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David Potter, Ed., *France in the Later Middle Ages 1200-1500*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003. xiv + 288 pp. Further reading, chronology, genealogical tables, chief office-holders of France, glossary, maps, and index. £14.99 U.K. (hb). ISBN 0-19-925047-2.

Review by William Chester Jordan, Princeton University.

The editor of the volume under review has done an extraordinarily fine job in bringing together generally first-rate essays on aspects of later medieval French history. And his “Introduction” and “Conclusion” draw the various themes of the individual essays together in useful ways. This is a rare trait in edited volumes. The book thus has the “feel” of a coherent general study.

The real gems of this collection, beside the “Introduction” and “Conclusion,” are Michael Jones’s and Graeme Small’s respective chapters on the evolving relationship of the crown and the provinces, Anne Curry’s vivid review of the Hundred Years War, the editor’s own comprehensive and eminently readable study of the institutions and personnel of Valois governance, and Gareth Prosser’s re-evaluation of the meaning of nobility in the later Middle Ages, emphasizing its genuinely deep military character.

Of course, no collection is perfect and there are two relatively weak—or perhaps, one should say, thin—chapters by Pierre Charbonnier. His dozen pages on the economy and society of France leading up to the crisis of the fourteenth century and another dozen from him on the crisis itself and its aftermath offer too superficial a treatment of such complex subjects. One noticeable absence from the collection is a thematic treatment of the church. *Ecclesia* surfaces in several essays, usually due to the role of a few prelates in governance or, less happily, in the stereotype of the tired careerist, late medieval institution caricatured in Protestant historiography for centuries. Unfortunately, little or nothing is done to interrogate this impression. The contrast with English historiography is striking, as recent work has reawakened scholars to the vitality and seriousness of religious devotional practices in the late medieval church.[1]

One explanation for the absence of any concentrated study of the church in the collection is the primary focus on politics and indeed on royal and princely government. Insofar as the church is relevant to this focus, it is those aspects of it that affected governance more or less directly. One author, Gareth Prosser, cautions that the *raison* of princely authority should not be crowned as the only cause of change in the history of later medieval France (p. 209), but the same author perhaps too readily dismisses the scholarship which placed the royal struggle against feudalism in this position (pp. 182-83). Feudalism, as a useful historical construct, has fallen on hard times in the last three decades, but not all medievalists have bought into the critique. Thomas Bisson’s recent study of medieval Catalonia offers a particularly far-reaching criticism of the anti-feudalism *atelier*. [2] The term, when carefully used, still has value in describing certain important aspects of the political structures of high and late medieval France.

Other caveats about the collection concern, first, the number of errors—most no doubt typographical—in Jean Dunbabin’s otherwise perfectly straightforward essay on the period from 1200 to 1336. The medieval treaties of Péronne (1200) and Paris (1259) were not “signed”, as she put it, but rather “sealed” to validate them. The use of “citizens” interchangeably for “subjects” is unwise; medievalists traditionally limit the former term to burghers. Burghers and rustics together, however, were subjects of the crown. Philip the Fair was not yet Philip IV when he married the heiress, Jeanne of Champagne (p. 27). Philip II Augustus lost the royal archives in the battle of Fréteval in 1194, not 1197 as it is twice

reported on p. 29. The year “1247” seems an arbitrary choice for saying that by that date “Louis IX had determined on ... a crusade” (p.31). He first made the decision in 1244 while ill, took the vow a second time in 1245 after his recovery, and worked continuously on preparing for war in the East from then on. The “failed Spanish crusade,” usually called the Crusade against Aragon, took place in 1285 not 1283 (p. 32).

As the headnotes to this review indicate, the essays are followed by an invaluable guide to further reading, an excellent chronology, genealogical tables, lists of government personnel, a needed glossary, maps, and a good index. There is nothing like this collection in any other single volume. It should be assigned in all courses on medieval France or on French history in general.

LIST OF ESSAYS

- David Potter, “Introduction”
- Jean Dunbabin, “The Political World of France, c. 1200-c. 1336”
- Pierre Charbonnier, “The Economy and Society of France in the Later Middle Ages: On the Eve of Crisis”
- Michael Jones, “The Crown and the Provinces in the Fourteenth Century”
- Anne Curry, “France and the Hundred Years War, 1337-1453”
- Pierre Charbonnier, “Society and the Economy: The Crisis and Its Aftermath”
- Graeme Small, “The Crown and the Provinces in the Fifteenth Century”
- David Potter, “The King and His Government under the Valois, 1328-1498”
- Gareth Prosser, “The Later Medieval French Noblesse”
- David Potter, “Conclusion”

NOTES

[1] See, especially, Eamon Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, c. 1400-1580* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1992).

[2] Thomas Bisson, *Tormented Voices* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998).

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