

H-France Review Vol. 4 (July 2004), No. 72

Sean L. Field, *The Writings of Agnes of Harcourt. The Life of Isabelle of France and the Letter on Louis IX and Longchamp*. Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003. x + 106 pp. Bibliography, notes, and index. \$38.00 U.S. (cl). ISBN 0-268-04403-1; \$19.00 U.S. (pb). ISBN 0-268-04404-X.

Review by Christopher K. Gardner, George Mason University.

The original manuscript(s) of Agnes of Harcourt's *Life* of Isabelle of France have been lost since the French Revolution, and scholars have since depended upon the edition of Charles du Fresne, Sieur du Cange, published in 1688. Du Cange did not thoroughly explain either his techniques or the provenance of his source, however, and subsequent historians could not verify his references in the *Archives nationales de France*. Such issues might explain why the work of Agnes, twice abbess of the women's Franciscan house established by Isabelle at Longchamp and well-connected member of the Capetian court in her own right, has not been much studied. Sean L. Field's edition should begin to change that, though much remains to be said about the *Life* of Isabelle and Agnes's letter concerning her royal benefactor.

Field has painstakingly uncovered the earliest surviving copy of Agnes of Harcourt's *Life* of Isabelle (d. 1270), sister of King (and saint) Louis IX of France, which was made not by Du Cange, but by Sébatien le Nain de Tillemont. Although de Tillemont's work was unpublished and preceded Du Cange's only by some thirty years, Field convincingly demonstrates how the language and orthography of the copy by de Tillemont much more closely represents other texts emanating from the Ile-de-France in the late thirteenth century than does Du Cange's, which silently updated phrases and spellings into mid seventeenth-century French. Building on the transcriptions and notes of de Tillemont and his instructor, Antoine Le Maistre, Field presents an *en-face* French edition and English translation of the *Life* of Isabelle and Agnes's open letter (dated 4 December 1282) concerning Louis IX's piety and patronage of his sister's Franciscan house at Longchamp. The letter is edited and translated as well for the first time by Field, though it too survives only in a later copy (in this case from the middle of the fifteenth century). Field's edition of the *Life* focuses on de Tillemont's copy. Nevertheless, Field includes sections that Du Cange transcribed but de Tillemont did not; de Tillemont noted that he did not include the few miracles that had been crossed out in the manuscript before him.

The edition and facing translation are well presented, accurate, and accessible. The book should prove an excellent resource for upper-level undergraduate courses covering women, religion, medieval Paris, and the French language and literature. With Field's contribution, the University of Notre Dame Press has added a valuable volume to its series "Texts in Medieval Culture." Field thoroughly notes variations between the copies of the *Life*, which should prove valuable to students of both medieval and seventeenth-century French. Yet, the notes pertinent to textual variations are placed at the ends of each text, rather than at the foot of each page, which makes them difficult to follow without a good deal of page flipping. Such arrangements surely were to avoid unsettling the students for whom Field states his book is designed, although they might bother the scholars he also wants to address.

The value of Field's introduction, on the other hand, is difficult to gauge. It seems pitched at once both to scholars who want to follow the difficulties of establishing an "original" text from later copies and to first-year students who would prefer a summary of the texts' topics and their most general significance to reading the texts themselves. The single most discussed topic in the introduction pertains to the debate over Du Cange's undocumented document of Isabelle's *Life* and Field's uncovering of and work with the hitherto unedited work of de Tillemont and Le Maistre. Field's textual archaeology requires explanation, of course, and he provides it in a clear and convincing manner. Nevertheless, the detail and extensive footnotes seem too rich for the students in his audience and of value particularly to scholars of the archival and editorial practices of academics of the Ancien Régime.

