
H-France Review Vol. 13 (October 2013), No. 159

M. Cecilia Gaposchkin, ed; translations with Phyllis B. Katz, *Blessed Louis, The Most Glorious of Kings: Texts Relating to the Cult of Saint Louis of France*. Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2012. xi + 307 pp. Illustrations, notes, and bibliography. \$39.00 U.S. (pb). ISBN 0-268-02984-9.

Review by Ronald J. Stansbury, Roberts Wesleyan College.

St. Louis IX of France is certainly one of the most significant and well known of medieval French kings. Born in 1214, Louis became king of France in 1226 at age twelve, went on crusade twice in 1250 and again in 1270 when he died in North Africa. St. Louis' canonization process began almost immediately after his death and ended with the formal pronouncement of his canonization by Benedict VIII in 1297.

Building on her 2010 monograph, Cecilia Gaposchkin offers here in both Latin edited text and facing-page English translation a collection of mostly previously unpublished hagiographical, liturgical and sermonic sources for the life of St. Louis. [1] Modern readers of course know St. Louis best through the text of Joinville's *Life of St. Louis* written around 1308 and published in the sixteenth century, but Gaposchkin argues convincingly that the medieval Saint Louis is better found in the texts offered here: *Gloriosissimi regis*, *Beatus Ludovicus*, the liturgical (mass) texts *Ludovicus decus regnantium* and *Gaudeamus omnes*, and in two sermons on St. Louis by Jacob of Lausanne, an early fourteenth-century Dominican preacher.

Gaposchkin introduces the reader to the hagiographical tradition of St. Louis, the manuscript tradition of these particular texts, and the themes that featured so prominently in these early lives: his humility and other virtues, devotion to the cross and relics, his ascetic practices, his crusading and, of course, the divine providence and protection during his life and the miracles that were immediately reported after his death. Of particular interest is the discussion about how the authors of these early lives had to wrestle with the dichotomy that existed between the apostolic ideals of poverty and renunciation on the one hand and the wealth and power that naturally come with royalty on the other. Gaposchkin suggests that this dichotomy worked out well because it mirrored the life of Christ, who was both King and servant.

Gloriosissimi regis is one of the early portraits of St. Louis offered here. There are twelve chapters that begin with his early life and education (under the influence of his mother Blanche of Castile) and end with his death. Several chapters were added in the fifteenth century and included early miracles. *Beatus Ludovicus* is another early post-canonization text and shares many of the same details as *Gloriosissimi regis*, but also some differences. There are twelve chapters that include a total of seventeen miracles. Of particular interest in this text is the section on his kingship or rule found in chapter nine. Here St. Louis is portrayed as a wise and just ruler who, modeled after Christ, set aside glories of kingship in favor of serving the poor, punishing unjust nobleman, and striving for peace throughout his realm.

Gaposchkin also offers two liturgical texts, *Ludovicus decus regnantium* and the Mass for St. Louis (August 25) *Gaudeamus omnes*. Both of these texts provide important examples of how Louis was remembered in the context of the liturgy.

The final sources included here are two sermons from the early fourteenth-century Dominican preacher Jacob of Lausanne (d. 1322): *Rex sapiens* and *Videte regem Salomonem*. Because these sermons (there were a total of five written in honor of St. Louis) were copied many times, Gaposchkin suggests that they would have had some influence on the later memory of the King, certainly within the Franciscan and Dominican communities, and particularly with regard to the themes of political kingship, religion and community in the early fourteenth century.

Although Gaposchkin takes some liberty in translating the poetry of the liturgical texts, the English translations read well and thus make this a good text selection for courses on medieval hagiography and even a more general survey on medieval history. Scholars of medieval hagiography, liturgy and sermon studies will also welcome this important addition to the corpus of edited and translated texts.

NOTE

[1] M. Cecilia Gaposchkin, *The Making of Saint Louis of France: Kingship, Sanctity and Crusade in the Later Middle Ages* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2010).

Ronald J. Stansbury
Roberts Wesleyan College
stansbury_ronald@roberts.edu

Copyright © 2013 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 edistribution/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