
H-France Review Vol. 3 (December 2003), No. 138

Florian Mazel, *La noblesse et l'Eglise en Provence, fin Xe-début XIVe siècle: L'exemple des familles d'Agoult-Simiane, de Baux et de Marseille*. Paris: Comité des Travaux Historiques et Scientifiques, 2002. 806 pp. €32.00 E.U. (pb). ISBN 2735505030.

Review by John Drendel, University of Quebec at Montreal.

Following a research path well worn by half a century of scholarship into the French nobility, Florian Mazel has produced a major study of aristocratic families in Provence from the eleventh to the fourteenth centuries. This study explores kinship, politics and piety while eschewing more fashionable themes like representation, ritual and emotion. Yet the approach underlying and supporting these traditional themes shows that Mazel has assimilated the fundamental changes in research of the last two decades, most notably in his close focus upon individuals and specific families. The dense texture invokes the fundamental premises of microhistory—a reconstruction of history from the choices individuals make. The resulting study respects past scholarship while thoroughly remodeling our understanding of how the Gregorian reform changed medieval society.

Mazel explores the destinies of three major Provençal aristocratic families—the lords of Baux, the viscounts of Marseille, and the House of Agoult-Simiane—which emerged in the eleventh century as the principal powers in the Rhone Valley, the hinterland of Marseille, and the plateau of Forqualquier. The decline of regional power after 1050 allowed these three houses to cement their hold over land and people by dominating local episcopal and monastic establishments. The evolution of this aristocratic power over the next two hundred years depended not only upon issues like kinship structure and marriage, problems which the influence of Marc Bloch and Georges Duby allowed to dominate the historiography of this period, but also, if not above all, upon the relationship between these lineages and the church. While historians of Italy or Germany may not find this to be a novel idea, in France, as Mazel points out, a century long battle between “*curés*” and “*républicains*” isolated religious history, particularly in the *Annales* tradition, from broader social movements. Even if it were only to address this singular lacuna, Mazel’s book would be a significant achievement. It offers in fact much more.

Mazel breaks down the evolution of aristocratic power into three periods, all of which are commanded by the evolution of the church. In the first period, 1050-1150, aristocratic power consolidated itself through the domination of episcopal seats and urban monastic institutions. In this post-Carolingian age, local power in Provence remained predominantly urban in its focus and administration. Donations to the church consisted largely of rural churches near the *castra* which these families were building to consolidate their territorial influence in the countryside. By exercising a form of patronage reserved to kings in the Carolingian period, large families reinforced their power in the city without dissipating their prerogatives in the *pagus*.

The Gregorian attack upon intimate family and property ties among bishoprics, monasteries, and the local aristocracy constituted a veritable revolution, both in its rejection of traditional forms of piety which sanctified aristocratic power and in its erection of a monarchical church dominated institutionally

by Rome. The struggle for control of local churches in Provence fundamentally altered the foundations of local power. Reforming bishops and papal legates, supported by resurgent comital influence in the second period, 1150–1209, wrested control from the viscounts of Marseille and the Baux over bishoprics in Arles and Avignon. In reaction, these families took their piety and generosity to the new orders, in particular Cîteaux and the Hospitalers of St. John of Jerusalem, and sought a new equilibrium with bishops by placing their sons in cathedral chapters. The latter practice enabled the principal branches of these families to sustain an urban presence. More and more, however, the great families identified with their rural lordships, near the Cistercian and Hospitaler domains they supported. The branching of lineages resulting from inheritance customs based upon equality among brothers increased the importance of the rural foundations of seigneurial power in the *castra*. Only in Orange and Apt did the Baux and the Agoult-Simiane sustain a strong urban seigneurie after 1100; in the former because the bishopric was a recent foundation and in the latter because Apt was an ecclesiastical backwater, the episcopal domain was poor, and the House of Agoult-Simiane avoided brutal assaults upon episcopal liberties.

In the third period, 1209–1350, the aristocracy of Provence experienced a dramatic transformation of its structure, power, and piety. The Albigensian crusade provided the bishops of Provence with a militant force with which to break aristocratic resistance to ecclesiastical lordship, particularly in its initial stages, when the crusaders targeted Raymond of Toulouse's possessions in the lower Rhone valley. In Marseille, the papacy was blatantly provoked to remove viscount Roncelin in 1211. Roncelin, a monk of St. Victor, was persuaded by the town's merchant oligarchy to leave the abbey and assume the town's lordship, in flagrant defiance of the Gregorian order. The final episodes of the crusade (1226–1250) provided the Catalan count of Provence, Raymond Berenger V, with the opportunity to support the church and consolidate his own power. Those nobles who rallied to his side, including those studied by Mazel, discovered a new vocation of service to the prince. Those who opposed him, and his Angevin successor, Charles I of Anjou, led their lineages into decline. Barral of Baux represented both tendencies. While the Baux supported the initial crusade, the resulting triumph of episcopal power stiffened their resistance after 1226. In 1234, Barral supported Raimon VII of Toulouse and invaded the Comtat Venaissin, lands of the count of Toulouse in the Marquisat of Provence which the papacy seized in 1215. Barral then led aristocratic opposition to the new count, Charles I d'Anjou, who married the heiress of Provence, Beatrice, in 1246. But Barral rallied to the new order in 1251, thus preserving for himself and his lineage its lands and power in Provence, and acquiring new lands in Southern Italy. He died in 1268 as grand-justicier of the kingdom of Sicily.

