

**Jean-Michel Matz, Noël-Yves Tonnerre, L'Anjou des princes, fin IX<sup>e</sup>–XV<sup>e</sup> siècle, Paris (Éditions A. et J. Picard) 2017, 360 p., 67 fig. en n/b, 21 pl. en coul. (Histoire de l'Anjou, 2), ISBN 978-2-7084-1023-7, EUR 34,50.**

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The city of Angers and the region of Anjou have received extensive scholarly attention for the better part of a century and a half because of the exceptional importance that they played in the political, economic, military, cultural, social and religious history of Late Antiquity, the Middle Ages, as well as early modern Europe. In order to provide specialists, students, and general readers a synthesis of this enormous historiographical tradition, the Picard press has undertaken to publish a four volume series under the direction of Jean-Luc Marais that treats Angevin history from its origins up through the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The second volume in this series, written by Jean-Michel Matz, professor of medieval history at the University of Angers, and Noël-Yves Tonnerre, emeritus professor of medieval history at Angers, covers the period from the end of the 9<sup>th</sup> through the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, an era that they denote as »Anjou of the Princes«.

As the authors explain in their introduction, the dates 476 and 1492 have little relevance for the history of Anjou, which was characterized in the 5<sup>th</sup> century by substantial continuity with the late Roman world, and in the 15<sup>th</sup> century by political events that had nothing to do with the »discovery« of the New World. Their purpose is to use Anjou, during its rule by counts and dukes rather than by kings, as a prism through which to understand developments in cultural, religious, and economic affairs as well as changes in political organization and institutions.

The volume as a whole is divided into two parts. Tonnerre, a specialist in the economic and social history of the West of medieval France in the period before the 13<sup>th</sup> century, covered the period between the emergence of an Angevin principality in the late 9<sup>th</sup> century up through the end of Plantagenet rule in the early 13<sup>th</sup> century. Matz, whose research focuses on the social, religious, and cultural history of late medieval Anjou, was responsible for the second half of the study that treated the period from Philip Augustus' conquest of the region from King John up through the death of Duke René of Anjou in 1480, and the recovery of direct rule in the province by King Louis XI of France (1461–1483). In addition to examining Anjou, itself, the two authors also consider the larger political units of which Anjou was a part, including the kingdom of France, the Angevin Empire of the Plantagenets, and the second Angevin Empire created by Charles of Anjou through his conquest of southern Italy and Sicily.

The first half of the book is divided into three sections, the first of which begins with a detailed treatment of the sources of information that are available for the study of Anjou. These include an analysis of the historiographical treatment of the narrative sources dealing with Anjou and collections of legal acts preserved in ecclesiastical archives. Of particular importance, this introduction to the sources also emphasizes the central importance of archaeological research to understanding social, economic, political, religious and military matters. Chapters one and two then provide



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an overview of the political history of Anjou covering the period 888–1202. The third chapter focuses on the power of the nobility within the Angevin principality. Here Tonnerre accepts the traditional »feudal« narrative that Carolingian military organization collapsed, and with it the public obligation of landowners to serve in expeditionary levies, and for all able-bodied men to participate in the public defense. This broad participation in military affairs, Tonnerre argues, was replaced by a monopoly by the nobility on military violence. Such a conclusion is at odds with much of the English-language scholarship on Anjou, which provides considerable evidence for the continuity of Carolingian military institutions well into the 11<sup>th</sup> century. In other matters relating to the nobility, however, Tonnerre rejects the importance of the year 1000 as marking a decisive turn in the breakdown of public order. Instead he posits strong comital authority over the nobility at the turn of the millennium.

Section two of the first half of the book, in chapters 4–6, focuses on Anjou's role as a major center of spiritual and artistic development. In chapter four, Tonnerre contrasts the overall bleak condition of the church in the north of France with the very positive situation in Anjou. Although other regions, such as Normandy, saw the wide scale destruction of the ecclesiastical infrastructure as a result of attacks by the Vikings, the monasteries of Anjou were not abandoned and in the second half of the 10<sup>th</sup> century benefited from substantial internal reforms. Tonnerre then turns to a discussion of the individual episcopates of the bishops of Angers, pointing to the close control exercised by the counts over these prelates, but also the extensive development of episcopal organization down to the parish level. In chapter five, Tonnerre builds on the previous discussion by addressing the religious and spiritual life of Anjou. He describes the 12<sup>th</sup> century as a period of victory for Gregorian reform, as well as an era of continuing vitality for Benedictine monasticism despite the emergence of other types of communal life, including the Cistercians. In this context, Tonnerre also argues for an increasing lay participation in religious life through confession, but does not address evidence for extensive lay participation in confession during the Carolingian period. The final chapter in this section focuses on the cultural growth in Anjou that was driven, Tonnerre argues, by the extensive political power of the Angevin counts, the efforts of reforming bishops, and the influence of the monasteries. He points to the Carolingian background, and particularly Charlemagne's command for the establishment of episcopal and monastic schools, as providing the foundation for the efflorescence of cultural production during the 10<sup>th</sup>–12<sup>th</sup> centuries. Tonnerre devotes particular attention to literary production, and architectural developments, which had their roots in the Carolingian world but adopted newer influences as well, such as the transition to the Gothic style in the first half of the 12<sup>th</sup> century.

