

---

H-France Review Vol. 16 (November 2016), No. 263

William D. Paden, *Two Medieval Occitan Toll Registers from Tarascon*. Medieval Academy Books 115. Toronto: University of Toronto Press for the Medieval Academy of America, 2016. xiv + 278 pp. Figures, maps, notes, glossary, and bibliography. \$85.00 U.S. (cl). ISBN 978-1-4426-2934-9

Review by Wendy Pfeffer, University of Louisville.

William Paden has been described as the doyen of American scholars of Occitan language and literature; *inter alia*, he is the author of *An Introduction to Old Occitan*, the language textbook for students of medieval southern France. To review *Two Medieval Occitan Told Registers from Tarascon*, his critical edition of two medieval commercial documents from Tarascon (Bouches-du-Rhône) is a relatively simple task, because Paden knows the language and culture of the region so well. With this edition, he adds to his previous expertise an intimate understanding of mercantile issues, such as rates of exchange of multiple currencies and the numerous products that the city of Tarascon taxed as merchants moved their wares past the city walls, whether on land or on water.

The two registers published in this edition are both from Tarascon, two lists of tolls, both composed in the local language, Occitan. The earlier document, Tarascon, Archives municipales AA9, known as *Le livre rouge*, ff. 3r-17r (manuscript *T*), had been published by Edouard Bondurand in 1890.[1] Paden offers a new edition of this work, accompanied by a later toll list, identified as Newberry Library (Chicago)/Northwestern University (Evanston) MS 1; Newberry Library, Vault Case MS 220, heretofore unpublished (manuscript *N*). Thanks to his work with both Occitan documents, along with several Latin toll registers and other documentation of tolls on the Rhône River from 1252 through the fifteenth century, Paden offers a convincing revised chronology for the Occitan records. He dates MS *T* to 1298-1325, though it was copied in circa 1438, and MS *N* to after 1387 and before 1425-50. While these dates are based on inferences, the logic is valid.

Paden's study of the language of his texts shows distinctions between them. MS *T* shows Italianisms that Paden connects to the presence of Italian merchants and scribes in Provence during the period of the Avignon papacy, a highly plausible explanation. On the other hand, MS *N* shows dialect traits found in today's department of the Hautes-Alpes. This difference permits Paden to infer that MS *N* was not copied from MS *T* and that they show no direct transmission one to the other. The linguistic examination allows Paden to demolish Bondurand's argument that MS *T* was archaic; Paden demonstrates that the vocabulary and forms that the nineteenth-century scholar thought antiquated were nothing of the sort.

The physical description of the two manuscripts and texts shows their similarities and differences. Both registers start with the highest tolls and list per decreasing tax rates. Most importantly, MS *T* presents its information in tabular format, whereas MS *N* uses paragraphs. Paden suggests that intended readership and users might explain this difference, though I might add that the inclinations or (in)experience of the scribe might be other explanations.

Paden then considers the purpose of the two registers, which was the fixing of toll rates for commodities in transit. He adds that MS *N* may have been created to update the official toll rates; that new terminology, specifically, the small hogshead, may represent a change in shipping practices. More importantly, the registers served as documentation of the king of Sicily's presence and power in late medieval Provence—the king was also count of the region. Paden thinks that a major interest of the registers was in total tolls collected, rather than offering an aid to the toll keeper charged with collecting the money, for each register includes a table that modern tax collectors would find difficult, if not impossible, to use. Paden thinks that contemporaries tolerated the scribal errors in these tables, but I believe that practical utility of the tables required accuracy, unless Paden is correct in his belief that the reader of these documents was not the toll collector himself.

Paden considers “The World around the Registers,” a discussion of Tarascon, its king and its tolls, ships and shipping, commerce and currencies, *inter alia*. Among the details worthy of note in these pages is the observation that in the mid-fifteenth century, river traffic was “about one ship every two days,...fewer in winter and more in summer” (p. 28[2]). The two registers charge tolls for slaves, demonstrating that a small slave trade existed in southern France in the late Middle Ages. The registers also show the breadth of trade that passes through Tarascon, with goods coming from as far away as Aleppo, Syria (alum), India (indigo) or the East Indies (brazil wood), in one direction, from Cornwall (tin) and Cologne, Germany (thread) in another. Salt was a major element of the toll system. Paden also considers the individuals involved in the tolling process—toll keepers and shareholders who received a percentage of tolls received, even though most of the revenue went to the king.

Paden demonstrates that the registers reflect increasing toll rates and the changing nature of merchandise (ash as cargo is but one example, not included in the earlier register but specifically mentioned in the later one). He explains how much of the toll revenue went to the king, though there were also individual shareholders who profited from the tolls. The families involved in the toll business changed over time as well. Paden, the linguist, considers the language (specifically tense usage) of the two Occitan registers as well as their contents to demonstrate consciousness of change over time, overturning the long-held assumption that “toll registers from Tarascon and elsewhere did not change with time” (p. 39). He demonstrates that the careful use of tense in the Occitan registers makes clear that the documents show “overt recognition of change, a recognition that provides evidence of historical consciousness” (p. 40).