The notion that allegiance to the princes of the emerging state was the key to new prosperity for old aristocratic families is not a novel proposition. Service to the Angevins alone could not, however, guarantee the survival and prosperity of a house; the destinies of the three lineages studied by Mazel rose or fell depending upon their patrimonial and marriage strategies as well. The viscounts of Marseille, bereft of urban revenues after Honorius II returned Roncelin to his abbey, married badly, accumulated debts, and declined into a family of rural squires, holding fragmented seigneurial rights in the hinterland of Marseille. The Baux had an intermediate fate. Some of the branches fell, like the viscounts of Marseille, into the ranks of village aristocracy, but others, like the branch of Barral, sustained their status with marital links to the count and other important families. These prestigious links eventually led to a new preeminence for the Baux in the Neapolitan court. In upper Provence, the different branches of the Agoult family prospered by preserving rights over tolls and markets and by specializing in marriages with rich heiresses of disappearing aristocratic lines.

Particularly intriguing is the importance of the Provençal nobility's adoption of Angevin Guelphism, especially after the Holy See established itself in Provence in 1309. Continuing relations with the church remained a constant force in the success of the aristocratic houses which survived and prospered in the fourteenth century. The most successful families tied themselves with the mendicant orders, ties which complemented their estrangement from local episcopal seigneuries, while at the same time emulating

the favor of the Angevin court towards the mendicants and cementing their devotion to the papacy. The patronage of Franciscan convents in Apt and Orange by the Agoult and the Baux dates from the origins of the Friars in Provence. Of particular importance in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth century were the links between the Provençal aristocracy and the Spirituals, whose roots in the region go back to Hugues of Digne (d. 1256). The cult of King Robert's brother, St. Louis of Anjou (d. 1297), a Spiritual Franciscan, flowered into a "royal religion" which Robert carefully cultivated to exalt his reign during the period in which Guelphism was shadowed by John XXII's persecution of the Spirituals.

At the same time, the viscounts of Marseilles, despite their irremediable decline, provided the Franciscans with a sophisticated Minister General, Raimon Jaufre V of Trets (d. 1310). Raimon almost certainly encountered Hugues of Digne in the convent of Marseille. As Minister General of the order after 1286, Raimon defended the Spirituals—in particular the theologian Peyre-Joan Olieu (1248-1298)—and was a key influence in Louis of Anjou's decision to forsake the crown of Sicily and Jerusalem for the Franciscan habit. The fantastic and emblematic virgin marriage of Dauphine of Puimichel (d. 1360) to Elzear of Sabran (1285-1323) epitomizes the aristocratic embrace of the mendicant ideal of ascetic sanctity in service to the world. Mazel's richly detailed reconstruction of the continuing importance of sanctity for the Provençal aristocracy through the history of this couple and their cult is the finest moment of this book. His conclusion, that aristocratic Franciscanism deepened the attachment of the leading families of Provence to the Angevin monarchy while expressing an enduring critique of the Gregorian "church-state" at the local level, is significant and original.

The 600 pages of this revised dissertation will discourage the non-specialist, but the author's remarkable ability to summarize each section of the book allows readers to grasp the principal lines of argument. Most readers will not venture into the thickets of names and relationships in his close analyses of specific families, but those who do will find helpful genealogies in the annexes. The final 150 pages should, however, be read by everyone interested in understanding how great families persisted in an attachment to the church that was fundamental to the sustenance of their estate during the rise of lay and ecclesiastical monarchy in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

John Drendel
University of Quebec at Montreal
r21750@er.uqam.ca

Copyright © 2003 by the Society for French Historical Studies, all rights reserved. The Society for French Historical Studies permits the electronic distribution of individual reviews for nonprofit educational purposes, provided that full and accurate credit is given to the author, the date of publication, and the location of the review on the H-France website. The Society for French Historical Studies reserves the right to withdraw the license for redistribution/republication of individual reviews at any time and for any specific case. Neither bulk redistribution/republication in electronic form of more than five percent of the contents of H-France Review nor re-publication of any amount in print form will be permitted without permission. For any other proposed uses, contact the Editor-in-Chief of H-France. The views posted on H-France Review are not necessarily the views of the Society for French Historical Studies. ISSN 1553-9172