In section three, Tonnerre turns his attention to economic matters. Chapter seven is focused on demographic growth in the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> century, which was made possible by and also encouraged a massive expansion of arable lands under cultivation, largely through deforestation. The counts, secular nobility, ecclesiastical magnates, and peasant cultivators all played a role in this transformation of the environment. Tonnerre argues that the substantial population growth in this period led, in turn, to the fixing of a hierarchy of settlements, the expansion of fortifications and fortified sites as well as a substantial increase in the number of villages and market towns in what previously had been thinly settled agricultural areas. In chapter eight, Tonnerre examines the impact of substantial economic growth on society, noting the weakening of both juridical and financial burdens on free and unfree cultivators. He also emphasizes the leading role played by the Angevin counts in encouraging economic development through investments in the

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transportation infrastructure of Anjou. He ends the chapter with a discussion of urban growth in the city of Angers and the development of a new urban center in the county at Saumur.

The second half of the book by Matz begins with section four, comprising chapters 9–12, that considers the history of Anjou under the Capetians and early Valois. Chapter nine provides an overview of the conquest of the region by Philip Augustus and developments in comital administration that took place under Capetian rule. Matz then considers the reign of Charles of Anjou and challenges the scholarly consensus that the county served this Capetian prince merely as a source of revenues for his military conquests in southern Italy. Matz argues instead that Charles was directly involved in comital administration throughout his reign and put in place substantial administrative reforms, which he oversaw even while on campaign in Sicily. In chapter ten, Matz turns to a discussion of economic matters and emphasizes the continuing prosperity of Anjou in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, which he credits to a number of factors including its excellent transportation routes and the substantial expansion of viticulture in the region.

Chapter eleven is focused on the church, religion and culture. As with the economy, Matz sees the 13<sup>th</sup> century in largely positive terms with the expansion of episcopal administration, and the final fixing of parish boundaries with a concomitant improvement in pastoral care for the laity. Matz also argues that Anjou maintained its major centers of learning even in the face of growing competition from the emerging universities, and particularly the University of Paris. By contrast, in the final chapter in this section, Matz paints a bleak picture of Anjou in the 14<sup>th</sup> century resulting from a combination of war, the concomitant increasing fiscal demands of the crown, and the beginning of a centuries long climatic downturn that led to famines, economic turmoil, and population declines.

Section five, which includes chapters 13–17, treats the period of the Valois dukes from the mid-14<sup>th</sup> through the late-15<sup>th</sup> century. In the first chapter in this section, titled »An Era of Difficulties«, Matz discusses the impact on Anjou of plague, famine, and war, with an emphasis on significant decline in cereal production and loss of population. An increasing volume of surviving documents from this period allows Matz to identify social differentiation in the countryside among peasant cultivators based on the possession of capital goods such as teams of oxen. He also points to the impoverishment of the nobility, and ties this development to the increasing success of the crown in attracting the nobility to its service. In chapter fourteen, Matz assesses Anjou as a royal appanage under the rule of Duke Louis I (1360–1384), with a discussion of the ducal administration, which drew upon men from diverse backgrounds, including laymen drawn from the sub-noble ranks of society.

Matz then follows with a chapter on the church and religious life in Anjou under the Valois. He emphasizes the activist role of the Avignon papacy in appointing clerics to offices in the duchy. He also challenges the state of the question that the poor quality of clerics in Anjou fueled the Reformation by pointing to numerous efforts to improve clerical education. However, he also notes the increasing lay participation in religious life and their emphasis on understanding the sacraments as well as partaking in spiritual exercises. Chapter sixteen is concerned with the »beautiful autumn« of medieval culture and focuses largely on the court of Duke René, the last independent prince of Anjou. Matz also turns his attention to education in Anjou, emphasizing the continuing importance of both primary and university schools. Matz ties this discussion of education to an examination of culture during the reign of René, and asks whether the late 15<sup>th</sup> century witnessed changing cultural tastes

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as evidenced by surviving library catalogs that demonstrate a preference for classical, patristic, and medieval works. He concludes the chapter with a discussion of the impact of the printing press on Angevin culture and the impact of war on the construction of the homes of the nobility.

The final chapter in the volume focuses on the end of Anjou as an autonomous principality. From an economic perspective, Matz sees the late 15<sup>th</sup> century as a period of growth, marked by increasing cereal production and repopulation of regions left empty by plague and war, although he also notes the reemergence of plague in the mid-15<sup>th</sup> century as well. In political terms, Matz argues that the denouement of the Hundred Years War and the military reforms of the French kings increased royal power at the expense of the nobility. The death of René in 1480, therefore, led inexorably to the reincorporation of the duchy to direct royal rule. Among the numerous manifestations of the new balance of power, according to Matz, was the introduction of royal urban policy to the city of Angers.

As a synthesis, Tonnerre and Matz eschew an extensive scholarly apparatus and provide no notes for the volume. Each chapter, however, is equipped with a brief bibliographic essay of notable works, including both French and English-language studies, dealing with the subjects treated by the authors within that chapter. The volume does not include a cumulative bibliography. The text is rounded out with an index of names and principle places in Anjou. There are also several dozen illustrations as well as a set of colored plates, which provide useful visual support for the points made by the authors. Taken as a whole, this volume provides a valuable survey of the history of Anjou over a period of 600 years and will be a useful resource for students with a knowledge of French who are seeking an introduction to Angevin history. An English translation of the text is a desideratum to make it available to undergraduate students in the United States. Specialists likely will find little new here and also surely will quibble about one or another point made by Tonnerre and Matz. Nevertheless, the authors' detailed discussion of the sources available for Angevin history and their emphasis, in particular, on the importance of archaeological research offer an important lesson for scholars as well.

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