

SCHEDE E RECENSIONI

Jonathan Rubin, *Learning in a Crusader City: Intellectual Activity and Intercultural Exchanges in Acre, 1191-1291*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2018 («Cambridge Studies in Medieval Life and Thought»); 234 pp. ISBN 978-1-107-18718-4.

The subtitle requires an explanation. Rubin's use of the term «intellectual» can be traced back to the well-known tradition of studies that refers to the volume *Les intellectuels au Moyen Âge* (1957) by J. Le Goff. At the time of Crusades there was no university in Acre, thus reading about «intellectual activity» localised in that centre may give rise to perplexities. Rubin deals with such perplexities by referencing, from a theoretical point of view, the preface that Le Goff added to his own book in 1985. From it, in fact, the author 'borrows' a more inclusive definition of intellectual: «anyone who is involved in the production and dissemination of knowledge, especially such that is related, directly or indirectly, to written works» (p. 9). This statement, which can be derived from Le Goff but does not belong to his study – whose main focus is on the academic environment –, clarifies in which sense we can speak of an «intellectual arena» in a city that lacked both a university and a patronage system. The idea that intellectual activity develops in a city and contributes to its growth on a sociological level also has its roots in the perspective of the French historian. Moreover, as Rubin notes, «the fact that [...] no university was ever created in the Kingdom of Jerusalem [...] cannot, in itself, be seen as indicative of the city's cultural position» (p. 171).

I personally believe that, in addition to the mention of Le Goff's tradition, a more thorough semantic examination of a key term such as «discourse» – repeatedly used above all in chapters 5 and 6 – would have proved to be of particular use in the introductory paragraphs that revolve around the concept of «intellectual activity» and the methodology of the study (e.g. for the sake of non-English-speaking readers).

The absence of a reference to the term's Foucauldian origin suggests that it is used with a general, if not generic, meaning. In this sense, the term is void of any specific connection to Foucault's conception of it, for which «discourse» would be seen as a means of legitimation of power by a system of thoughts and ideas, that tends to turn every relationship into a power negotiation among cultural subjects. Rubin, indeed, addresses issues concerning cultural exchange and the friction it sometimes causes: I am referring specifically to the pages in which Rubin reflects on the

«Frankish discourse on Islam» (p. 119) citing the deliberately distorting perspectives of Jean de Joinville and Jacques de Vitry. Nonetheless, generally speaking, it seems that a fully Foucauldian point of view, or even a Gramscian one, are alien to this study. This choice can be explained by the fact that Rubin tends to base his conclusions on likelihood more than on direct evidence. The scholar's prudence is, in this sense, admirable.

The cautions of the good historian, however, do not prevent the author from setting up his study dialectically. Rubin's goal is in fact to fit into the line of studies that in recent years have undertaken to demonstrate that the evaluations of intellectual activities in Outremer by historians such as H. Mayer, J. Praver or S. Runciman are too pessimistic. In this light, this study finds its foundations in the works of B. Kedar, P. Edbury, L. Minervini, C. Burnett and D. Jacoby (p. 10).

According to Rubin, the pessimistic judgment expressed by some historians on the intellectual activity in Acre is due, on the one hand, to the comparison with the level of cultural exchange between East and West that took place, for example, in Sicily or Iberia; on the other hand, to a vision that Rubin defines as Eurocentric, in the sense that «it seeks to find not what intellectual climate developed in the East, but how it contributed to Western culture» (p. 168). Finally, Rubin terms the approach of previous scholars anachronistic in that it focuses «on what modern historians would have liked to find rather than on a careful examination of the existing original material» (p. 168). I wish to express some doubts about this last statement, if I may. I personally think that there is nothing wrong with this type of approach: for a historian to interrogate the sources in search of confirmation of his own hypothesis is nothing but relying on the scientific method. However, here Rubin may be suggesting that previous historians did not bother to establish a body of evidence from which to formulate their hypotheses. And the greatest merit of Rubin's book lies indeed in the clear declaration of its sources, all grouped together in an Appendix that could become a rich spring of inspiration for future research. With its Appendix of 44 written sources – divided into «Texts certainly written in Acre», «Texts almost certainly written in Acre» and «Texts probably written in Acre» –, this monograph may serve as a handbook for the reconstruction of a historical and sociological context within which scholars can investigate specific issues.

Among the many possible lines of research, it seems to me that the more interesting ones from a Romance philology perspective are worth of

mention here. Although I am aware that Rubin's purpose is historical and not philological, the use of a considerable number of manuscript sources shall ensure that this book may be read with profit from the viewpoint of manuscript studies too.

A first reference to French literature is found in the paragraph titled «The Nobility» (pp. 24-27) where the nobility of Acre is depicted as a consumer of intellectual products or literary works belonging to three genres: history (William of Tyre's *Chronicon* and *Histoire universelle* were probably popular readings in the city), French romances and chansons (one thinks of Freidank or Thibaut de Champagne). Even the burgesses, despite «there is very little evidence for their involvement in other aspects of intellectual activity in Acre» (p. 27), were probably interested in history. This is demonstrated by the reference in the *Livre des assises de la cour des bourgeois* to the *Livre dou conquest dou reaume de Jerusalem*. The *Livre des assises* also cites the noteworthy case of a young burgess who «Maugré son pere ou de sa mere, use o juleors et devient juglier» (p. 27n), testifying that the entertainment sphere represented a potential highlight in the life of young burgesses in Acre. The same case is mentioned in *Lo Codi*, though with the mention of magicians rather than jongleurs. The relationship between the two works – the *Livre* and *Lo Codi* – is first discussed in chapter 2 (p. 56) reporting Praver's opinion on the problem, and then in chapter 4 where the *Livre* is analysed as representative of a work in which the two existing traditions of the city legal debate converge: the customary legal tradition and the learned one. In this regard Rubin quotes a recent study (by A. M. Bishop) according to which the *Livre* «includes sections which borrow directly from the Roman legal corpus rather than through the intermediation of the *Lo Codi*» (p. 92).

