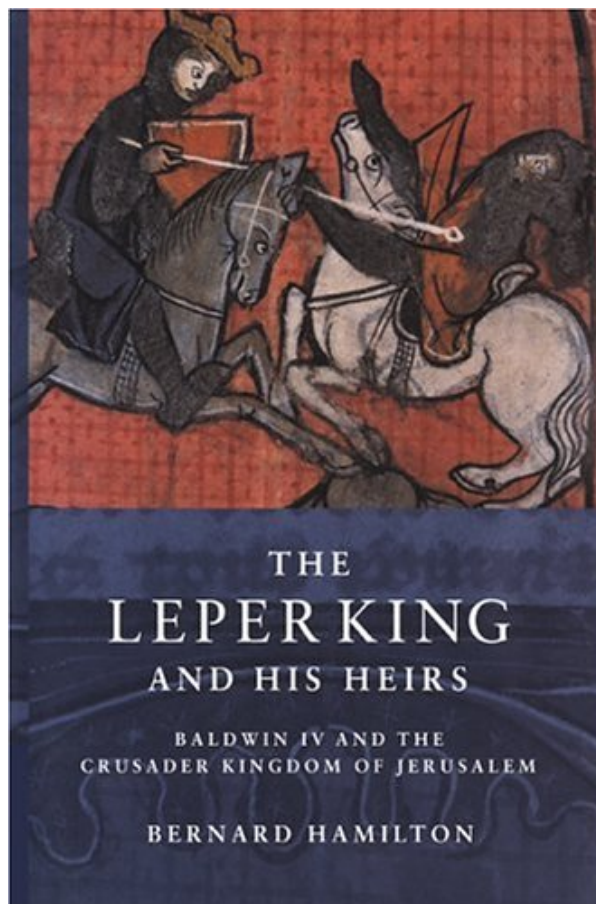
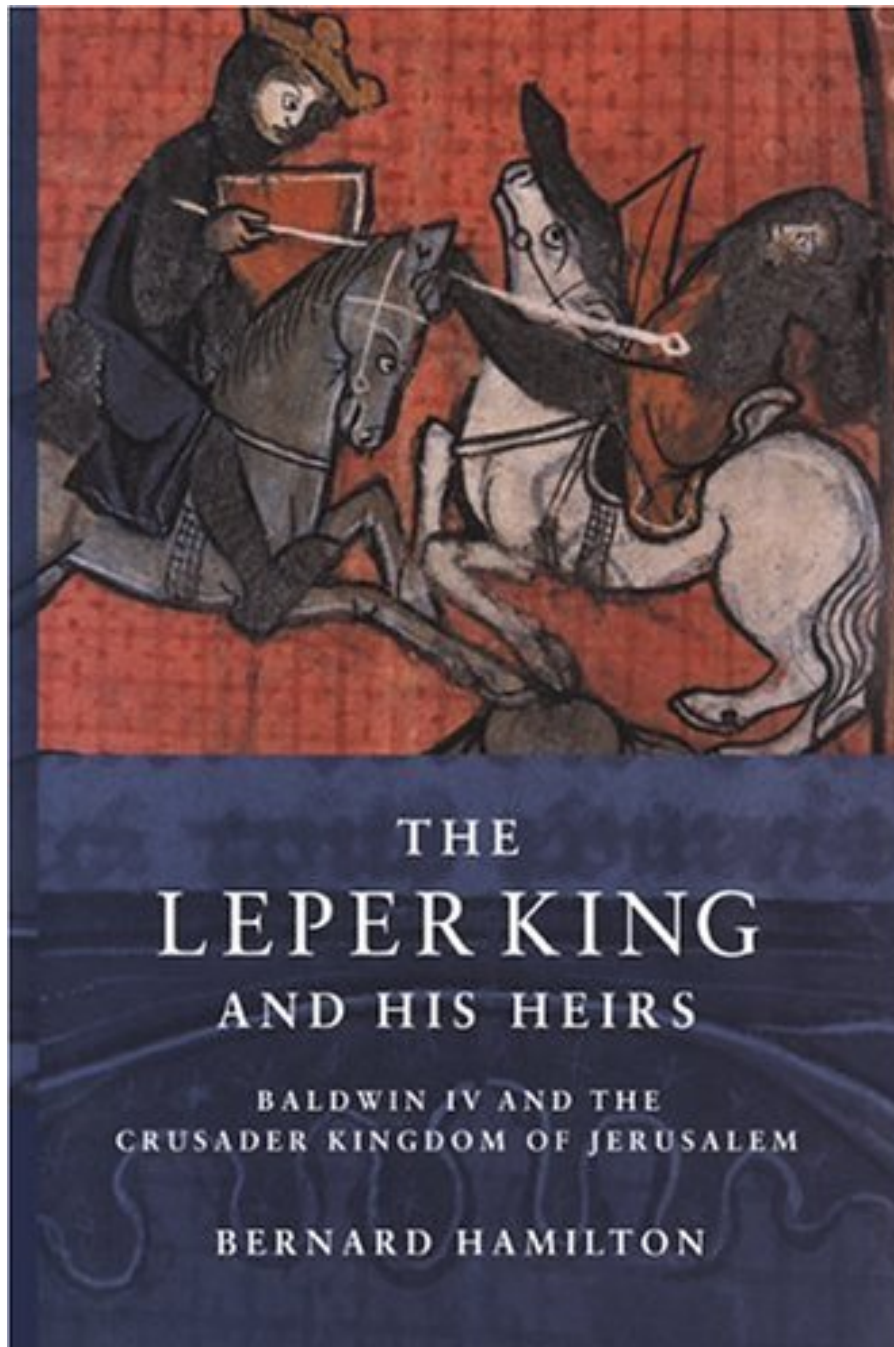


