond the latter’s emphasis on the tension between a ‘morale des prêtres’ and a ‘morale des guerriers’ (p. 353). In this respect, at least, Aurell’s wide-ranging introduction raises all of the right issues. Above all, he stresses that the marriage market, in the central Middle Ages, was not conducted against an unchanging theoretical backdrop. One could point, for instance, to a number of alternative or subsidiary themes, from the creeping sacramentalization of marriage to the sudden loosening of the canons surrounding consanguinity (a subject explored in more detail in Carole Avignon’s paper on the vicissitudes of the early Capetians). By contrast, Didier Lett’s conclusion is at its best when it points forward to several other topics that still warrant considerable discussion. For example, as Lett rightly notes, an undue focus on powerful males has led to a comparative neglect of the role that leading women played in arranging dynastic marriages – and that is before we turn to the impact of a wide range of other figures: envoys, mediators, advisors, and so and so forth.

A number of papers in the volume stand out. Christian Settipani's examination of 'unusual marriages' in the Frankish world offers a fine reconsideration of the vexed question of how the name 'Philip' ended up in the French royal family. Fabrice Lachaud provides a magisterial essay on the Craon dynasty, showing how they wriggled between the Angevins and the Capetians in the hothouse environment of the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. Perhaps the volume's most remarkable study, though, is Olivier Hanne's analysis of Qur'anic marriage as mediated through the lens of Robert of Ketton's translation (ordered by no less a person than Peter the Venerable). Hanne's paper – which includes a lengthy appendix of passages taken from Robert's Qur'an – serves to emphasize just how much was 'lost in translation', both accidentally and deliberately.

One of the book's finest features is the way in which it weaves in discussion of marriage as depicted in key literary texts, from the Bible itself to Wolfram's *Parzival*. The centrepiece of the volume, in this particular respect, is provided by Girbea's fascinating analysis of the popular topos of cross-cultural marriage in medieval romances. Yet an occasional sense of missed opportunity lurks in some of this. For instance, no mention is made of perhaps the most fascinating 'mixed marriage' proposal in the entire Middle Ages: namely, that between Saladin's brother, al-Adil, and Richard the Lionheart's sister Joanna (with the intention that the couple would then rule the Holy Land together). But the most serious problem is a much simpler one, and it is arguably unavoidable in collaborative works like this. It is the variety in the quality of the papers themselves – from the fine examples mentioned above to a couple of much weaker ones, which I will not cite here.

The volume is well laid out, although it is worth noting that it does not include an index. It is obviously essential that a book like this has good and clear family trees, and, indeed, it does. The same cannot be said of all the maps, however. One paper is followed by simply too many, whilst another map leaves much to be desired in the presentation.

Les Stratégies Matrimoniales focuses attention on a highly important subject matter, and the best papers in the collection open up a range of novel approaches to it. Quite apart from this, one can only applaud at the efforts that have been made to bring diverse scholarly communities together. All in all, it is a valuable, if variable, volume of essays.

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