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Paul Fermon, *Le Peintre et la Carte: Origines et essor de vue figurée entre Rhône et Alpes (XIVe-XVe siècle)*. Turnout, Belgium: Brepols, 2018. 507 pp. Maps, tables, figures, notes, bibliography, and index. €120.00 (cl). ISBN 978-2-503-58035-7.

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Don't let the modest title of this deeply researched and beautiful book deceive you. Using diplomatics and the latest codicological tools, Paul Fermon presents what at first glance might appear to be a highly specialized but narrow book about fourteen rather enigmatic "figurative views" found in archival collections of places in and around papal Avignon, Provence, and the Dauphiné during the period c.1300-c.1500. A closer reading reveals much more, however. These case studies and their accompanying synthetic chapters significantly expand how we understand the genesis and nature of this new "realist" visual culture, as he calls it, and how it served the interests of local authorities and their overlords. As such, it offers compelling new insights into the social practices involved in early modern state-building.[1]

Fermon sets his subject in the broader scholarly literature of the "geographic turn" that began a half century ago in the groundbreaking studies by François de Dainville and Paul Harvey as well as more recent contributions by experts such as Patrick Gautier Dalché and Camille Serchuk.[2] The thriving state of highly localized and specialized scholarship in France can also be measured by the vast number of monographs, articles, essays, and conference proceedings that Fermon marshals to support this research. Then there are the copious antiquarian studies from the nineteenth and earlier centuries that he mines, together with the innumerable nuggets he unearths from sundry departmental and municipal archives across France. In sum, Fermon leaves no stone unturned in his quest to situate his dozen plus figurative views as fully as possible in historical context to answer the critical questions of how and why they were made.

In the introduction, Fermon begins by going over the important shift toward realism underway across Europe around 1300 and locally expressed in the work of French primitives associated with the School of Avignon.[3] Some of Fermon's figurative views actually come from their hands and workshops. He relates them to extant earlier geometrical maps and *mappaemundi* and discusses the various purposes they served. The full scale of this new visual culture can be measured not by the meager number of views that survived, but rather in their increasingly frequent mention in account registers and ordinances during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. This complicated relationship between text and image to define and make visible a specific place varied depending on the circumstances surrounding their creation, as Fermon argues in chapter one. The cosmopolitan character of papal Avignon and the royal court of René

d'Anjou in Provence attracted painters from Italy and the Netherlands to pursue their craft and influence local tastes and commissions, which included figurative views featuring city profiles and important buildings. Chapter two examines fairly well-known examples of such depictions by master painters active in the region at the time. Here Fermon argues that their use of direct observation and onsite sketches, later rendered into finished paintings in their workshops or in fresco projects in local public buildings, spurred the taste for and furthered local development of this novel naturalistic style. It also informed the architectural portraits found on contemporary seals and signets, the subject of chapter three. Powerful patrons, in short, prized and increasingly used these new expressions of their position and authority now associated with highly visible places.

This connection between political power and the new “realist” aesthetic becomes even clearer in the remaining five chapters of the book. Fermon assembles his figurative views and accompanying images into three main groupings depending on their purpose. Chapter four takes their use in property disputes, showcasing how such views were used by the clergy in negotiations involving fishing rights to tidal ponds and estuaries belonging to the bishopric of Maguelone on the Mediterranean coast and fishing grounds off the coast of Cannes. Clergy managed these properties and the customary claims and leases held by merchants from nearby Montpellier who, in turn, subcontracted their elaborate fish traps to local residents. A series of schematic drawings showed the disputed waterways as shorelines and channels shifted in the wake of storms and other coastal disturbances. Only one of the original views from 1479 of the lagoons of Mauguio and Scamandre survives. However, Fermon makes careful use of copies made in the seventeenth century (to adjudicate the same issues) together with archival sources—depositions by witnesses, notarized contracts, and account registers—to reconstruct the processes and purposes used to demarcate the boundaries anew. These drawings, together with accompanying texts, depicted the deployment of fish traps to indicate who had rights to which areas in these waterways. A more geometrical approach to settling property disputes can be found in the triangular devices used by the abbot of Lérins to divide the bay between Cannes and the Lérins islands. Informed by custom and law, the effectiveness of such figurative views rested on winning agreement to them from the aggrieved parties who after all knew these places intimately. Achieving such consensus reflected how well the clergy employed techniques of the new visual culture to settle disagreements and protect their interests—a lesson not lost on their secular counterparts.

