
H-France Review Vol. 16 (August 2016), No. 174

Justine Firnhaber-Baker, *Violence and the State in Languedoc, 1250-1400*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014. xiv + 217pp. Illustrations, map, notes, bibliography, and index. \$99.00 (hb). ISBN 978-1-107-03955-1.

Review by John Arnold, Birkbeck, University of London.

In one among a number of arresting moments in this book, Justine Firnhaber-Baker tells us that the count of Pardiac remarked in 1395 that he did not think that war was illegal, “but even if it was, nobody ever did anything about it” (p. 169).

The phenomenon of violence within medieval society, particularly violence as fomented by noblemen and their followers, has long been associated with wider narratives about “government,” “state-building” and indeed “civilisation.” If, following Weber, we take a fundamental aspect of the modern state to be its monopoly over legitimate violence, it would appear that the presence of other kinds of violence—violence not exercised by the king—*ipso facto* demonstrates we are not in the presence of the modern state. The presumed saturation of society by violent activity, as with the presumed saturation of society by unquestioning religious credulity, indicates that we are “medieval.” These debates hover at the fringes of Justine Firnhaber-Baker’s work, and although—as her title indicates—she does want to think about the presence or absence (or strength or weakness) of a premodern “state,” she is also very clear throughout that teleology misleads us in this area. The presence of violence, and the ways in which political power attempted to deal with violence, varied over time and was not a clear linear progression.

Thus, in this important and carefully-researched monograph (originally a doctoral thesis supervised by Thomas Bisson), Firnhaber-Baker brings various aspects of that violence into closer scrutiny and very helpfully complicates the picture. The violence she is interested in is not domestic or interpersonal but the kind of larger-scale and often prolonged fighting that medieval authors often called “wars” or described as involving armed groups one might consider “armies.” The word “war” [*guerra*] was not limited to conflicts between kings; quite minor lords could have a “war” with each other, and indeed so also could cities, bishops, and monasteries. This in itself reminds us that we are in a period that is not-modern—though not necessarily one in which violence was unvaryingly endemic.

There are two main aspects to the research Firnhaber-Baker has undertaken. One is to track through a variety of documents (in the Archives Nationales, in local archives, and in compilations of sources such as the *Histoire Générale de Languedoc*) every definite or possible occasion of local warfare, keeping the south of France as her main terrain—though in fact intermittently drawing attention to similar phenomena elsewhere. Here she attempts to track the rise and fall of periods of particular instability, demonstrating moments in which a combination of factors can be shown to have prompted warfare and prevented much effective intervention from the throne. The other aspect to the research is a very careful examination of the ways in which a succession of French kings (de facto rulers of the south by the mid thirteenth century) addressed these phenomena, particularly in regard to inter-noble conflicts, law, and nascent political theory. Here a particularly key focus is the 1258 *ordonnance* issued by Louis IX,

prohibiting 'all wars' in his realm, almost certainly drafted by Guy Foulques, canon lawyer extraordinaire, bishop-elect of Le Puy, and future pope. This ambitious piece of legislation has a long but not-at-all straightforward afterlife and provides Firnhaber-Baker with a useful point of reference against which to understand and assess other forms and modes of royal intervention.

After an introduction which sets the scene historiographically and methodologically, chapter one focuses on the situation in Languedoc after the conclusion of the Albigensian Crusade, and rightly notes the particular discourse on "peace" that permeated post-Crusade legislation. Firnhaber-Baker follows Aryeh Grabois in seeing this as drawing upon and arising out of the earlier "Peace of God" movement.[1] In the second half of the thirteenth century it combines with the style of Louis's kingship to establish a Capetian ideology of peace, as something obligated by God and requiring royal mandate. At the same time (p. 44) it is not clear that royal representatives necessarily acted according to the ideology of the 1258 *ordonnance*, and nor was it the case that inter-noble warfare was in itself a "crime." Where they did intervene, it was more in an attempt to help the disputants come to peace, rather than to punish those who were breaking it. Chapter two picks up the story from Louis's death in 1270 and focuses particularly on Philip IV, who issued at least six *ordonnances* during his reign relating to local warfare and who oversaw a shift (Firnhaber-Baker argues) from God's peace to the *king's* peace, emphasizing on a number of occasions that inter-noble violence was an affront to the king himself, not least because of the distraction it caused from his own needs. There is in this sense a "monopoly on violence," though of a rather different kind, more sense of violence as *belonging* to the king. At the same time, the royal documents pertaining to local warfare start to use the language of the "common good" and the *res publica*—"a term which might best be translated as 'state' or 'government' in this context" (p. 65). Accordingly, local warfare started to be treated as a crime to be punished, rather than a problem to be solved; and we find instances for the first time of royal officials arresting nobles as a preventative measure because they thought violence was *going* to be committed (p. 74).

