

Theodore Evergates, *Henry the Liberal Count of Champagne, 1127–1181* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016). Print, 320 pp., US\$75.00, ISBN: 9780812247909.



Review

Count Henry I of Champagne — or rather, ‘Count Palatine of Troyes’, as he titled himself — proved a remarkable and highly influential figure of the twelfth-century French realm. Henry’s family was a powerful one: his father Thibaut was greatly respected; one of his brothers became Archbishop of Sens and eventually of Reims; another two inherited counties, as Henry did, and one of his sisters married King Louis VII of France. In *Henry the Liberal Count of Champagne, 1127–1181*, Theodore Evergates presents a chronological and systematic narrative that thoroughly explores every aspect of Henry’s life, especially his undertakings to foster economic growth and administrative cohesiveness within his lands. As Evergates mentions in his preface, no contemporary biography of Henry survives (p. vii). Nevertheless, to its credit, *Henry the Liberal* does a highly commendable job of reconstructing Henry’s relationships, responsibilities, and achievements.

The book opens with a succinct but penetrating overview of the circumstances and events that set the stage for Henry’s comital tenure, including his father Thibaut’s complex relationships with various political and religious leaders, as well as young Henry’s early upbringing, education, and training. The book then launches into Henry’s involvement in the Second Crusade (1147–1149) and his maturation as he succeeded his father, settling into his duties. His accomplishments included the construction of an impressive campus and chapel at Troyes, which established Troyes as the new centre of Champagne (and distinguished Henry from his father, who had governed in a more itinerant manner); the cultivation of a sense of unity amongst his chapters, with the

installation of clerics loyal to him; the development of 'A fixed annual cycle of clustered fairs' (p. 78) at Troyes and Provins, resulting in a prosperous commercial economy in which the religious communities of Henry's lands became heavily invested, thanks to the count's magnanimous and prudent arrangements of tax and toll privileges; and administrative reforms ensuring the loyalty of his officials. Henry envisioned his lands not as a set of disparate parts but as an interlocking whole, 'a territorial state anchored on thirty walled towns and fortifications with their geographically defined districts administered by his provosts, bailiffs, and toll collectors' (p. 171). Under his rule, Champagne blossomed into a formidable principality marked by stability and prosperity alike. Evergates persuasively argues that the dawn of Henry's years as 'Count Palatine of Troyes' marked the beginning of a new epoch — one characterized by such changes as the rise of a commercial economy, increasing dependence on written documentation, and the consolidation of comital power.

In addition, Henry was frequently obliged to navigate so-called 'international' affairs, his later years dominated by the complex goings-on between the royal families of France and England and by the conflict between Henry II of England and Thomas Becket. At the same time, Evergates makes clear that Henry's proclivity for fair governance and generosity, which the count's contemporaries so heavily extolled, as well as the amiable relations he experienced with Louis VII, Bernard of Clairvaux, and other prominent political and religious figures, did not insinuate weakness of any kind on Henry's part. One looks, for example, to Henry's unwavering response to the matter of episcopal jurisdiction over his chapel of St-Étienne (p. 127).

Evergates writes with elegant and engaging enthusiasm, carefully considering the contemporary impressions of Henry as an estimable and generous overlord alongside documentary evidence of his enfeoffments, land transactions, and dealings with his subordinates and townspeople. A wealth of court records, excerpts from

chronicles and accounts, anecdotes, and dispute resolutions serve to substantiate claims of Henry's magnanimity and fairness. Indeed, *Henry the Liberal* pertains not only to Count Henry himself, his household, and his acquaintances, but also more broadly to the machinations and concerns of twelfth-century life in France, England, and even the Holy Land. The discussions of Champenois architectural feats and intellectual life are just as fascinating – particularly the explorations of extant correspondences amongst the intellectuals and clerics to whom Henry was close or with whom he shared friendships, and the delightful sections detailing the count's love of books and personal collections.

Much is to be gained, too, from the narrative structure of *Henry the Liberal*. By presenting the count's life in stages, Evergates is able to offer valuable insight into the way Henry built upon political and administrative foundations that his predecessors (namely his father and grandfather) had previously established. Furthermore, Evergates's approach to historical narrative effectively demonstrates how a given episode might impact Henry's later relationships or his methods of governance. Perhaps most notably, recurrent discussions show how Henry's participation in the Second Crusade was to have wide-reaching and lasting ramifications throughout his comital career. Evergates's biography, rich in detail and abounding with source material, thus presents an integrated, comprehensive portrait of Henry's life and the transformation of the lands under his governance.

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