
H-France Review Vol. 18 (February 2018), No. 39

Kathryn L. Reyerson, *Women's Networks in Medieval France: Gender and Community in Montpellier, 1300-1350*. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016. xxix + 257 pp. Maps, bibliography, appendices, and index. \$99.99 U.S. (hb). ISBN 978-3-3193-8941-7; \$79.99 U.S. (eb). ISBN 978-3-3193-8942-4.

Review by Erin Jordan, Old Dominion University.

In *Women's Networks in Medieval France*, Kathryn Reyerson contends that the “life and experiences of Agnes de Bossones offer an entry into the world of medieval Montpellier” (p. xxi). Reyerson is correct in her contention. Her meticulous examination of documents of practice, most notably the notarial registers of Montpellier, provides a window into the medieval urban community through the lens of a prominent and powerful woman. While Agnes is very much at the center of the study, Reyerson produces much more than a biography of an elite, urban woman. She mines the sources masterfully to situate Agnes at the center of the social and commercial networks that crisscrossed medieval Montpellier. Such networks, both horizontal and vertical, were carefully constructed over time through marriage, apprenticeships, financial interactions, and charitable activities. The networks that Reyerson reconstructs, so crucial to individual success in the late medieval urban environment, were populated largely by women, who used them to further their own personal and professional ambitions. While a study of an elite urban woman's experience in and of itself would be a welcome addition to the current historiography, what Reyerson contributes is so much more. Though centered on the professional and personal activities of Agnes, her discussion reveals a community of women, rural and urban, across the socio-economic spectrum who animated the streets of Montpellier in the first half of the fourteenth century.

Chapter one introduces the reader to Agnes de Bossones, widow of the prominent changer and merchant Petrus de Bossones. Reyerson traces the extent of familial involvement in political and economic life of Montpellier to assess their standing among the urban elite. She determines that both her father and husband were members of the consular elite, which positioned Agnes among the “upper bourgeoisie” (p. 77). Although quite young at the time of her husband's death, Agnes remained a widow for nearly forty years. Management of her husband's estate, which was not insignificant, fell to the widowed Agnes, involving her in extensive litigation in both the French and Majorcan court systems of Montpellier. Her ability to successfully navigate both court systems proved beneficial to her family, demonstrating the extent to which “women could manipulate the court system as well as any man” (p. 18). Agnes also played active roles in expanding her kin group, arranging marital unions for her three daughters that widened their personal and professional network.

Chapter two explores the extensive family network of the Bossones, which included fifteen grandchildren. Examination of Agnes's will of 1342 illustrates the various ways she relied on family members to ensure the perpetuation of her memory. It also demonstrates how family functioned to secure future bloodlines. While a large family provided security, it also required careful management of resources. The formation of alliances through marriage of daughters could bring benefits through new economic relationships and an expansion of one's financial network. Yet, such unions could also divert property and wealth from the natal family. Balancing these concerns required careful navigation and negotiation of resources. Reyerson

includes a transcription and translation of Agnes's carefully crafted, complex will in appendix five, revealing the range of responsibilities among various branches of the family, particularly regarding provisioning for grandchildren.

The discussion in chapter three, "Networks of Property," also centers to a large degree on Agnes's will, situating her as an active matriarch of a large family, exerting control over financial affairs after her death through the dispersal of the family's holdings and monetary bequests. Reyerson approaches the final testament of Agnes as a documentary snapshot of the wealth she amassed over the course of several decades, identifying the various components that comprised an urban fortune. As her actions attest, Agnes was not content to transmit her inherited wealth to ensuing generations of her family but rather actively managed the estate, consolidating the family's wealth and furthering their financial interests in the process (p. 33). In addition, Reyerson uses written documents to understand the spatial configuration of Montpellier, exploring the association of various occupations and trades with particular physical sites within the city. By identifying the properties held by the family in Montpellier, Reyerson demonstrates the intersection of status and location within urban spaces.

Chapters four and five discuss the use of institutions to create new networks of association or enhance existing ones, focusing on marriage and apprenticeship respectively. The discussion of marriage extends beyond the alliances formed by the Bossones family. Reyerson addresses how marriage functioned generally within the urban community, integrating immigrants and, at times, facilitating social mobility among residents. Reyerson argues that marriage between individuals from the countryside to residents of Montpellier functioned as a "community-building exercise," fostering horizontal and vertical mobility (p. 49). Chapter five engages similar themes, focusing not only on the economic function of apprenticeship as an institution, but identifying the individuals who participated. Reyerson is particularly interested in examining the role played by women in the process of apprenticeship. The extant contracts facilitate a consideration of the influence of gender on the practice, revealing the range of trades open to women. Not unlike marriage, apprenticeship functioned as a process of integration into the community, often resulting in social mobility.

Chapter six examines urban-rural connections primarily through a case study of the entrepreneur Bernarda de Cabanis, who not only sold mercery in Montpellier, but trained others in its production. Bernarda, like Agnes, was a member of the commercial elite. But she too engaged in actions that benefited less exalted members of society, particularly women. In this chapter, Reyerson traces the various interactions that occurred between mercantile/retail members of society and those involved in agricultural pursuits, both urban and rural. She reveals the extent of interaction that occurred among women in trade in Montpellier and its environs. Her study of Bernarda allows Reyerson to determine the extent to which women were negatively impacted by their formal exclusion from guilds. She concludes that, in spite of such exclusion, women were valued for their expertise, often securing access to training through relationships with other women. Reyerson demonstrates that they were valued for their expertise, as well as the extent to which women like Bernarda and Agnes were instrumental in empowering other, less elite, women within Montpellier by offering support and professional opportunities that were otherwise denied them due to their sex.

