



*Baldwin of Bourcq: Count of Edessa
and King of Jerusalem (1100-1131)*

Alan V. Murray

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Had it not been for the success of the First Crusade (1095-1099), the life and career of Baldwin of Bourcq would have likely remained in obscurity. Baldwin, a simple knight and younger son from a well-connected seigneurial family from the Champagne-Ardenne region of France, rose from his modest beginnings to become the Count of Edessa in 1100, and then the King of Jerusalem in 1118, in the newly formed Crusader States of the Latin East. As King of Jerusalem, Baldwin would go on to expand the borders of the kingdom, establish its first laws, and be the founder of a dynasty whose descendants would rule for the next two centuries. Yet despite his remarkable rise to power, one that typifies the rags to riches narrative commonly associated with medieval crusaders, Baldwin has never been the subject of a dedicated biography. Medieval writers were often more interested in the life of one of Baldwin's kinsmen and royal predecessors, Godfrey of Bouillon, who was a hero of the First Crusade and the first ruler of the nascent kingdom of Jerusalem in 1099-1100. Fortunately, in this first ever biography of Baldwin of Bourcq, Alan V. Murray has produced a comprehensive study of the monarch that contextualises his rule as both Count of Edessa and King of Jerusalem in the wider geopolitics of the Middle East, which will be a core work for all scholars of the Crusades and the Latin East for many years to come.

The book follows a standard chronological format, and Murray begins the volume with an introduction discussing the limitations of the source material for Baldwin's life, and how this has shaped the structure of the study. Though Baldwin reigned as Count of Edessa from 1100 to 1118, surviving evidence for his early life and rule in Edessa is notably lacking. While there is much more evidence for his reign as King of Jerusalem from 1118 to 1131, it is not always consistent in its chronological coverage, leaving us better informed of some periods of Baldwin's reign than others. To overcome these challenges, common for many medieval biographies, Murray has included several thematic chapters in the subsequent sections of the book that adroitly set the stage for the different phases of Baldwin's career. Thus, though we may have little evidence on Baldwin's life directly, by placing Baldwin within the broader context of the world he inhabited, his society, its customs, and its regional politics, we are able to form an idea of the type of man Baldwin was likely to be, as well as understand the wider forces acting upon him as a medieval monarch.

The first section of the book explores Baldwin's early life, his ancestry, and his participation in the First Crusade. Given the plethora of works already dedicated to the history of the First Crusade, Murray wisely avoids a retelling of the campaign in depth and sensibly keeps the narrative focused on Baldwin's involvement in its events. The second section examines the world of the Crusader States founded in the Levant in the wake of the First Crusade, followed by narrative chapters detailing Baldwin's rule as Count of Edessa.

Edessa is an often-overlooked region in the history of the Latin East, so this section is a welcome addition that skilfully considers the complex relationships between the ruling Latin Christian, Armenian, and Muslim populations of the county and their impact on the nature of Baldwin's rule. The final and largest section of the volume discusses Baldwin's reign as King of Jerusalem, with chapters dedicated to his accession as king, his numerous military campaigns in Syria, his time as a captive of his Muslim opponents, and the political arrangements for the succession of his daughter, Melisende, in 1131. Much of this is welltrodden ground in the history of the Latin East, but Murray places the events of Baldwin's reign in Jerusalem within the intricate and ever shifting politics of the region, highlighting Baldwin's abilities as an adaptable ruler who learnt from his experiences over time. The volume also includes a detailed chronology of Baldwin's reign and three appendices listing genealogical tables, Baldwin's presence in later medieval romances, and his appearance in the Leeds University Genealogical History Roll.

As the evidence for Baldwin's life is limited, the surviving source material is often more concerned with his accomplishments as a ruler than it is with his personality. Consequently, though Murray's study of Baldwin's reign is comprehensive in its coverage of events, Baldwin's character never really leaps out from the pages. We do not fully get to know Baldwin the man but are reliant on his actions and policies as a monarch to determine his temperament. Baldwin of Bourcq is presented as a personally courageous and skilled warrior who, despite recklessness in his youth, grew into a cautious but capable military leader. He was a pragmatic ruler, willing to work with the native elites of the Levant, be they Christian or Muslim, if it was advantageous, and he made extensive use of his own familial network to help secure his authority, by placing loyal and dependable kinsmen into key positions of power and influence in Edessa and Jerusalem. Though Baldwin relinquished Edessa for Jerusalem in 1118, his reign as King of Jerusalem was one dominated by a succession of emergencies in Edessa and the neighbouring Principality of Antioch that regularly drew him away from his Jerusalemite realm. Baldwin was frequently obliged to provide military assistance or act as a regent for Edessa and Antioch, whose own rulers were often killed or captured in battle. His commitment to these regencies and the need to ensure Edessan and Antiochene security, despite increasing opposition from the Jerusalemite baronage who resented the absence of their monarch, demonstrates not only his wider strategic vision but also his sense of duty. One theme that frequently comes to the fore in Murray's book is just how lucky Baldwin was. Baldwin was often in the right place at the right time to take advantage of favourable circumstances, be it succeeding to the county of Edessa or the kingdom of Jerusalem, escaping from captivity, or benefitting from the frequent disunity among his enemies to secure and stabilise the realms under his control. Baldwin was an able king, but he was also a fortunate one.

Murray's biography is the first in any language on Baldwin of Bourcq, a man who rose from humble origins as a knight to become the King of Jerusalem and, for a brief period, the temporary ruler of much of the Latin East. Baldwin of Bourcq had a remarkable career, and

Murray's highly detailed and enjoyable volume is a remarkable work ideal for scholars, students, and the general reader alike.

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