

**Marie Dejoux, Pierre-Anne Forcadet, Vincent Martin, Liêm Tuttle (dir.), La justice de Saint Louis. Dans l'ombre du chêne, Paris (Presses universitaires de France) 2024, 400 p., ill., ISBN 978-2-13-086319-9, EUR 28,00.**

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What did Louis IX desire to achieve in the area of royal justice? What was the ideological underpinning of his aspirations? What did he actually accomplish? These three questions lie at the heart of the book under review. The group of now leading scholars who combined their knowledge and talents to produce the volume had been working independently on aspects of these questions since their days in graduate school and had separately published major relevant contributions since that time. They believed – and they were quite correct, in my view – that a collective effort to combine and advance their interpretations would pay off handsomely in scholars' understanding of the nature, aims and influence of the French government in the thirteenth century.

To understand Louis IX's aspirations, the authors have looked back to the Carolingian period and the central claims about kingship at that time. Consequently, they discuss the coronation ceremony and sacrality, unction and dynastic symbols in particular. They also address Carolingian representations of the ruler's judicial responsibility to punish the guilty and protect the innocent. The point is not to claim that Louis IX and his advisers were slavish imitators of their Carolingian predecessors but to explore what thirteenth-century authorities, including the king, emphasized from inherited traditions. The sources for accomplishing this particular aspect of the investigation include, prominently, mirrors of princes (advice books, one might call them), contemporary coronation ordines (along with pertinent ideas drawn from scholastic theology) and – one of the most fascinating discussions in the entire volume – the material objects used as symbols of royal sacredness and authority in the thirteenth century (54–62). They test their interpretations against the *ipsissima verba* of Louis IX himself, not least his so-called »Teachings« composed for his heir.

The authors make clear that Louis IX and his councilors had lofty goals. They saw royal justice as exemplary. The government would have preferred if lordships throughout the realm adhered to the aims and followed the procedures of the king and his judges. To a certain extent and over the very long haul, under the mentorship of the crown (*une sorte de tutelle*, p. 198), these jurisdictions did harmonize aspects of their procedures with those of royal justice. Yet, the king's and his councilors' attitude was also pragmatic (*réaliste*, p. 86). They recognized and respected those customs that differed from royal procedures as long as they cohered with the



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underlying principles of royal justice. They were also cautious. They realized that no matter how often they talked about the exemplarity of royal justice as an ideal, real human beings at the provincial and local level had to operate the system. They were as subject to temptation as anyone else, and this propensity to sin necessitated the establishment of a comprehensive system for the identification of corruption and for its eradication. Hence, the famous reform ordinance of 1254 and the equally famous stratum of the administration known as the *enquêteurs*. The very word *enquête* (Latin, *inquesta*) operated in so many arenas and at so many registers in addition to this one that scholars may legitimately speak not solely of justice but of government in general by inquest.

The king's administrators (*baillis*, *sénéchaux* and lesser officials) needed close supervision. The lords of fiefs also endured surveillance, so that the ruler could uncover their abuses of the rights of justice they possessed. The government did not hesitate to impose severe punishments on various malefactors, but one cannot say with certainty how often the judges issued capital judgments. To be sure, Louis IX's government did not have the resources to protect all the vulnerable people who needed protection, including the financially poor. Yet, it certainly aspired to listen to complaints, to respond to them with righteousness, in line with Catholic beliefs of the time, and to forestall the sort of practices, like private war and the bearing of arms, that led to the harm of innocent people. Underneath it all, one might say, was the desire to assure the salvation, spiritually speaking, of the king's subjects. This desire also explains in large part the legal repression of heresy, blasphemy and usury as well as the effort to convert Jews to the Catholic faith.

The authors of this study readily admit that there is still a lot to learn about Louis IX and his governance. The background and responsibilities of the royal councilors, for example, cry out for additional study. To offer another example, our presently limited knowledge of the procedures and outcomes of the courts of the *baillis* and *sénéchaux* would benefit enormously from more investigation. Yet, what the authors provide in this wonderful volume is a major gift to the field. It will itself be an enormous stimulus for continuing research.



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