

Alexander Berner. Cologne, Weimar and Vienna: Böhlau Verlag. 2014. 373 pp. €59.90 (hardback).

German crusade studies are slowly but surely gathering pace. In this new book Alexander Berner investigates the involvement of the counts of Berg in the crusades between the middle of the twelfth and the beginning of the thirteenth centuries. The counts of Berg were one of the leading noble families of the Rhineland during the high middle ages, dominating the regional political and seigneurial scenes together with a number of other powerful families, such as the counts of Jülich, Cleve and Sayn, and the archbishop of Cologne. The chronological boundaries of Berner's study are set by the first appearance of a crusading count of Berg on the Second Crusade and the disappearance of the high medieval dynasty of the older counts of Berg with the death of its last male heir Count Engelbert II in 1225. The centrepiece of the study is an investigation into the crusading activities of the four counts of Berg who took part in the Second, Third, Fifth and the Albigensian Crusades. Berner combines traditional German regional history (*Landesgeschichte*) with approaches of recent, mostly English-language crusade studies that explore the political, social and cultural contexts that promoted crusading enthusiasm and shaped a crusading culture beyond the military campaigns. Like Berner's book, most of these studies, by scholars such as Marcus Bull, Jonathan Riley-Smith, Jonathan Phillips, Kathleen Thompson and Nicholas Paul to mention just a few, are focused on comital families and their involvement with the crusades.

Berner is not only interested in factors that caused the counts of Berg to become crusaders. He also explores the effects that the decision to become crusaders had on the political, seigneurial and economic activities of the counts before, during and after their crusades. These wide-ranging effects included political acts and alliances that provided a context for participating in the crusade, ecclesiastical patronage which underscored a devotional urge to serve Christ and do penance on crusade, and economic decisions that give clues to the financial viability and management of crusading. The counts of Berg were not only prominent figures on crusade—Count Adolf III, for example, was an eminent military leader of the Fifth Crusade—but also played an important role within crusader networks and as patrons of the Cistercian Order, the Order of St John and the Teutonic Order in the Rhineland. Such patronage naturally went hand in hand with the counts' involvement in the crusades but it also had more lasting effects, thus identifying them as supporters of the crusade movement with an impact far beyond the times and needs of specific crusade campaigns.

The strength of Berner's study lies in the meticulous analysis of the available source material. He manages to draw numerous connections between the counts' political and seigneurial activities, as reflected in charters and narrative sources and their involvement with the crusades. Although *Landesgeschichte* of the high middle ages is riddled with pitfalls due to limited and selective evidence, Berner proceeds with great care and circumspection wherever his argument relies on imaginative interpretation of the sources and he goes to great lengths to discuss and evaluate previous scholarship in the process. This principal strength of the study, however, also engenders one of its main weaknesses. Originating in the author's doctoral thesis, the text would have benefited from a great deal more editorial intervention while turning it into a book. As it stands it lacks in economy of argument and at times also in thematic focus. For instance, Chapter 2 provides an overview of crusaders from the north-western part of the Empire from 1096 to 1229. This does not greatly contribute to the later discussion of the involvement in the crusades of the counts of Berg and is therefore largely redundant. Similarly, Chapter 3 is a lengthy overview of their political activities during the

same period, largely unrelated to their crusading activities. This makes for tedious reading and includes much evidence that serves little or no purpose with regard to the main thematic focus of the book. The readability of the book as a whole would have been greatly improved if both Chapters Two and Three had been cut drastically and the evidence integrated into the discussion of the counts' crusading activities where needed. There also remains the question of whether a partially thematic rather than a purely chronological arrangement of the various aspects discussed might have provoked more in-depth analysis of some topics such as vassalage on crusade, crusading finance or memorial culture.

Despite this criticism, Berner is to be recommended for a task well done in combining medieval *Landesgeschichte* with crusade studies. He has presented a solid piece of research which not only analyses the crusading activities of an important high medieval comital family in the light of modern scholarship but also shows how much can be gained by regional studies for the understanding of crusading generally, when reflecting on the crusade as an integral part of aristocratic life and culture. In many ways this is a pioneering study which will no doubt be an inspiration for similar projects in the future.

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***Gemeinsam leben: Spiritualität, Lebens- und Verfassungsformen klösterlicher Gemeinschaften in Kirche und Gesellschaft des Mittelalters.* By Klaus Schreiner. Edited by Gert Melville and Mirko Breitenstein. 'Vita Regularis. Ordnungen und Deutungen religiösen Lebens im Mittelalter—Abhandlungen', 53. Münster: LIT Verlag. 2013. xii + 627 pp. €64.90 (paperback).**

The volume under review belongs to the genre of celebratory reprints. It assembles thirteen previously published contributions to the study of monastic spirituality and organization in the high and late middle ages by Klaus Schreiner, re-edited by Gert Melville and Mirko Breitenstein for the 'Vita Regularis' series. Given Schreiner's typical in-depth approach and the fact that he developed several clear areas of interest, drawn together in this collection, the volume in fact works better than such reprints sometimes do. As Gert Melville points out in his introduction (p. vii), Schreiner's pieces have a monographic outlook: he writes dense, lengthy texts brimming with source analysis—forty to sixty pages are not unusual. Readers not deterred by this will find themselves immersed in the intricacies of the *vita religiosa* with Schreiner, as he approaches his subjects from complementary angles, delves into interconnected sources and slowly but inexorably unearths nuances and continuing tensions in medieval monastic life. The four parts of the volume, entitled 'Spirituality', 'Rule-Bound Life and Social Change', 'Norms and Constitutional Developments' and 'Reforms' respectively, centre around historical shifts and breaks in and between the reform periods of the high and late middle ages, addressing several recurring themes.

The first chapter ('Mönchtum zwischen asketischem Anspruch und gesellschaftlicher Wirklichkeit') starts with a particular area of interest, the Southern German Benedictine reform circles of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, led by Hirsau—a topic that is present in a substantial number of other contributions as well (the Hirsau reform itself being discussed in-depth in Chapter 4). Schreiner's first essay discusses the tension between the radical ascetic ideals of monastic life and the realities of a strongly stratified society. As he shows