

**Xavier Hélyary, L'ascension et la chute de Pierre de La Broce, chambellan du roi († 1278). Étude sur le pouvoir royal au temps de Saint Louis et de Philippe III (v. 1250–v. 1280), Paris (Honoré Champion) 2021, 518 p. (Études d'histoire médiévale, 16), ISBN 978-2-7453-5552-2, EUR 78,00.**

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**William Chester Jordan, Princeton**

Xavier Hélyary's book is a thorough study of the affair of Pierre de La Broce, a royal chamberlain, who rose to have an unexpectedly strong influence on King Philip III of France (1270–1285). Scholars have traditionally seen Pierre as a perfect type of the greedy royal favorite seeking advancement in dubious ways. To a certain extent, Hélyary argues that they may have exaggerated his influence and his acquisitiveness, but Pierre's story remains a fascinating one. He was not destined by high birth to become a part of the inner circle of advisers of Philip III, but a series of circumstances on the Eighth Crusade (1270), on which Hélyary is the acknowledged expert, brought this about. The death of Philip's father, Louis IX (Saint Louis), on crusade, the plight of the disease-ridden army, and the illness of the new king offered Pierre the opportunity to display his modest medical skills, his calmness in very difficult conditions and his evident loyalty. Once he had the trappings of power, however limited in reality, he systematically began to acquire properties from the king and others at court. He managed to have certain of his relatives and friends achieve major posts, like the bishopric of Bayeux. In addition, he enjoyed a style of living that was, according to critics, above his station. Finally, his fear that his achievements would suffer reversals as other men and women, particularly the king's new wife and her relatives, rose to prominence at court, appears to have led him into a plot or rather series of plots to discredit his detractors. His end came through an aristocratic counter plot, culminating in his execution in 1278. However, Pierre's fall does not seem to have had especially tragic repercussions on his family in general or even on those who had risen to some prominence with him.

How is it possible to tell this story in such vivid detail as Hélyary achieves? The source base is extraordinary. Officials seized the parchments in Pierre's personal archive that documented his accumulation of properties, and most appear to have survived the ravages of time and dispersal. Chroniclers describe what they had heard about the case. The role of any number of high churchmen who tried to get to the bottom of the rumors, many sexual, swirling around court generated additional records. Moreover, a body of contemporary moral tales about Pierre and his fate, in which the trope of the wheel of fortune is prominent, also survived.



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Hélary's book is not merely a narrative of the rise and fall of a counselor. To understand how Pierre played the game, one needs to know not merely the structure of the court but the individuals themselves. This is what Hélary provides in a series of meticulous studies in the first four chapters. It is only then, in the next three chapters, that he narrates the rise and, in four more, the fall of the chamberlain. These chapters are very much source-oriented, as Hélary attempts to uncover the different points of view underlying the authors of the sources. Anyone familiar with Jacques Le Goff's monumental biography of Saint Louis will appreciate the similarity of approach.

I once lamented that the state of scholars' knowledge of the royal court and its courtiers in 13<sup>th</sup> century France fails to »satisfy«; an opinion that Hélary quotes with evident approval early on in his book (p. 20). With this magisterial study of the court of Philip III, he has made a major contribution to rectifying this situation.



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