In the scrutiny of the topics of philological interest, another worthwhile passage can be cited: on p. 54 the entries of the Old French-Arabic glossary preserved in the ms. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Copte 43, are used to formulate a hypothesis regarding the instruction of Copts by Franks residing in Acre.

The paragraph of greatest interest from a Romance philology point of view is obviously the one titled «Old French in Frankish Acre» in chapter 3 (pp. 70-82). Said paragraph investigates the importance of the city in the history of the French language and its literature. Two major works are discussed here. The first is an Anglo-Norman translation of Vegetius' *De re militari* – the first known translation of this work into French – which was

almost certainly produced in Acre. Another translation of Vegetius's work that E. de la Cruz Vergari (in her unpublished doctoral thesis of 2016) demonstrated to have been produced in the Middle East and perhaps in Acre can be added to the above-mentioned Anglo-Norman translation. The second is a French translation – preserved in the ms. Chantilly, Musée Condé, français 433 – of works on rhetoric and logic: Cicero's *De inventione*, the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* and a «short treatise on logic» (p. 73). The production of this important manuscript is due to John of Antioch. The analysis of the works preserved in this codex allows Rubin to show that Outremer was «characterized by an inclination to use the vernacular in fields which, at that time, were usually preserved for Latin» (pp. 74-75). The same Chantilly manuscript is also mentioned on pp. 161-163 where the author comments on a miniature, depicting a classroom scene, which has been chosen as the cover image of this book.

There is also place, in Rubin's study, for philological issues relating to Latin texts. On p. 123, for instance, Rubin makes use of philological evidence to show that some sections of William of Tripoli's *Notitia de Machometo* are not original but interpolated. On p. 141 mention is made of the dating problem that concerns the *Tractatus de locis et statu sancte terre ierosolimitane*: according to Kedar, the treatise dates back to the two decades preceding 1187, while according to P. Trovato it must have been written after 1198. The problem arises from the doubt around whether some variants of the text that are useful for dating should be considered original or interpolated. Rubin does not take a position in the debate even if the arguments of Trovato, which are based on quite acceptable ecdotic principles, would seem more convincing. Finally, another notable Latin text is the *Tractatus super erroribus quos citra et ultra mare invenimus* by Benedict d'Alignan, a treatise preserved by numerous manuscripts which «has received very little scholarly attention». Considering the absence of a critical edition of the work, which has never been published, Rubin cites the text of the ms. Paris, BnF, lat. 4224, that preserves a late and abbreviated version of the treatise, without explaining why he chose this witness over others.

In the conclusion to his work, Rubin points out an interesting line of possible future research that could reveal how, in more technical or practical fields of knowledge, the exchange of information between Latins and Muslims was even more intensive. I am referring to geography and cartography. In fact, Rubin mentions the ms. Oxford, Bodleian Library, Douce

319 (the witness D² of Brunetto *Latini's Tresor*) which features, on f. 8r, an extraordinary world map, probably based on an Arabic model (p. 172). The similarities shared with other codices of the Saint Jean d'Acres production make it reasonable to think it likely that this manuscript was produced in Acre as well.

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***The French of Outremer: Communities and Communications in the Crusading Mediterranean*, edited by Laura K. Morreale and Nicholas L. Paul, New York, Fordham University Press, 2018 («Fordham Series in Medieval Studies»); 296 pp. ISBN 978-0-8232-7816-9.**

La raccolta di saggi procede da un incontro di studio tenutosi nei giorni 29 e 30 marzo 2014 nel quadro del progetto di ricerca eponimo, iniziato nel 2009 presso il Center for Medieval Studies della Fordham University. Come sottolineato dai curatori nelle pagine introduttive (pp. 1-13), *The French of Outremer* è un titolo «replete with ambiguity», nel quale la giustapposizione dei due termini «might seem unnecessary or even redundant» (p. 1). L'accostamento è però giustamente reputato istruttivo e criticamente importante, in quanto a partire dalla fine del XIX secolo fino a tempi molto recenti, *French* e *Outremer* rimandano a due ambiti di ricerca distinti, appannaggio di discipline separate e non comunicanti – rispettivamente la storia della lingua e della letteratura francese del Medioevo e la storia delle crociate – che si tenta qui di far dialogare.

Nell'articolo efficacemente posto in apertura (*What We Know and Don't Yet Know about Outremer French*, pp. 15-29), L. Minervini offre al lettore lo stato dell'arte circa gli studi sul francese d'Oltremare, a partire dalle ricerche pionieristiche di A. Thomas, E. Brayer, G. Folena e V. Bertolucci Pizzorusso. Pur essendo basate su un corpus ridotto di testi, spesso editi con criteri non sempre filologicamente accettabili, le loro acute intuizioni sono ancora oggi preziose, e d'ispirazione per quanti in seguito si sono accostati al corpus oltremarino cercando d'integrare la pratica ecdotica con gli studi sulla storia sociale e culturale del Levante all'epoca delle crociate (*in primis* C. Aslanov, P. Nobel, F. Zinelli e la stessa