

The Earl, the Kings and the Chronicler: Robert, Earl of Gloucester and the Reigns of Henry I and Stephen. Robert B Patterson. OUP 2019. xx, 255pp, six ill. Hardback £69.00. [ISBN 978-0-1-987981-4].

The Earl in question is Robert, First Earl of Gloucester, who died in 1147. The Kings are Henry I, Robert's father - Robert was the eldest of several illegitimate sons that Henry had, hence he was not eligible for the crown of England, the only thing that kept him from the throne - and, after Henry's death in 1135, Stephen, his cousin who was a rival to Empress Matilda, Robert's half-sister, and the Chronicler is William of Malmesbury (d c 1143) who wrote the *Historia Novella*, which is largely constructed to praise Robert, Earl of Gloucester. As such, it is basically untrustworthy. The chronicler, William of Malmesbury, is the subject of Chapter Six of this book, Chapters One to Five follow Robert of Gloucester in broadly chronological order, starting with the circumstances of his birth and ending with his death.

Robert Patterson, Emeritus Professor at the University of South Carolina, has written extensively about Robert, Earl of Gloucester throughout his career, and this book is the first full-length study of the Earl. It is a triumph of the 13th century historian's art, although it is understandably rather short on Robert, Earl of Gloucester's private life, given the nature of the available sources, which Patterson has used very well, as is shown by the footnotes. Also, the repercussions of the Earl's life are not really followed through after 1147 - given that the Empress Matilda continued to resist Stephen until his death in 1154, when her son became King of England, as Henry II, this is a particular problem. The interesting life of Robert's son and heir, William the second Earl, is not properly covered. The book's title, which was probably decided by the publisher, is misleading - this is really a study of Robert, Earl of Gloucester - not of the Kings, nor, even, of William of Malmesbury.

The Earl of Gloucester acquired Bristol - the castle (rebuilt by the Earl in stone), borough and the Priory of St James - probably by 1120, along with Cardiff and other Welsh properties that made up his lordship of Glamorgan. He also acquired Tewkesbury, the abbey of which he rebuilt, together with the Priory of St James. Patterson deals quickly with the popular local myth that he built St James as a tithe offering for the castle. Less of a local myth is the support he gave for the Empress Matilda in the West of England, although this was only for the relatively short period from 1138 until his death. Patterson deals with this, efficiently in his usual style. This book is necessary reading for anyone with an interest in 13th century politics, the history of Bristol in the same century, or the nature of 13th-century aristocratic life.

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