**THE LEPER KING AND HIS HEIRS:
BALDWIN IV AND THE CRUSADER
KINGDOM OF JERUSALEM BY BERNARD
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Review

"Hamilton (Nottingham, emeritus) offers a thorough reassessment of the reign of Baldwin IV, the leper king whose reign is often interpreted as a period of decline leading to the disaster at Hattin two years after Baldwin's death in 1185. This study belongs in all medieval history collections." Choice

"Hamilton deserves major congratulations for helping us to see what an excellent historian can accomplish by a careful reading of the sources and a catholicity of view that encompasses the whole historical fabric, as well as what he recognizes lies beyond the evidence...Hamilton's account will now provide the basis for a new understanding." Historian

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The reign of King Baldwin IV of Jerusalem (1174-85) has traditionally been seen as a period of decline when, because of the king's illness, power came to be held by those who made the wrong policy decisions. Notably, they ignored the advice of Raymond of Tripoli and attacked Saladin. This book challenges that view, arguing that peace with Saladin was not a viable option; and that the young king, despite suffering from leprous leprosy, presided over a society that was (contrary to what is often said) vigorous and self-confident.

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Unromantic but Solid Depiction of an Incredible Saga

By Si Sheppard

Baldwin IV, king of the Crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem is largely - and unfairly - unknown in the west today. But, as Bernard Hamilton details in *The Leper King and his Heirs*, he deserves so much better. For a start, he accomplished so much more than his famous Crusading near contemporary Richard the Lionheart, and under infinitely more trying conditions.

Not only was his childhood troubled - his father Amalric had been forced to disown his mother Agnes when Baldwin was two years old before the aristocracy would accept him as king, and Baldwin was only 13 when Amalric died and he took the throne - he contracted leprosy at a young age (Baldwin's symptoms are discussed in a useful appendix by Piers Mitchell).

The disease could not be hidden; "It grew more serious each day, specially injuring his hands and feet and

his face, so that his subjects were distressed whenever they looked at him," William of Tyre, chief contemporary chronicler of the day, relates.

A lesser person would have quickly broken under such circumstances. But Baldwin was animated by both a bold spirit and a tremendous sense of duty, of his obligation to his people. One of the most human touches is William of Tyre's depiction of Baldwin as "a good looking child for his age" who grew up "full of hope" and "more skilled than men who were older than himself in controlling horses and in riding them at a gallop," (p 43). Baldwin had taught himself this skill, vital to a knight, despite already losing feeling in his right hand. And he continued to ride at the head of his men into battle when there was no way he could have remounted had he been unhorsed. Determination and courage were to be the hallmarks of his all too brief career.

For Baldwin was by any measure a successful king - considering his circumstances and limited resources, a great one. Though his people were massively outnumbered and surrounded on three sides, this boy, who took the throne in 1164 and died aged not quite 24 in 1185, for 11 years frustrated the ambition of Saladin, the greatest warrior of the age, to forge unity among the Arab people and drive the Christians from the Holy Places.

Despite being significantly outnumbered, he defeated Saladin in two major battles, Mont Gisard in 1177 and Le Forbelet in 1182, and forced him to raise the siege of Beirut in 1182 and the major fortress of Kerak twice, in 1183 and 1184. On the latter occasions he was blind and so debilitated he had to be slung in a litter between two horses.

Hamilton also helps untangle the intricate web of domestic and international relations in which Jerusalem, the center of the world for three faiths, was ensnared. Baldwin had to balance the conflicting jealousies and agendas of his own nobility, always maneuvering to secure their positions first in the event of a regency, then at the succession; the knightly orders that were within his kingdom but not of it; the neighboring Crusader states; the attitude of the Papacy; the interests of Byzantium; and the distant and fickle responses of the western European powers. And overshadowing all this was ever-present menace of the Islamic counterattack that could come anytime, anyplace. Given this ever-precarious situation, Baldwin perhaps emerges with even greater credit for his diplomacy than for his skills with the sword. Certainly, he made no fatal mistakes and left the kingdom in no weaker condition than he found it.

