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Gaël Chenard, *L'administration d'Alphonse de Poitiers (1241-1271)*. Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2017. 548pp. Tables, notes, bibliography, and index. €58.00 (pb). ISBN 978-2-406-06016-1.

Review by Lindy Grant, University of Reading.

This is a substantial book which makes an important contribution to our understanding of France under Louis IX. The book analyses the administration of St. Louis's younger brother, Alphonse, who was invested with the county of Poitiers in 1241, and who was also, from 1251, count of Toulouse in right of his wife Joanna, who inherited the county of Toulouse from her father Raymond VII. Alphonse and his wife died on their return from his brother's ill-fated crusade to Tunis in 1270-1271, on which Louis himself died. Between 1241 and his death, Alphonse governed, as count, a very substantial area of the kingdom of France. The book contains several tables, including, as an appendix, a very useful table summarising the archival sources for Alphonse's administration. However, there are no maps. This is a real disadvantage, whether Chenard is discussing Alphonse's rule of his counties within the geo-politics of the kingdom, or whether he is discussing the micro-administration of towns and administrative units of Poitou.

The core of Chenard's study is an intensely detailed analysis of the surviving accounts produced for Alphonse. Some are household accounts, showing the income and expenditure of the count's and countess's households. Some are the accounts showing the expenditure and revenues for the various administrative units, the *prevotés* and seneschalcies, into which Alphonse's counties were divided. The survival of the accounts is patchy, and leads to a focus on Poitou rather than Alphonse's Toulousan lands. Nevertheless, the survival rate is much higher than is the case for the equivalent contemporary royal accounts, which are very fragmentary for the reign of St. Louis. In addition to the accounts themselves, a large number of the mandates, in effect administrative commands or orders, also survive for Alphonse's territories, again far more than in the case of the royal administration. These survivals allow Chenard to analyse the procedures of Alphonse's comital administration.

Alphonse's accounts are interesting enough in themselves, in that they reveal much about the accounting habits, and thus the administrative engine of government, for a large area of France in the thirteenth century. Set alongside the fragmentary royal accounts, they help to understand the accounting habits, and thus the administrative engine of government, of the kingdom of France in the century of St. Louis.

But, as Chenard shows, interpreting the accounts and understanding the administration of Poitou, let alone the kingdom, is far from straightforward. Alphonse's administration was established as new when Alphonse was invested with the county of Poitiers in 1243. At that stage, his administrative team was drawn from the royal household, and from that of his mother, Blanche of Castile, and his administrative procedures almost certainly closely reflected royal administrative procedures of the 1240s. Over the years, the initial close relationship between the personnel of the royal household and administrators and Alphonse's team naturally lessened, as Alphonse developed his own networks. However, Chenard sees little evidence of evolution in procedure in Alphonse's administration. He compares this to the French

royal administration, which was forced to evolve as more lands came under the direct control of the crown. This is perhaps an unfair comparison—for the royal administration we have fragmentary evidence stretched over the thirteenth century, whereas for Alphonse we have intense evidence for twenty-seven years. The accounts themselves have a shockingly high margin of error, and would not be much use to an administration that was trying to keep a close control on income and expenditure. Chenard argues that this allowed Alphonse and his administrators to shift the risk onto the agents of local government, the *prevôts* and seneschals, since their offices were farmed, and they would have to make up any shortfall between actual incoming revenues, and the expected amounts. Chenard insists throughout on the thin manpower of the Capetian administrations, both royal and Alphonse's, especially in comparison to the administrations of the Angevin kings of England. The Capetian administrations did much less checking, and much less careful and multiple recording of transactions, than their Angevin counterparts.

How far Alphonse's administration casts light on French royal administration is also problematic. That it does so has certainly been assumed in the past, indeed that was often why historians have been interested in Alphonse's administration. But, as Chenard points out, the relationship of Alphonse's administration and the king's has too often been coloured by assumptions about the perfection of St. Louis's kingship by late nineteenth-century or early twentieth-century historians like Edgar Boutaric and Auguste Molinier.[1] Boutaric and Molinier were the only previous historians to work extensively on Alphonse's administration, and Chenard is rightly and generously conscious of the importance of their work. But they tended to see Alphonse's administration as being a reflection of that of his saintly brother—though sanctity and administrative competence do not always go together. Conversely, Alphonse has acquired the reputation as an organised administrator-ruler, someone who cared more about efficiency than the state of his soul, largely because so much more evidence of the procedures of his comital administration has survived in the form of accounts and mandates. In fact, Alphonse does not really emerge from Chenard's study as a great administrator. Chenard proposes that Alphonse's administration should be seen on its own terms. Just because he does so, his study provides a much more solid ground for an attempt to understand the government and administration of Louis IX. The equivalent of John Baldwin's great book on the government of Philip Augustus for that of St. Louis remains to be written.[2] Le Goff was not interested in the workings of government.[3] W.C. Jordan's magisterial work on Louis's preparations for crusade is richly illuminating, but it focuses on a specific if hugely important area of Louis's administration.[4] Indeed, I think that Chenard could have made more use of Jordan's work to enrich his comparisons between Louis's and Alphonse's administrations.

