CHAPTER SEVEN

PRINCIPES AND THE CRUSADING NOBILITY

As with their vocabulary for the lower social orders, the early Latin historians for the First Crusade differed from one another in the terms they employed for the upper layers of society. *Principes, optimates, seniores, maiores, proceres* and so forth had, in the classical era, held very distinct social or legal meanings.\(^1\) By the early twelfth century, however, there was much less appreciation of their former nuances. Furthermore, the usage of such terms was still evolving, as can be seen by the various ways in which these historians made use of them.

One fairly consistent feature of the works examined here was their notion of nobility. By the early twelfth century the concept of *nobilitas* had come a long way from its origins as a term for the consular families (descendents of men who had held the consulship) of the Late Roman Republic.\(^2\) As discussed in Chapter Five, on the whole the evidence of the sources for the First Crusade shows that they considered nobility to a be a honoured social status possessed not only by the very uppermost members of the expedition, but also for the far more numerous *milites*, the knights. The most important examples in this regard comes from Guibert of Nogent. He described the relatively lowly knight Matthew as being of ‘noble birth’ (*genere nobilis*) and the entire body of knights on the crusade as the ‘flower of the nobility’ (*flos nobilitatis*) of the Franks.\(^3\)

In one of his—rare—substantial additions to the *Gesta Francorum*, Peter Tudebode described an incident in which the knight Rainald Porchet, himself a *miles nobilis*,\(^4\) was displayed to the Christians on the walls of Antioch by the besiegers before being executed. Brave in the face of death, Rainald shouted out to encourage the Christian leaders, letting them know that in a recent battle they had killed all the *maiores*

---

3. GN 198, 147.
4. PT 79. For Rainald Porchet see J. Riley-Smith, *First Crusaders*, p. 219.
and the bolder men of the city, namely twelve emirs and 1,500 nobles.  
Although the society being described here is that of the Muslim army in Antioch and the numbers are exaggerated, it gives a sense that Peter Tudebode saw the category of nobles as a very broad one.

Another crusading historian who used the term nobles with regard to Muslim society was Raymond of Aguilers. The passage of greatest interest from Raymond’s history in this regard is his comment that bodies of Arabs, both of the nobles and the vulgus, outside Tripoli were a delightful sight to the Christian army, following fighting early in March 1099. This example suggests that Raymond of Aguilers understood the couplet, nobles and vulgus, expressed the entire body of society: that the basic social division was between noble and commoner.

The image of a society that consisted of two basic orders, the nobility and the commoners, was a commonplace for Albert of Aachen. At the siege of Antioch, sometime during the spring of 1098, Count Hugh of Saint-Pol and his son Engelrand led a successful foray against those Turks who were preventing his followers bringing forage to the camp. As a result of their victory nobles et ignobles came running up from every side. Despite this victory, famine soon pressed hard on many nobles et ignobles. Soon after the flight of Count Stephen of Blois from Antioch, 2 June 1098, a vision of the Church Father, Bishop Ambrose of Milan was reported to the Christian army. Albert wrote that Ambrose’s speeches produced great comfort to clerics and lay people, nobles et ignobles. Similarly, on the death of Bishop Adhémar of Le Puy, nobles et ignobles mourned with extreme lamentations. When, in August 1098, plague struck the Christian forces in Antioch, ‘both nobles et ignobles gave up the spirit of life.’ Furthermore ‘whether equites or pedites, nobles et ignobles, monachi et clerici, parvi et magni, to say nothing of the female gender, more than 100 thousands were laid waste by death without being struck down by swords.’

__References__

5 PT 79.  
6 RA 23 (240), 125 (260), 186 (272), 262 (286).  
7 RA 262 (286).  
8 AA iii.48 (214). For Hugh of Saint-Pol, aged vassal of Count Eustace III of Boulogne, see A. V. Murray, The Crusader Kingdom, p. 213.  
9 AA iii.53 (220).  
10 AA iv.38 (306).  
11 AA v.4 (342).  
12 AA v.4 (342): *Tam nobilies quam ignobilies spiritum vitae exalarent.*  
13 AA v.4 (344): *Tam equites quam pedes, nobles et ignobles, monachi et clerici, parvi et magni, quin sexus feminem super centum milia sine ferro morte vastati sunt.*