In chapter seven, "Women of the Marketplace," Reyerson focuses on Herbaria square, the central market in Montpellier for those engaged in more modest economic activity. An extended dispute over rights to the square resulted in litigation involving the Bossones. The documents produced over the course of the dispute include witness testimony that reveals the physical composition of this unique space, illuminating its spatial configuration. They also provide eyewitness accounts of the women who inhabited it and the activities in which they engaged. Of particular note is the extent to which various occupations were not only gendered, like reselling, but comprised family traditions that were passed down through generations. Careful examination of this corpus of material reveals the links, both vertical and horizontal, that connected the women who populated Herbaria square. Reyerson posits the existence of a community in

which elite women, like Agnes, provided opportunities for those below them on the socio-economic ladder. As Reyerson acknowledges, women like Agnes were not entirely altruistic in their support of others, reaping rewards in the form of prestige and bolstering their own status within the community accordingly. Reyerson argues that the personal networks formed as a result of professional interactions like those witnessed in Herbaria square provided additional opportunities for elite women while forming a safety net for disadvantaged females that was crucial in a society dominated by men.

Chapter eight shifts its focus from Agnes to a group of women living adjacent to the city of Montpellier in an area called Campus Polverel. Based on the terminology utilized in the notarial registers in reference to them, as well as their location within the community, Reyerson advances the argument that these women were prostitutes. She further suggests that many of the twenty-five women named in various real-estate transactions were not only single but had immigrated to Montpellier. Given the nature of medieval views toward prostitution, the extent to which these women participated in the economic life of the town is rather surprising. Not only did they enter lease agreements, many appear to have been property owners in their own right. They were also active consumers of luxury goods. Based on the frequency of their contact with municipal officials, Reyerson characterizes this group of prostitutes as readily accepted within the community. Although there is no direct link in the records to Agnes, Reyerson hypothesizes that they could easily have been targets of her philanthropy.

In chapter nine, Reyerson returns the focus of her discussion to Agnes, examining the philanthropic concerns expressed in her will. The patterns that emerge from Reyerson's examination of her testamentary bequests reveal a noted preference for Franciscans, Dominicans, and orders of penitent women. Of particular note is her relative neglect of foundations associated with the older monastic orders, even though they housed two of her own granddaughters. As the discussion here demonstrates, medieval patrons were very much aware of the varied nature of monastic and religious communities and directed their largesse accordingly. Reyerson also traces Agnes's participation in various charitable activities, most notably her active role in the Ladies of Wednesday. This group was intimately involved with the community, focusing their efforts in particular on its less fortunate members in their distribution of food and basic necessities. Her discussion of the path taken by the Ladies of Wednesday through the town in the course of their charitable distributions produces yet another visual glimpse of the urban community of Montpellier. Overall, Reyerson concludes that both in life and after her death, Agnes made a significant contribution to the "social safety net" of Montpellier, exhibiting a pointed concern for lower-status women within her community.

In *Women's Networks in Medieval France*, Kathryn Reyerson successfully challenges the adage of the 1980s and early 90s that scholarship on medieval women was thin on the ground because there simply were no sources. This conclusion was not only inaccurate, it led to a number of equally inaccurate conclusions about the experience of medieval women. Scholars concluded that there were no sources because women were marginalized, excluded from the political, religious, economic, and intellectual activities that tended to produce documents in the Middle Ages. However, as Kathryn Reyerson so adeptly proves in her study of Agnes and her community, sources on medieval women not only exist, but if time and energy are expended, they reveal a lively, bustling world populated by women who not only participated in urban life, but at times dominated certain sectors of it, including the economy. Her focus on documents of practice, rather than normative sources, is central to Reyerson's ability to determine what women like Agnes did, rather than what certain individuals and institutions in society thought they should do. While there is a tendency among scholars to characterize a successful business woman like Agnes as an "exception" to the norm of male dominance in late medieval economic activity, Reyerson proves that Agnes was by no means exceptional. Although she was wealthier and occupied a more elevated social position, she was by no means alone in the extent of her economic activity, as the networks of women traced in the documents so aptly demonstrate. The women who emerge from the pages of Reyerson's text challenge past assumptions about how gender operated in medieval society and the ability of women to surmount the obstacles they may have encountered. While the community Reyerson illuminates was

undoubtedly influenced by gender norms, and certain economic activities were restricted to men, the women of Montpellier capitalized on the opportunities that were available to them, which were not insignificant. Reyerson's study offers a visual glimpse into a late-medieval city, shedding light not just on the individuals who populated the city but the spaces that they inhabited and the trades in which they engaged. Ultimately, Reyerson has produced an important contribution to the historiography of the late Middle Ages that is as enjoyable to read as it is scholarly significant. Her work will no doubt appeal to a wide range of scholars, including those interested in gender, the late-medieval economy, the formulation of social networks, and the configuration of urban spaces.

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ISSN 1553-9172