Hamilton makes no great departures in his work, but goes some way towards rehabilitating Reynald of Chatillon from his characteristic depiction as loose cannon psychopath. Following Michael Lyons and David Jackson's *Saladin: The Politics of Holy War*, he also demythologizes the Crusader's nemesis, emphasizing the traditional argument that the Christian state unnecessarily provoked Saladin into war is flawed: The great leader of the Muslim world had been working towards the cleansing Jihad his entire career.

This is a book as much about an era as an individual, and at times, Baldwin as a personality tends to disappear inside it. Even considering the limitations of the sources, one wishes there was more representing his perspective in his voice. But we are limited to a heartfelt letter he wrote to Louis VII of France, humbly recognizing his limitations and offering to hand the kingdom over to a candidate as noble, and more healthy, than he: "To be deprived of one's limbs is of little help to one in carrying out the work of government... It is not fitting that a hand so weak as mine should hold power when fear of Arab aggression daily presses upon the Holy City and when my sickness increases the enemy's daring." (p 140).

It was fortunate for the Kingdom of Jerusalem that this offer was refused. It is significant that just two years after Baldwin's death Saladin won his great victory at Hattin, fatally wounding the Crusader presence in the Middle East and setting in motion the chain of events that would culminate in their expulsion in 1291.

"Few rulers have remained executive heads of state when handicapped by such severe physical disabilities or sacrificed themselves more totally to the needs of their people," (p 210) Hamilton concludes. Baldwin's accomplishments would seem to be the stuff of myth, but he was quite real, a testament to human courage and endurance, and Hamilton does a fine job of putting his life and times in perspective.

3 of 4 people found the following review helpful.

Good Revisionist History, Disappointing Biography

By Helena P. Schrader

Good Revisionist History, Poor Biography

This is an excellent, detailed and well-documented account of the crusader kingdom of Jerusalem in the late 12th century. It focuses on the quarter century of Baldwin IV's life span, 1161 to 1186, a particularly critical period in the history of the crusader kingdom. Hamilton's book provides details too often skipped over or even blurred together in accounts that try to cover the whole two hundred years of crusader history. Furthermore, Hamilton provides an excellent summary of his sources up front and impresses with his familiarity with not only Latin and Arab, but Greek, Jewish and Armenian sources.

Particularly impressive was Hamilton's treatment of Reynald de Chatillon. Chatillon is usually depicted as a rogue adventurer, more robber than baron, and often blamed for the war with Saladin. Hamilton, in contrast, effectively defends many of Chatillon's most controversial actions. While not denying his violent and ambitious character, Hamilton convincingly argues that Chatillon followed sound strategic principles when launching his raids into Sinai, putting Christian warships in the Red Sea, and even when breaking the truce with Saladin to attack a heavily armed caravan.

Hamilton's treatment of Raymond of Tripoli is less convincing. He tries to paint Tripoli as a treasonous threat to the throne, and even suggests that Sibylla's marriage to Guy de Lusignan was arranged by King Baldwin in an attempt to prevent a coup by Tripoli. The evidence is very weak for this and contradicted by other accounts, notably the *Cronicles of Ernoul*, that other historians have followed. Furthermore, Baldwin soon withdrew his favor from Lusignan, while Sibylla remained remarkably loyal -- two historical facts that give credence to the more common interpretation of a love-affair between Lusignan and Sibylla forcing the king's hand. But even here, where Hamilton's arguments are weak, he presents them cogently and names his sources, leaving the reader in a good position to judge for himself which interpretation of history he finds more compelling.

Where this book falls short of the mark is in the essential biographical function of making the subject come to life. For all his meticulous reporting on what happened during "the Leper King's" reign, Hamilton singularly fails to get inside the leprous skin of his subject and help us understand him. We are given no inkling of what he was thinking and feeling, why he behaved in certain ways, how he succeeded in winning the undoubtedly loyalty of his subjects despite his illness or what motivated him at critical junctions. We are not even told until the epilogue that he was chaste but not particularly devout.

Baldwin IV of Jerusalem deserves a better biography precisely because -- despite his severe handicap -- he successfully held his kingdom together in a very difficult period, and -- again, despite his severe physical handicap -- he repeatedly defeated Saladin on the battlefield. He also pursued a highly sophisticated foreign policy, which showed profound understanding of the geopolitical position of his kingdom. I would like to read a book that explores the character and psyche of such a man; Hamilton unfortunately does not.

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful.

A REMARKABLE RESEARCH

By Evangelos Charatsis

A remarkable book, fine product of a thorough political and military research analysis. It has answered a lot of my past questions regarding the chaotic period (1174-1186) hence the period before the cataclysmic crusader defeat at Hattin.

I suggested it for all those readers who are looking for a different or an alternative approach regarding the behaviors of famous crusaders like Raymond of Tripoli or the infamous Reynald of Kerak, based on comparative scientific historical data which pour new light to a supposedly known story. Not for readers

without basical knowledge of the crusaders era.

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