Chapter three moves on to the last Capetians and the period in which the Hundred Years War began. Key here are the leagues of 1315, which forced Louis X to disavow royal power over against local customs. This broke radically from the principles built up in the preceding reigns that the king could, of his own regnal position, intervene for the good of the realm in local warfare; instead, nobles asserted ever more strongly their customary "right" to wage war against each other. Nonetheless, Firnhaber-Baker demonstrates, *specific* interventions and agreements did work to keep the basic principles in place from Philip IV's reign, even if abandoning the ideological high ground: that peasants were to be protected, that private wars had to be put on hold if the king needed to wage war with another realm, and that there had to be a "significant delay" (traditionally forty days) between the declaration of warfare and the onset of actual violence—a "cooling off period," as it were.

Chapter four charts a "changing experience of violence" in the second half of the fourteenth century, linked to the ongoing devastations of the Hundred Years War and in particular to the increased number of "freebooters" roaming the landscape. Inter-noble violence was now only one problem among many, and, Firnhaber-Baker argues, *realpolitik* overtook ideology: there was little emphasis on framing "peace" in regard to royal rights and powers, but more practical attempts to quiet down different situations through whatever means presented themselves to royal officials. But important also were *local* institutions asserting their own role in limiting or assuaging violence. At the same time, local justifications for violence began to assert the legitimacy of vengeance in affronts to honour—including the collective honour of a town, for example, or a family.

In chapter five, moving into the latter half of the fourteenth century, we are in a social and political landscape ravaged by the combined factors of ongoing warfare and recurrent plague (particularly devastating in the south in the later return of plague, in the decades after 1348). Royal authority was not strong, and at the same time there is a demonstrable growth in inter-noble violence, which for the first time (Firnhaber-Baker argues) takes on the recurrent quality of feuding, thus ensuring that

conflicts dragged on for years rather than being specific flashpoints amenable to particular moments of dispute settlement (a pattern of violence which points ahead to early modern experiences). The ideology of royal authority in regard to violence weakens in one respect, with little or no reference to the Capetian *ordonnances*, and with the king repeatedly allowing particular nobles the “right” to pursue private violence against others. But, it is argued, this ties noble families to royal authority in a different sense, making them part of localised state formation.

There is much here that I have not recounted, in regard to specific moments of violence and the finer details of political, economic, and legal currents. One of the very great strengths of the book is its persuasive refutation of any straightforward linear “developments” to or from a society of violence. It demonstrates that different aspects—of royal ideology, of practical intervention, and of participants in and causes of particular periods of local warfare—were all in flux, all subject to change, whilst also braiding them cumulatively together. This works particularly well with regard to the explicit ideology of royal proclamations and the *realpolitik* of intervention by royal officials. The book draws upon a host of sources, and is written throughout with clarity and wit. The numerical tabulation of local wars is not always completely persuasive because of problems of definition, evidence, and comparative impact (are all “wars” of equal size and shape?) but is useful nonetheless in demonstrating the recurrent nature of the issue; and the list of conflicts provided as an appendix is a generous resource for other scholars.

This is, in short, an impressive and powerful book, adept in particular at bringing out the implicit political ideas in medieval legislation whilst tracking also the gaps between that legislation and action. It contributes importantly to wider ongoing debates about violence, order, society—and indeed what is “medieval” or not about the middle ages.

NOTE

[1] Aryeh Graboïs, "De la trêve de Dieu à la paix du roi: Étude sur les transformations du mouvement de la paix au XIIe siècle" in Pierre Gallais and Yves-Jean Riou, eds., *Mélanges offerts à René Crozet*, 2 vols. (Poitiers: Société d'études médiévales, 1966), I: 585-96.

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ISSN 1553-9172