Fascinating examples of governing lands from afar form the focus of chapter five. The first case arose in the 1420s as the French crown sought to secure its border in Dauphiné from the marquisate of Saluzzo, a client of its rival the Duchy of Savoy.<sup>[4]</sup> A notary and Dauphinois official, Antoine Actuhier, was entrusted with planning and executing a tour of the alpine lands in question abutting Château-Dauphin near the disputed border. Fermon reconstructs the team that Actuhier put together, its methods and goals, and the ensuing inventive views the inquest produced for the crown. The two extant views articulated landscape and built features from the valleys to the mountaintops tethered together by a road meandering into the distance. The views enabled crown officials to take a virtual tour further detailed in accompanying memoranda. In the 1430s another royal official, Mathieu Thomassin, undertook a similar investigation into contested lands in the counties of Valentinois and Diois and the area around Bellecombe. Unlike the finished, colored views that Actuhier had made, Thomassin's efforts produced schematic diagrams in ink that reflected his itinerary, replete with notes, roads and byways, and profiles of major buildings encountered along the way. They remind this reviewer of a static Prezi

presentation. Other similar cases in the fifteenth century of the royal government using maps and views to inform policy and action relied on such cadres of officials trained as notaries, scribes, and lawyers. Their education included rudimentary mathematics and geometry and the basics of figurative drawing sufficient to calculate proportions, distances, and significant built or natural forms. The wedding of the new visual culture and the expansionist ambitions of the French monarchy resulted in a new stage of state-building that flourished in the centuries ahead.

The last set of maps and views considered in chapter six concern contested riparian rights near the confluence of the Rhône and Durance rivers at papal Avignon. At issue was control and responsibility over islands, riverbanks, and the all-important Pont Saint-Bénézet linking Avignon with Languedoc. While the consuls of Avignon shouldered the costs of bridge repair and keeping the river navigable, the seneschal of Languedoc resented what he saw as an infringement of royal rights by claiming a monopoly to collect tolls and regulate river traffic. Avignon appealed both to the papacy and French crown, hiring local master painters to prepare maps to make their case, starting in the mid-fifteenth century and eventually culminating in Nicolas Dipre's sweeping bird's-eye view from 1514. That the issues remained unresolved attest to the persistence of the Avignon city leaders. By the early sixteenth century, the use of figurative views and maps became accepted forms of evidence in litigation, diplomatic relations, and state-building, providing administrators from the local level to the court a common symbolic language to represent places where they sought to strengthen their authority.

Chapter seven closes with a synthetic analysis of the cartographic principles and methods revealed in these case studies. Painters and officials over these two centuries collaborated together in the creation and use of every figurative view, each of which contributed to the ascendancy of the new visual culture. They were more than simple supplements to accompanying written materials. Indeed, Fermon shows how they could stand in lieu of the actual place depicted, allowing faraway officials and leaders a chance to visit them "virtually" as a kind of aide-mémoire. He distinguishes preparatory from finished views and carefully unpacks the instrumental purposes they served. These could include arbitration and negotiation, resource management, policy and judicial decisions, and as emblems of authority. Fermon goes over the technical choices that authors of the views made as well as costs and logistics involved in their execution. Each project required careful planning and consultation if only to win acceptance by the parties concerned on a view's veracity in representing the place in question. They achieved this through articulating a common stylistic vocabulary and blending of perspectives to create an almost sensory verisimilitude that would make Jean Baudrillard proud.