Both toll registers are organized by principles that were logical to contemporaries. The tolls are listed in descending rate of imposition and also according to categories of commodity, although neither of these principles is perfectly observed. Additionally, we have tolls on the river itself and also at several other entry points to Tarascon, such as at Saint Gabriel and Lubières. The two Occitan registers, especially when compared with Latin extant documents, allow Paden to observe increasing toll rates over time.

The introduction concludes with an afterword; the linguist tries to connect the toll registers to the troubadours, musicians and poets of medieval southern France. Paden identifies troubadours connected with Tarascon and mentions briefly examples of commercial vocabulary found in medieval Occitan lyric poetry. This very brief discussion serves as a taste of Paden's next project, a study of troubadour love poetry that offers “a realistic reading” (p. 76), not dividing poetic works between fiction and non-fiction. While Paden tries to connect the real-world references in troubadour lyric to the toll registers edited here, perhaps such a connection cannot be made in the few pages available in this edition.

The core of the book is the registers themselves. Presented first is MS *T*'s text, then its translation with footnotes that explain translation issues, followed by MS *N*'s text, its translation again with notes, then, a description of the marginalia in the two texts. Last in this large section are the textual notes on the two Occitan registers. Paden's principles of edition are sound. He has attempted to present the two

registers for modern readers, though his effort to mark manuscript line numbers as they occur offers a presentation that may confuse those not familiar with the concept. For example, sometimes a line number falls within a word, as a word may continue across a line break; an example of a Latin word interrupted by line number is “*ver-(18)bum*” (p. 120), of an Occitan word, “*pre-(18)mierament*” (p. 121). He has rightfully decided not to emend the text, noting that “the registers had the status of official pronouncements bearing authority even in their flaws” (p. 50). I would add that the registers serve as documentation of language in Tarascon in their respective periods, a source that would be harder to work with had Paden emended the language to conform to norms that did not exist in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The translations are accurate and literal, though I do quibble with a few translation choices (see below).

The glossary, albeit selective, of this volume is itself a treasure. Paden has identified some sixty-eight common nouns not heretofore identified in major Occitan reference works. Each entry in the glossary offers the expected reference to its location in one of the toll registers, its definition and additional information, such as other usages, Latin equivalent terms, and commercial details of interest to scholars. I disagree with some of Paden’s translations, most notably that for *pols de sucre* and *polvera de sucre*, both of which he translates as “powdered sugar” (see p. 217 s.v. *pol*). Yes, that is a literal translation of the terms, but I believe “granulated sugar” is closer to the product being taxed. In the twenty-first century, powdered sugar is a specific product to which cornstarch or another anti-caking agent is added; what we think of as powdered sugar is perhaps much finer than what was available to medieval merchants, who tended to acquire their sugar in loaves, even if these are less often taxed at Tarascon. Another quibble regards the unit of measure *palm* (p. 210), which Paden converts to twenty-four or twenty-five centimeters. It would have been useful for him to have added the comment that in English-speaking countries, a palm is considered closer to three or four inches (eight to ten centimeters).

This reader would like to fault the press for several presentation issues. The introduction ends with its notes, a bit of an inconvenience. There is a single running header for the two Occitan texts and their translations, so that the header does not really tell the reader what is on a given page; that is, the reader does not know which text is where. Textual notes, traditionally placed at the foot of each page of a critical edition, are placed after both texts, another inconvenience for the reader. Each Occitan text is followed by its translation, so that it can be hard to compare translation and original. A facing-page translation, with textual notes on the page, would have been much preferable.

In conclusion, I sing the praises of William Paden, for his painstaking work on two texts that were unfamiliar to him in their format, though not in their language. Many medieval Occitan commercial documents have been published, often by French scholars who saw no need to provide a translation even into French. Paden has brought the two registers from Tarascon to the attention of scholars who have not mastered Occitan, who will benefit from his careful analysis of every feature, and who will be able to use this edition to further our understanding of medieval southern France.

## NOTES

[1] Edouard Bondurand, “Les Péages de Tarascon, texte provençal,” *Mémoires de l’Académie de Nîmes*, series 7, no. 13(1890): 135-159.

[2] Citing F. Denel, “La navigation sur la Rhône au XV<sup>e</sup> siècle d’après les registres de péage de Baix,” *Annales du Midi* 82(1970): 287-299.

Wendy Pfeffer  
University of Louisville  
[pfeffer@louisville.edu](mailto:pfeffer@louisville.edu)

---

Copyright © 2016 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