



**Jonathan Jarrett.** *Rulers and Ruled in Frontier Catalonia, 880-1010: Pathways to Power.* London: Royal Historical Society, 2010. 208 pp. \$90.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-86193-309-9.

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## Ruling Tenth-Century Old Catalonia

This work by Jonathan Jarrett, currently a lecturer in history in the Queen's College at Oxford, is based on his PhD dissertation presented in 2005, focusing on two geographic areas from the late ninth century to the year 1000. The first is the area around the monastery of Sant Joan de les Abadesses in the Vall of Sant Joan; the second is the surroundings of the See of Vic. In addition, he also attempts to reconstruct the power relations of the count-marquis Borrell II (927-92) and his ability to rule over the territories under his jurisdiction.

The geographic area under study is the one known in the historiography as "Old Catalonia," whose southern border with the Islamic domains is outlined to the west over the Llobregat River, Manresa, and Cardona, including the counties of Urgell and Pallars. With respect to this region, later Arabic sources focus on the troubled frontier and, especially, on the expedition commanded by al-Mansur that sacked Barcelona in 985. However, such sources don't provide any important data for the author's research. Therefore Jarrett chooses to subject to a careful and attentive analysis the charters reflecting land purchases and the donations of parcels that survive in the Catalan archives. It must be pointed out that the author, besides researching in the relevant archives, has made use of the charter collections already published, one of which merits special mention: the works included in *Catalunya carolíngia*, a project launched by Ramon d'Abadal in 1926 that has edited and published

all the documents prior to the year 1000 found in Catalan archives.

One of the objectives cited by the author was to critique Pierre Bonassie's thesis in *La Catalogne du milieu*, especially his model about the conditions in which settlement in the new Hispanic March territories took place, although the nature of the documentary sources does not always permit identification of the parties involved in the transactions or indicate whether a given parcel was the product of some division of land or *aprisio*.<sup>[1]</sup> Even when one of these elements appears, Jarrett shows a healthy methodological carefulness before accepting its historicity, aware that many documents are mere copies of the originals and may have been altered by the copyist. It also can be observed that the reason for the preservation of these documents was to protect the property rights of the owner.

All these circumstances make the description of reality in the charters especially biased, although the author, in some instances, manages to reconstruct the patronage relations of some individuals holding some institutional power—secular or ecclesiastic—over a given territory. He manages, too, to reconstruct the process of the making of a lordship. Regrettably, in other cases, the number of documents is too small to make possible anything but a synchronic analysis.

Finally, it's remarkable that the author avoids being

drawn into the historiographical debate over the birth of Catalan nation. This debate is entirely anachronistic, sterile, and occasionally biased by political agendas inside and outside Catalonia. As the author points out, contemporary people were not concerned about such an issue, and it was irrelevant whether they were subjects of the Carolingian monarchy or not. Overall, Jonathan Jarrett presents a highly interesting study that, without

doubt, improves our knowledge of the social reality of this period in the history of Old Catalonia.

Note

[1]. Pierre Bonnassie, *La Catalogne du milieu du Xe Å la fin du XIe siÃcle: croissance et mutations dâune societÃ©* (Toulouse: Association des publications de l'UniversitÃ© de Toulouse-Le Mirail, 1975-1976).

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