The rest of the introduction contextualizes Agnes of Harcourt as one of a few female authors in the high Middle Ages. As Field point out, Agnes was not the first woman to write in the vernacular, even in France, but she was the first woman known to write about another woman in French prose. The introduction also sketches the lives of

Isabelle and her older brother Louis IX (d.1270), as well as the efforts of their brother, Charles of Anjou, to get Louis canonized and to establish the congenital sanctity of the Capetian royal family. These are the pages that read like the crib-notes too many undergraduates want to turn to instead of to the text in question. Indeed, the themes raised here could apply to almost any text drawn up to encourage the canonization of not only Louis, but also his other brothers Alfonse of Poitiers and Robert of Artois all of whom died on crusades.

The elementary quality of this part of the introduction, which argues simply that Charles and Agnes had similar interests in lauding the sanctity of the Capetian blood line and presented numerous examples and testimonies to demonstrate that sanctity, is especially striking in that Field does not comment on significant aspects of the quotidian activities and socio-religious milieu of the Capetians that Agnes's texts reveal. To give but a few examples: Louis, a layman, is said to have given "the first sermon" to the women of Longchamp after he "enclosed" them (p.46). That a king, even one of Louis's stature, rather than a cleric could confer the rights of enclosure and offer the first sermon for the women therein was not unheard of, but warrants some discussion by the editor. Louis's sister Isabelle endured a transformative illness that inspired her to found the religious house for women at Longchamp (p.56), a story that parallels Jean de Joinville's account of Louis IX having taken the crusader's cross in an oath offered while gravely ill--a parallel that works quite well within the context Field outlines although it gets no mention. Isabelle underwent "such great disciplines" or bodily mortifications not by her own hand but by that of Madame Helen of Busemont, and Isabelle did so with such severity that she bled (p.60). Thus Agnes presents a saintly woman whose spiritual exercises ran counter to the church's skepticism toward flagellation of one by another, especially with a rigor that the church often frowned upon. Finally, one of Isabelle's miracles post-mortem pertains to the healing of the house's keeper, who fell from a basket hoisted into the vaults and "pulled by a chord by a machine" (p. 90). Slim, but vital, evidence of the activities required for the upkeep of Gothic structures, even in the prime. These are but a few of the topics that should have been outlined and contextualized in the introduction.

The disjuncture between the texts and the introduction to them is perhaps most striking in the discussion of Isabelle's preparations for "la riule" (the rule under which the women of her house were to live). According to Agnes of Harcourt, Isabelle "stayed up a large part of the nights and days" working on her rule so that it would be confirmed by the pope (pp. 64 and 66). She did so in the presence of numerous clerics and Franciscan brothers who reviewed her work in progress. Agnes emphasized Isabelle's deliberations over what should and should not be included, and her close cooperation with numerous luminaries from the University of Paris, such as the Franciscan Brothers Bonaventure and William of Meliton. Agnes thus painted a picture of a well-connected woman garnering support and guidance at every step in order to have her spiritual ambitions fulfilled. Field's introduction sketches the scene in a couple of places, yet rather flatly states, "The Franciscan master would be present in her chambers to examine everything as it was written, and Isabelle was so intent on making certain that nothing 'perilous to souls' should find its way into the rule, and was so anxious that the rule should be approved by the pope, that she could hardly rest" (p. 23). The striking facts that Isabelle not only wrote a religious rule (albeit with the oversight of male Franciscan academics) but had the connections to elicit support from the university and to get it approved by Pope Alexander IV in 1259 go by with hardly a mention.

The edition and translation of these texts bring a valuable contribution to the field, especially, it seems to me, for advanced undergraduates. The introduction, on the other hand, dilutes that contribution because it provides only the general (if not easily presumed) context of Capetian family politics and spiritual image making. The reader is largely left to his or her devices to bring out the richness of quotidian detail in the texts that Field has so expertly assembled and edited. The edition was undertaken as part of Field's Ph.D. dissertation at Northwestern University, and thus one hopes Field plans a follow-up monograph of Agnes, Isabelle, their house at Longchamp, and the Capetian patronage that gave these women notable power, opportunity, and flexibility.

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ISSN 1553-9172