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Yannick Frizet, *Munificence et stratégie de Louis XI en Midi provençal. Arts. Série Histoire, théorie et pratiques des arts*. Aix-en-Provence: Presses Universitaires de Provence, 2017. 598 + 2pp. Sources, bibliography, document and image lists, documents, images, index, and table of contents. €29.00 (pb). ISBN 979-10-320-0112-7; ISSN 1778-2848.

Review by Rainbow A. Porthé, Independent Scholar, Chicago.

Provence was the last territory to slip away from Angevin control when Louis XI annexed it to France on the death of Charles V of Anjou in 1481. In the years leading up to the region's incorporation, Provence provided refuge for René d'Anjou (ousted from his native Anjou by his nephew King Louis) and enjoyed the increased attentions of the king. Yannick Frizet's first book addressed this period and investigated the protracted history of the annexation process.^[1] The topic had never received due attention in the literature of the period until Frizet's study, and it is the most complete, modern, and well-documented work on the subject. This second book draws on much of the same research, ultimately derived from Frizet's dissertation. As with Frizet's first study, the reader is introduced to a proto-Machiavellian Louis XI and the king's agenda for Provence. The focus this time, however, is on gifting in service of the king. With this volume Frizet continues his contributions to the field through careful study of poorly known (and in only one case extant) artworks, connecting Louis XI's art patronage in the region to his Provençal political tactics and the move toward annexation.

The book is divided into two parts. The first comprises four case studies of artworks made for the king and gifted to local religious institutions. Three of these works were located inside Provence: a chapel at the Sainte-Baume, Saint Martha's skull reliquary in Tarascon and the tomb of Charles III of Provence in Aix-en-Provence. The first survives only in fragments, the latter two only in copies (both two and three dimensional in the case of Saint Martha's reliquary; only later drawings in the case of Charles' tomb). The fourth object of study is the cathedral organ in Embrun (Dauphiné), at the periphery of the region but included because of Embrun's influence on Provence, encompassed in part by the Embrun diocese. Tracing these varied works through several representations, detailed descriptions, and biographies comprises the bulk of these discussions. As with book on the whole, Frizet shows himself to be an adroit archivist, providing an extensive (and at times overwhelming) amount of data. The undertaking is formidable and is best characterized as an archeology. The result is an impressively comprehensive and complex reconstruction of artworks providing an invaluable contribution to the study of these individual monuments. Collectively, these works share forms, iconography, motifs, and symbolic values that Frizet argues essentially provided a positive image of French royalty to the Provençal masses.

Part two, “*Herménutique du don royal*,” explores Provence’s unique place within Louis’s political patronage practices, the politics of gifting, and, finally, a comparison with the patronage practices of René d’Anjou, the ruler and lead benefactor of the region. This section contextualizes royal gifting spatially, temporally, and socially. Frizet demonstrates that Louis’s Provençal patronage and religious gifting tended to coincide with the king’s personal and political crises. He further argues that Louis’s “munificence” effectively manifested the king’s presence in Provence, allowing Louis to curry favor among the clergy and larger population and slowly gain support for French rule in the region. Louis XI’s munificence had a trickle-down effect: In gifting to the religious institutions, the king created favorable working conditions for his artisans, resulting in the establishment of good studios (p. 255). Working with both the elite and artisan classes, the king’s patronage is to be understood as part of a delicate process of French insertion.

The book’s structure is logical given the quantity of information that must be organized, though it does mean that description and the consequences of interpretation tend to be separated and similar claims are repeated in multiple locations. For example, the elaborate descriptions of monuments in the first part are separate from the question of style that appears in the second part, requiring the reader to recall details of the objects in question. A more integrated discussion, where evidence and analysis were brought into closer alignment, might have made for a stronger argument overall.

Frizet’s attention to gift giving is welcome and aligns well with other recent art history studies of the period. His primary theoretical frame is a Maussian ethnographic lens that considers the dynamics of gift giving and receiving in terms of the construction of hierarchical power relations. I would like to see a more thorough engagement with Mauss and the substantial anthropological literature on the complexities of gift giving that has complicated his classic account of the practice in more recent years.^[2] Greater nuance might also have been brought to the comparisons between Louis’s patronage and that of René d’Anjou. René, head of a house in ruins (due to failed campaigns to regain Naples and financial dependencies), simply did not have equal discretionary funds to conduct patronage on the scale that Louis could deploy. Frizet notes this fact but pursues the comparison between their activities as though they were conducted on even ground. Similarly, Frizet distinguishes between Louis’s public gifts and what he sees as René’s more private commissions. In making this distinction, however, Frizet overlooks René’s building campaigns in Provence (his Italianate home in Aix, for one, is a highly public monument) and René’s own literary productions, which had a large, if learned and elite, audience. A more effective comparison might have been between Louis and his other European contemporaries, rather than solely comparing the king’s Provençal patronage to his actions in areas of his control outside of Provence.

