

Elizabeth de Burgh, Lady of Clare (1295–1360): Household and Other Records. Edited by Jennifer Ward. Suffolk Records Society, 57. Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell Press, 2014. Pp. xxx+186. ISBN: 9781843838913.

JENNIFER WARD IS notable for her edited source collections, especially for women's medieval history, and her book *English Noblewomen in the Later Middle Ages* (London, 1992). Elizabeth de Burgh, daughter and coheir of Gilbert de Clare and Joan of Acre, Earl and Countess of Gloucester and Hertford, has figured prominently in all her work, in large part because of the survival of an astonishing number of documents relating to her household and management of her estates. Indeed, according to the introduction, some 103 separate documents exist, comprising about one-fifth of the total of all non-royal medieval account records extant in British archives. This collection created for the Suffolk Records Society is just a selection, but it represents all of the kinds of sources available for Elizabeth de Burgh's economic life. Ward has also included complete transcripts of several commissions of *oyer et terminer* and royal letters patent and close, rather than simply pulling from the calendars prepared by the National Archives. This is extremely helpful as the transcripts provide a far more detailed picture of certain kinds of interaction with the Crown than is usually available through the brief calendar entries.

The book is divided into a relatively brief historical introduction and seven sections: [I] Elizabeth's Chamber Account for the second half of 1326; [II] a complete Wardrobe and Household Account (including the Latin text for part of it) for 1339–40; [III] documents relating to the daily activities and maintenance of Clare Castle; [IV] documents illustrating the expenditures in Elizabeth's household for food, hospitality, and business and personal travel, with the first document also including the Latin text; [V] a diverse collection of documents relating to Elizabeth's estates, including bailiffs' accounts and manorial, borough, and honor court rolls; [VI] documents highlighting Elizabeth's ecclesiastical patronage, in particular the founding of Clare College, and also details of her patronage of scholars, maintenance of wards, and influence with the king (including a letter from Edward III in 1360 concerning her defense of the Suffolk coastline, which is an odd outlier in this section); and [VII] Elizabeth's will. The documents are almost entirely drawn from those in the National Archives, with a few from the British Library, and her will from Islip's register at Lambeth Palace Library.

There is much to recommend the researcher about this collection. The translations are more or less literal, which makes for some awkward syntax

but provides a useful tool for vocabulary building for those unfamiliar with the terminology of medieval account records; the glossary in the back of the volume helps this as well. The inclusion of different varieties of records provides students with a fantastic range of possibilities in exploring the ways in which lordship was enacted—whether male or female—at the local level. The few Latin examples, presented in dual-column format with the Latin on the left and the English translation on the right, give readers unfamiliar with the original texts an opportunity to compare the transcription to the English version. It would have been very helpful had Ward provided similar examples for the records in French.

There are some elements of the publication that could have been altered to make the work far more “user friendly,” however. The formatting of the documents, mimicking the original Latin in many ways—especially in the continuous stream of lists that are undifferentiated by any significant punctuation—really operates against nonspecialists’ understanding of what they are looking at. The typeface is tiny and the margins are thin. The page is just crammed with text, and it makes for an unattractive read. Using the documents would probably require actually reformatting them in more vertical lists or organizing them in a way to make quantification easier. In other editions of account rolls, such as those of Eleanor de Montfort or Henry de Lacy, the editors have chosen to abandon the original manuscript format and make the presentation of the information easier to consume and understand.

The introduction, although helpful in a basic way in locating Elizabeth de Burgh in the volatile years of the fourteenth century, fails to mention that a significant aspect of the Clare patrimony Elizabeth and her sisters enjoyed came from the combined estates of William and Isabella Marshal, Elizabeth’s great-great-grandparents, and that her own connection to Ireland—as well as that of her daughter who married the Earl of Ulster—came out of that inheritance. The presentation of that family history thus minimizes how important inheritance through the female line was for the Clares: without the inheritance of one-fifth of the earldom of Pembroke and lordship of Leinster there would have been no reason to concentrate any of the Clare children’s political and material fortunes in Ireland. Moreover, the wealth of the Clare family—considered by their biographers to have been the wealthiest non-royal earls in medieval England—was significantly enhanced by the Marshal inheritance.

The introduction is also rather thin on analysis of Elizabeth de Burgh’s presentation of herself as a lord, and Ward prefaces her discussion of Elizabeth as a competent and able actor with a surprisingly traditional caveat: “medieval women, expected to be weak, irrational and subordinate, were at a great

disadvantage when faced with a determined king and powerful, ambitious lords” (xvii). Given that the discussion concerns the depredations of Edward II and his favorites, an admission that they attacked a large number of landholders, both male and female, and that the women thus ill-used were able to muster significant levels of resistance to these attacks (the Mortimer women, Alice de Lacy, and Marie de St. Pol among them) would have located Elizabeth in a far more genuine political context. Isn’t it time to stop trotting out the standard sermon-literature diatribes against women as the cultural standard? It is clear from the actions of all three kings Edward of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries that they did not consider female lords to be “weak, irrational, and subordinate”—far from it. And the surviving records outlining Elizabeth’s estate management underscore her competence and the effectiveness of her leadership quite successfully.

Finally, Ward never discusses why Elizabeth de Burgh’s account records survived in such large numbers when so few others did. Is it because her principle heir, Elizabeth Countess of Ulster, was married to Lionel of Clarence? Many other account rolls seem to have come to the National Archives by way of the Duchy of Lancaster, so it stands to reason that this could have occurred as well for Clarence, and it would have been helpful to have someone so familiar with these documents speculate on the serendipity of their survival.

Despite the deficiencies of the introduction, this is still a valuable tool for teaching and research, and it is laudable that Ward took on the onerous task of translating these often indigestible documents and that the Suffolk Records Society saw fit to publish them. Let us hope that this is a sign of future publications to come: more presentations of the daily lives of medieval people through their actual documents.

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