Review: Lise Hull, Understanding the Castle Ruins of England and Wales: How to Interpret the History and Meaning of Masonry and Earthworks

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through the study of persons. She concludes that the traditional picture of guilds hostile to economic and technical innovation is simply misguided.

Heusinger’s answer to her third question, the nature of guilds, is perhaps the most strongly revisionist part of this study. It holds that guilds can be understood only if four aspects—guilds as economic organizations, as brotherhoods, as political bodies, and as military units—are studied together. In this way the general nature of guilds can be seen to have been broadly common to cities possessing guild constitutions (Strasbourg, Zurich) and Nuremberg, which remained—in the traditional view—notoriously guildless. In a most interesting passage Heusinger establishes that at Strasbourg women were active in almost all areas of trade and production; they had the same (economic) rights as men; and, if full members, they had to pay for weapons and substitutes for watch duty. Women could be apprentices, but there is no evidence for their admission to the journeymanship. In their second function as brotherhoods, the guilds assumed religious and cultic tasks (burials and memorials), cared for the sick, and enforced rules against cursing, gambling, and vulgar table manners. The third sector, politics, was, of course, an exclusively male preserve. Heusinger reveals for the first time that the guildhalls had members who possessed social but no political rights. She also concludes that the picture of evolution from crafts into politically enabled corporations, which has been advanced by Philippe Dollinger and others (including this reviewer), is incorrect; the crafts functioned throughout their history as political bodies. Finally, the military sector does not display a clearly defined boundary between the patricians and guildsmen.

Summing up, Heusinger writes that the traditional picture of the builds was far too monolithic and static, for social practice was much more varied, more flexible, and more fluid than the guild regulations could have revealed. This is why a revision was possible only through the study of persons and not just ordinances. The author’s extensive comments on the problems of prosopographical research in late-medieval civic documents will be helpful to future researchers who investigate these dynamic, flexible social groups, which form a collective model for human social organization in civic spaces.

Sabine von Heusinger’s work opens up a new stage of the study of guilds as a primary form of association in medieval civic spaces. She stands in the high tradition of historians of south German guild regimes, a line that contains such names as Karl Wilhelm Nitsch, Gustav Schmoller, Georg von Below, and Otto von Gierke. Yet Heusinger’s work distinguishes itself from the older literature in one central respect: she does not examine the medieval guilds and guild-based regimes in quest of the origins of modern bourgeois civic institutions. While she is by no means alone in making this shift—one thinks of Knut Schulze’s work—this book makes her the premier historian today of guilds active in the German-speaking lands. Not just medievalists but also early modernists and, indeed, almost everyone interested in the role of guilds in the southern German cities will learn from her work.

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The title here is honest advertising. Lise Hull writes about these ruins as an amateur enthusiast, incorporating into her description of the physical remains anecdotal details regarding major historical episodes and personalities, while folding in from time to time echoes of recent scholarly debates over the nature and functions of the castles themselves.
Her very useful appendix offers thumbnail sketches of ninety-six sites in England and sixty-three in Wales, all mentioned somewhere in the text (with another eight from Scotland, Ireland, and the Isle of Man thrown in). The general reader (and even the nonspecialist scholar) will also find the glossaries of terms appended to the end of each of the five chapters handy for quick reference.

Chapter 1, “Castle Development,” sketches the historical development and traditional typology. Hull defines them as “fortified ‘military’ residences,” with only brief allusion to the lively recent debate over which part deserves more emphasis, “fortified” or “residence.” The next two chapters tour a wide selection of ruins from the outside and the inside. The next chapter, “The Manorial Estate,” introduces some of the principal themes developed in recent scholarship: placing the castle in its original context in the economic, social, symbolic, and physical landscape. Finally, “The Castle Experience” directs attention to the concerns of historical preservation, indeed to the urgent questions of how these ruins are surviving and ought to survive in the modern landscape.

Hull’s book can be usefully compared with Stephen Friar, The Sutton Companion to Castles (Gloucester, Eng., 2003), which is organized in an alphabetical encyclopedia format. Friar’s book is a third longer, printed on glossy paper, and offers color plates as well as a fair number of black-and-white illustrations directly keyed to the entries. Hull offers many black-and-white photographs, which are not always so effective on the cheaper paper—the sun may indeed be shining on a ridge-and-furrow system on Dartmoor (p. 147), but the image is dull and blurry. There are no line drawings or site plans, a frustrating drawback for the reader seriously interested in the archaeological aspects of these sites. Since Friar does not include entries on individual castles or a gazetteer, Hull’s appendix of sites will appeal to some readers. Friar’s succinct bibliography of major studies seems designed to offer an introduction not only to castles but to the broad historical context in which they developed. Hull’s selection is more eclectic, leaving out such classic works as William Anderson’s Castles of Europe (1970) while including many recent Internet resources and even e-mail correspondence. Curiously, she does not cite her own Britain’s Medieval Castles (2005). The most original feature of her work is the final chapter, which examines the controversy between those, like John Ruskin, who value ruins as such and want them preserved with as little intervention as possible and modernizers like the marquesses of Bute, who spent enormous sums in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to restore their castles at Caerphilly and Cardiff. Today under the legal framework established by the 1979 Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act, the “conserve as found” doctrine is officially preferred by English Heritage, which has gained management responsibility for more and more sites. Medievalists whose concern goes beyond understanding the past for its own sake to what is being done and ought to be done to preserve its physical vestiges in our landscapes today will benefit from Lise Hull’s introduction to the ongoing quarrel between proponents of the “age value” and of the “use value” of historical monuments. (Robert Wallace, a graduate student, made valuable contributions to this review.)

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This book contains editions of three short Anglo-Norman works on falconry from the second half of the thirteenth century: Cambridge University Library MS Ff.VI.13, fols.