

book reviews

Benham, Jenny, *Peacemaking in the Middle Ages. Principles and Practice*

(Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011) hardback; xii + 250 pages; RRP £60.00; ISBN 9780719084447

Peacemaking in the Middle Ages examines the practices surrounding the making of peace and demonstrates that there were certain principles in common to these practices. To examine these common principles Benham undertakes two case studies of the peacemaking: the kings of England and their neighbours Wales, Scotland, and Ireland; and the kings of Denmark and their neighbours. The period examined for England is 1154 to 1216, which covers the reign of Henry II and his sons Richard I and John, while the period examined for Denmark is 1157 to 1241 and covers the reign of Valdemar I and his sons Cnut VI and Valdemar II. The reason Benham chose these rulers of these two kingdoms was because the two kingdoms faced similar diplomatic challenges, although they had vastly different resources at their disposal with which to respond to the challenges of peacemaking.

Both kingdoms faced three major challenges. Firstly, both Danish and English kings encountered a period of restoration and reformation of royal authority. Secondly, both Henry and Valdemar experienced a diplomatic challenge that involved the church. Thirdly, both kingdoms owed allegiance to a powerful neighbour: Henry II to the king of France and Valdemar to the German emperor.

Benham identifies five main principles of how to negotiate and to make peace: meeting places; symbolic acts; envoys; oaths and hostages; and treaties. The book has five parts that expand upon and illustrate these five principles of peacemaking as practiced during the Middle Ages.

Part one, "Meeting places," features an interesting discussion on the important and difference of the meeting place between equals, and between superior and inferior. It is not clear that the medieval people had a concept of territorial borders. Equals would meet a more or less on neutral ground, an elm or at a ford, which would mark the border at that particular time, between their respective kingdoms. "When it came to relations between ruler, a 'border' meant a specific place as opposed to the modern concept of the border as a line" (31). Face-to-face meetings between rulers was at the heart of the peacemaking process in the Middle Ages. However, when it came to a meeting between superior and inferior there would be no consideration of neutrality of place and the meeting would be held on land owned or controlled by the superior ruler to mark their dominance.

Part two, "The rituals of peacemaking," examines the role of ritual in the process of peacemaking. These rituals consist of actions that are recognised and understood as a universal language between rulers and their courts. They could take the form of gift exchanges which could range from a sword to a marriage contract with a sister of the ruler. Banquets were also an important form of ritual where the most distinguished guest would sit at a raised dining table. Equally important were the rituals performed by the inferior rulers in acts of homage and gestures of submission to the superior rulers.

Part three, "The envoys," surveys the role of the envoys or mediators in negotiating peace. The face-to-face meetings of the rulers took considerable effort to organize leading up to, during and after the meeting. Envoys rarely negotiated themselves, they were not required to act with political inventiveness but would act as a diplomatic mission on behalf of their king and carrying out their king's wishes. They had to be the king's most trusted servant.

Part four, "Guaranteeing the peace," considers measures that would hold the agreed peace. Oaths to swearing allegiance to a king was a common practice in peacemaking in the Middle Ages. The oaths had a clear Christian connection "so help us God and these Holy Gospels and the relics of the Saints" (150). Despite this Christian connection, oaths were not a Christian concept; they stemmed from the Roman period and ancient Greece, but peacemaking in the Middle Ages would be unthinkable without the oath. A more punitive way of guaranteeing peace was the taking of hostages and sureties. Although this was seen as a practice linked to kings it was in fact a double-edged sword, since the giving of "hostages was perceived as a sign of weakness, whereas taking hostages could be constructed as tyrannical" (171).

Part five, "Peacemaking and the written word" examines the importance of the treaties. Many treaties in the Middle Ages remained oral agreements bound by oaths and/or by the taking of hostages or the securing of sureties. The treaties that do survive use terminology that is on the whole vague and make it difficult to unravel the nature of the agreement between the parties.

Throughout the five parts Benham gives example of the principles of peacemaking from his two case studies of the English and the Danish kings. The examples, and particularly the contrast, between the kingdoms make very interesting reading. The book is well structured, thoroughly research and highly readable. It should be of interest to medieval scholars.

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Biniaś-Szkopek, Magdalena, *Bolesław IV Kędzierzawy: Książę Mazowsza i Princes [Bolesław IV Kędzierzawy: Duke of Mazovia and Princes]*.

(Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 2009) hardback; 372 pages; RRP \$35.00; ISBN 9788371776038

This book, by a scholar from the University of Poznań, belongs to the tradition of historical biography. The author, a Polish historian of the Middle Ages, aims to unpack the personality and achievements of one of the less known rulers of the Polish monarchy, Bolesław IV Kędzierzawy ("the Curly"). She achieves her aim very successfully and this book represents the total revision of the scholarship of the past century.

The task to examine the reign of Bolesław IV in detail was never undertaken before despite the fact that in the twelfth-century history of the Piast realm the person of the second eldest son of Bolesław III Krzywousty (the Wrymouth) took centre stage. Yet, the novelty of the subject under consideration brings with it the issue of the evidence. The sources for this period are scarce and historians have only a handful of