



The Talents of Jacopo da Varagine: A Genoese Mind in Medieval Europe

By Steven A. Epstein

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Jacopo da Varagine (c. 1228–1298) is remembered today primarily for his immensely popular work, *The Golden Legend*, a massive collection of stories about the saints. Compiled over the years 1260–67, *The Golden Legend* quickly eclipsed earlier collections of saints' lives. One indication of its popularity is the fact that so many manuscript copies of the work have survived—more than one thousand according to some estimates. Despite the enduring influence of *The Golden Legend*, Jacopo remains an elusive figure because he left behind so little information about himself. In *The Talents of Jacopo da Varagine*, Steven A. Epstein sets out to remedy this situation through a careful study of all Jacopo's works, including many hundreds of sermons and his innovative chronicle of Genoese history.

In Epstein's sure hands, Jacopo emerges as one of the most active and talented minds of his day. Indeed, Epstein argues that one needs to read all of Jacopo's books, in a Genoese context, in order to understand the original scope of his thinking, which greatly influenced the ways generations of people across Europe experienced their Christianity. The rich sources for Jacopo's sermons, saints' lives, and history illuminate the traditions that inspired him and shaped his imaginative and artistic powers. Jacopo was also one of the inventors of social history, and his writings reveal complex and new perspectives on family life as well as the histories of gay people, slaves, Jews, and the medieval economy. Filled with impressive insights into the intellectual life of the thirteenth century, *The Talents of Jacopo da Varagine* will be of interest to a wide range of medieval scholars and students of religious history, church history, and hagiography as well as intellectual history and Italian history.

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Editorial Review

Review

"This is a work of outstanding scholarship, impressive for Steven A. Epstein's command of the primary and secondary sources, for his ability to situate Jacopo within his Genoese context, and for the quality of his writing. It will constitute a significant contribution to our scholarship on Jacopo. One of the major strengths is its close readings of primary sources. Particularly noteworthy are the chapters on Jacopo as a historian, the complex and nuanced interpretations of Jacopo's works, and the numerous Genoese references that help situate Jacopo in a specific place. I finished this book deeply impressed by the range of Jacopo's contributions in a wide variety of genres. That an archbishop of a major port city was able to administer his archdiocese and complete so much brilliant work is remarkable. This book is distinguished by its interdisciplinarity, which should help it appeal to a wide variety of historians and scholars."?George Dameron, Saint Michael's College, author of *Florence and Its Church in the Age of Dante*

"*The Talents of Jacopo da Varagine* offers a new way of looking at a particularly important medieval writer and, therefore, a new way of understanding his works. Steven A. Epstein illuminates Jacopo's contexts, such as Genoa at its height and the Dominican order as it had become established by the later thirteenth century. This book will deepen scholarly use of Jacopo's writings; there are no comparable books that consider Jacopo in his integrity as an author in this way."?Samantha Kahn Herrick, Syracuse University, author of *Imagining the Sacred Past: Hagiography and Power in Early Normandy*

About the Author

Steven A. Epstein is Ahmanson-Murphy Distinguished Professor of Medieval History at the University of Kansas. He is the author of several books, including *The Talents of Jacopo de Varagine: A Genoese Mind in Medieval Europe* and *Speaking of Slavery: Color, Ethnicity, and Human Bondage in Italy*, both from Cornell, and *The Medieval Discovery of Nature*.

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