Fermon's brilliant decoding of these sometimes baffling viewscapes opens up new directions for research. One question concerns the impetus behind this shift in visual culture during the Middle Ages. Fermon mentions but does not go into the religious motives underlying it, the desire to depict the transcendent mysteries of the faith into the three-dimensional space of this world. By collapsing the distance between the believer and God, the divine became more immanent and immediate in worldly matters and affairs of state.<sup>[5]</sup> As such, these views represented an aesthetic expression of the new *religion royale* developing in France and elsewhere in Europe after 1350. The clergy, after all, led the way in utilizing figurative views and continued into the early modern era to play a key role in state-building. Another avenue to pursue is the rhetorical character of these figurative views, how the arguments they deployed related to the ones employed in accompanying memoranda, ordinances, and other written records. How did they differ from or expand upon each other? How were they received and read then in turn further

adapted? In this respect, as Fermon suggests but does not pursue, they grew out of the significant rise of new inquisitorial procedures of investigation during the Middle Ages that relied on written or oral evidence to guide judgment rather than augury signs and the ordeal. In their training and practice, officials implemented these techniques of establishing “fact” to justify their actions in the name of God, the king, or custom.[6] Just as intriguing in this new legal culture was the mental shift that occurred when equating representations of the “real” with reality itself, turning René Magritte’s later joke about the treachery of images—in his case of a pipe—on its head.[7] Fermon’s great book leaves us much to ponder about this momentous shift in European visual and political culture at the end of the Middle Ages, one whose consequences still very much remain with us in our own image-soaked mediascape version of the world that our various devices bombard us with daily.

## NOTES

[1] See Robert Stein, *Magnanimous Dukes and Rising States: The Unification of the Burgundian Netherlands, 1380-1480* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2017) and James B. Collins, *State-Building in Early Modern Europe: The Case of France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

[2] See in particular for the present study under review François de Dainville, “Cartes et contestations au XVe siècle,” *Imago mundi* 24(1970): 99-121 and more generally his *Le langage des géographes: terms, signes, couleurs des cartes anciennes, 1500-1800* (Paris: Picard, 1964). For the others, see P.D.A. Harvey and R.A. Skelton, eds., *Local Maps and Plan for Medieval England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), Camille Serchuk, “Images of Paris in the Middle Ages: Patronage and Politics” (Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 1997) and P. Gautier Dalché, “Essai d’un inventaire des plans et cartes locales de la France médiévale (jusque vers 1530)” *Bibliothèque de l’École des chartes* 170(2012):421-471 as well as other numerous articles.

[3] Featured are works by Barthémy d’Eyck, Enguerrand Quarton, Nicolas Froment, Jean Changuet, Josse Lieferinxe, and Antoine Ronzen.

[4] See Matthew Vester, ed., *Sabaudian Studies: Political Culture, Dynasty, and Territory, 1440-1700* (Kirksville, Mo.: Truman State University Press, 2013) and idem, *Renaissance Dynasticism and Apanage Politics, 1531-1585: Jacques de Savoie-Nemours, 1531-1585* (Kirksville, Mo.: Truman State University Press, 2012).

[5] Mitchell B. Merback, *The Thief, the Cross and the Wheel: Pain and the Spectacle of Punishment in Medieval and Renaissance Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998) and Caroline van Eck, *Art, Agency and Living Presence. From the Animated Image to the Excessive Object* (Munich and Leiden: Walter De Gruyter/Leiden University Press, 2015).

[6] James A. Brundage, *Medieval Canon Law* (London & New York: Routledge, 2005), 2<sup>nd</sup> edition and Peter Stein, *Roman Law in European History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

[7] Alastair Fowler, *Renaissance Realism: Narrative Images in Literature and Art* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2003) is a useful place to begin on this topic.

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