In the realm of art history, the author appeals to a semiotic visual analysis as he traces the artistic language of Louis’s patronage. Frizet understands the repetition and reoccurrence of such symbols as the fleur-de-lys, abundant foliage, heraldry, and the crown of thorns as conveying a royal ideology to Provençal audiences. In their context within the domains of local religious institutions and cultic sites, he argues, these motifs placed the king in the lineage of Christian Provençal rulers, promoted him as the head of a flourishing monarchy, and advertised him as an active participant in the veneration of the Provençal saints. Frizet acknowledges this is a typical strategy. Indeed, it is rather the absence of a singularity that is interesting for the

author.[3] Within Louis's own patronage history, the king's gifts were similar across all his territories (p. 241). Louis's munificence in Provence is "*peu pronocée*" (p. 313) and the art forms in Provence ultimately cannot be distinguished from the king's other projects (p. 315). Frizet argues that Provence was very much a part of Louis's overall ideological program.

While the history of late medieval Provençal art has generally been of little interest to scholars outside Francophone culture, specific characters like René d'Anjou and his court artists, places such as the Sainte-Baume, and social practices (e.g. cultic) have received international (German, Italian, and English, predominately) scholarly attention [4]. Certainly, the Anglophone literature on Valois court art patronage is rich, as is the literature on art and patronage in general. Yet, with few exceptions, Frizet's references to the secondary literature on art, socio-cultural history, and politics are restricted to French scholarship. The resulting lacunae are at times striking. Panofsky, for instance, is absent in Frizet's all too brief discussion of a Provençal Renaissance.[5] Additionally, there are a number of passages where Frizet could have exploited the vast global discourse on art and patronage to reinforce and enrich his argument. That he does not look outside French culture, nor outside the period in question, ultimately both hampers his analysis and limits its significance for the broader field. Greater attention to the wider discourse of patronage studies could have made for a more textured and complex understanding of Louis's use of art as propaganda. Engaging with a larger scholarly community would have contributed to bringing late medieval Provençal art out from the shadows, one of the author's implied aims. Instead, the conversation remains limited to the usual interlocutors.

Frizet's study excels in the wealth and collation of documentary sources and is an important contribution to the field for the sheer amount of information the author provides. From (re)discovered *prix-fait* to an exhaustive look at royal and church accounting records and exchanges, the text is a traditional patronage study (who paid how much for what and when) in many ways. While the long role of facts and numbers (currency sums are often cited but rarely contextualized/interpreted to enlighten those without immediate understanding of *sous* and *tournois* values) can prove tedious, it nonetheless allows Frizet to formulate a wonderful chronological biography of the works of art in question. This is a difficult, generous, and invaluable work: We now have the specifics of the case studies, but also a further contribution to the study of artist, patron, and beneficiary relationships and the working processes.

That art could act as an agent for political agenda is not a novel argument; it is a long-accepted commonplace. Frizet's contention that Louis's artistic commissions in Provence constituted a political project intended to gain Provençal favor for an uncontested annexation can easily be accepted. In the end, the author's account of the success of these strategies and the forms they took remain debatable, but this is another of Frizet's own gifts to scholarship. Having laid so much groundwork through such thorough documentation, this compendium provides a solid foundation upon which other scholars may build.

NOTES

[1] Yannick Frizet, *Louis XI, le roi René et la Provence : "tout ainsi comme les nostres propres" : l'expansion française dans les principautés du Midi provençal, 1440-1483* (Aix-en-Provence : Presses universitaires de France, 2015).

[2] Marcel Mauss, *Essai sur le don : forme et raison de l'échange dans les sociétés archaïques* (Paris:Quadrige/PUF, 2007).

[3] The section that covers this is confusingly titled “*La singularité de la munificence provençal*.” “Customary” or “accepted” might have been better titular terms.

[4] The bibliography on René d'Anjou is too vast to summarize here. More modern English language scholarship on the Provençal cult of Mary Magdalene includes Neal Raymond Clemens's dissertation, “The Establishment of the Cult of Mary Magdalen in Provence, 1279-1543.” (Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 1997) and Katherine Ludwig Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen: Preaching and Popular Devotion in the Later Middle Ages*. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000.). Both these studies amend Victor Saxer's work, (upon which Frizet is dependent): Victor Saxer, *Le culte de Marie Madeleine en Occident des origines à la fin du moyen âge* (Paris: Clavreuil, 1959). On Saint Martha see Diane E. Peters, “The Iconography of St. Martha: Some Considerations.” *Vox Benedictina: A Journal of Translations from Monastic Sources* 9/1 (1992): 39-65.

[5] Erwin Panofsky, *Renaissance and Renascences in Western Art* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972, c1960).

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