Chenard builds on his understanding of the inside workings of Alphonse's administration of his counties to open a discussion about the political relationship between Alphonse and Louis IX. Both brothers were profoundly affected by the Crusade of 1248-54. Louis felt that his life thereafter must be penance for the failure of the crusade. Alphonse fell very ill on his return, and probably never regained full health. Before the crusade, Alphonse spent quite a bit of time in Poitou, improving his residences there, taking an active part in the running of the county; after the crusade, perhaps on account of his health, Alphonse remained in and around Paris, governing his counties at a distance through his officials. After the crusade, Chenard identifies indications of growing distance between the two. Alphonse stayed at royal residences until Louis's return in 1254, but after that he set himself up just outside Paris in the area around Montlhéry and seems rarely to have appeared at the royal court or to have coincided with Louis's itinerary. Certainly Alphonse, like their younger brother Charles of Anjou, was unhappy at some of Louis's initiatives, including his determination to make peace with Henry III (which involved handing some of Alphonse's Poitevin lands over to Henry), and his determination to subjugate baronial coinage, notably that of Alphonse and Charles of Anjou, to royal coinage. The growing rift between Alphonse and Louis had administrative implications. Chenard stresses the importance of identifying the personnel of government. Before the crusade, many of Alphonse's administrators, whether clerks or laymen, were drawn from the ranks of the royal administrators—though that is what one would expect with the establishment of a new comital administration. At this stage, Alphonse's administration may indeed have been a close reflection of Louis's. Like his brothers, Alphonse copied Louis's *enquêtes* into

maladministration as a form of redemptive government before the crusade. After the crusade, there was probably less exchange of personnel between the royal and the Poitevin administrations, and thus perhaps less convergence of practice between the two.

The political strains between Louis and Alphonse were the inevitable result of investing Alphonse with such extensive lands. Alphonse became one of the great princes of France, governing an immense polity within the kingdom, like the count of Champagne, the countess of Flanders, or the duke of Burgundy. The power balance between the great principalities of France and the kingdom, polities within a polity, had been problematic before the Capetians took the throne in 987, and would continue to be so throughout the rest of the Middle Ages, at least. The power balance is often discussed in terms of the construction of the centralised nation state: that gradually the principalities would be conquered by, or be absorbed into the rule of, or be controlled by, the king, now truly sovereign in his kingdom. It is probably true that most medieval rulers wanted to have as much effective power as they possibly could over as much of their realm as they possibly could. But the realities of sovereignty in thirteenth-century France were not so straightforward. One of St. Louis' own administrators, Philip de Beaumanoir, wrote that "the king was sovereign in his kingdom, and the baron was sovereign in his barony."^[5] There were always going to be occasions when what the king thought might be for the good of the kingdom, might not be what a great prince, like the count of Poitiers, thought would be good for his county. Chenard's extended discussion of the political and the juridical relationship between Alphonse as count and Louis as king of France is an important contribution to an understanding of the conception and the reality of sovereignty and governance in thirteenth-century France.

In spite of the political, and sometimes personal, strains between Alphonse and Louis, and, indeed, between Charles of Anjou and Louis, they possessed a strong sense of familial solidarity. They did not all express their personal piety as overtly as St. Louis, but, as Charles of Anjou said, they had all been schooled in deep religious devotion by their mother, Blanche of Castile, and personal piety was deeply important to them. In Alphonse, it manifested itself in a perpetual urge to return to the Holy Land as a crusader. Chenard argues that this was what motivated Alphonse to demand that his administrators extracted as much as possible in revenue from his counties, though there is no evidence that this led to any real evolution in administrative practice within his counties in the way that it does seem to have driven Louis IX to administrative innovation in the late 1240s in order to raise the huge revenues necessary for the king to fund his first crusade. At all events, it was this manifestation of personal piety that brought Alphonse and Louis together, as both focused on planning their final, and fatal, crusade.

NOTES

[1] Edgard Boutaric, *Saint Louis et Alphonse de Poitiers: Etude sur la réunion des provinces du Midi et de l'Ouest à la Couronne et sur les origines de la centralisation administrative* (Paris: Plon, 1870); Auguste Molinier, *Correspondance administrative d'Alfonse de Poitiers*, 2 vols. (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1894-1900); Auguste Molinier, *Etude sur l'administration de Saint Louis et D'Alphonse de Poitiers dans le Languedoc* (Toulouse: Privat, s.d.).

[2] John W. Baldwin, *The Government of Philip Augustus: Foundations of French Royal Power in the Middle Ages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986).

[3] Jacques Le Goff, *Saint Louis* (Paris: Gallimard, 1996).

[4] William Chester Jordan, *Louis IX and the Challenge of the Crusade: A Study in Rulership* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979).

[5] Philippe de Beaumanoir, *The Coutumes de Beauvaisis of Philippe de Beaumanoir*, ed. and trans. F.R.P. Akehurst (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992), p. 363.

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