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Justine Firnhaber-Baker, *The Jacquerie of 1358: A French Peasants' Revolt*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021. xxii + 307 pp. Illustrations, maps, bibliography, and index. \$105.00 U.S. (hb). ISBN 9780198856412; \$41.99 U.S. (pb). ISBN 9780198860310.

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In the summer of 1358, against the backdrop of the Hundred Years War and unrest in Paris, communities of northern French peasants revolted against the nobility in the region, committing acts of destruction, pillage, and interpersonal violence. This event, commonly known as the Jacquerie, has not had its own dedicated monograph since Siméon Luce's published *Histoire de la Jacquerie* in 1859, despite its recognized importance as one of many peasant revolts that followed in the wake of the Black Death in Europe.[1] Justine Firnhaber-Baker's *The Jacquerie of 1358: A French Peasants' Revolt* is thus a much-needed and timely study that asks why the northern French rustics—contemporaneously termed “Jacques”—revolted when they did and how they did so. Using chronicles and judicial records, the author meticulously and persuasively argues that the Jacquerie was “not a discrete ‘thing’ to which we can ascribe a single meaning, but rather a constellation of different and overlapping events and processes undertaken and understood differently by different people at different times” (p. 96). Firnhaber-Baker's mastery of the intricacies and limitations of her sources makes this book a pivotal contribution not only to the study of late medieval France but also to broader scholarship on revolt, resistance, and social history.

The author's ambitious goal for the book is to “disassemble the Jacquerie... disaggregate the Jacques and their associates...[and] put it all back together again as a story about how individuals reacted to a specific set of circumstances, how events both planned and accidental altered their course, and what and how they chose to remember (or to forget) in its aftermath,” one she unequivocally achieves (p. 4-5). Since no sources contemporary to the Jacquerie survive, Firnhaber-Baker relies on chronicle accounts and extant legal documents generated in the revolt's aftermath, the latter often overlooked by historians. She primarily draws from the chronicles of Jean Froissart, Jean le Bel, Jean de Venette, and the *religieux* of Saint-Denis as well as the *Chronique normande* and the *Chronique des quatre premiers Valois*. As Firnhaber-Baker points out, these accounts favor the Jacques' adversaries and do not engage with their motivations or goals. Her other principal sources are the letters of remission that individual Jacques received from the crown after the rebellion was put down. Although Dauphin Charles—acting as regent for his father, King Jean II, then a prisoner of the English—issued a blanket plenary remission for both the Jacques and their opponents in August 1358, dozens of Jacquerie participants sought personalized pardons that often included a narrative section detailing their involvement in the

revolt. Records from the *Parlement de Paris* and local French archives supplement these remissions. The author has also plotted these documentary sources in an online open-access map (<https://worldmap.maps.arcgis.com/home/webmap/viewer.html?webmap=c2d6f953cbe64cb38323f1c71a68de5c>) that includes the call number and description of the document pertaining to each location, a boon for researchers. As she emphasizes throughout the book, “the sources tell us at least as much about the acts of narrative creation and imagination that were committed in the wake of the revolt as they do about what actually happened out in the countryside in the summer of 1358” (p. 6). Her inclusion within the text itself of longer excerpts of these narratives and documents, especially from the remissions, strengthens her analysis and infuses the book with texture and flavor.

The book consists of an introduction and ten chapters in addition to a helpful note on currency and a timeline. The first chapter, “Complaints: The Aftermath of Poitiers,” covers the period following France’s devastating defeat and the capture of its king at the Battle of Poitiers against the English in 1356 through early 1358. Firnhaber-Baker argues that non-nobles viewed the disaster as the nobility shirking its duty to protect and defend them. The Parisian reform movement active at the same time, led by bourgeois Étienne Marcel and Bishop Robert le Coq of Laon, shared many of the non-nobles’ complaints and had potentially found an ally in Charles II of Navarre, who had newly escaped imprisonment and had a claim to the French throne himself as a grandson of Louis X. Chapter two, “New Marvels: Turning the World Upside Down,” begins with the mob murders of the marshals of Champagne and Normandy in front of the Dauphin on 22 February 1358. Étienne Marcel orchestrated the assassinations, claiming that the marshals were enemies of the reform movement, and even, according to one chronicle account, forced the Dauphin to swap hoods with him. Although Firnhaber-Baker concludes that this anecdote was probably fictional, she highlights the significance of Marcel’s action as “symbolic castration” of the Dauphin, whom the reformers already viewed as impotent and inept (p. 53). Unsurprisingly, “the assassinations were a watershed moment, laying bare the social split that had developed since Poitiers, would lead to the Jacquerie, and would culminate in its repression” (p. 54).

In chapter three, “An Unheard of Thing: The Massacre at Saint-Leu-d’Esserent,” Firnhaber-Baker analyzes the event that for her marks the beginning of the revolt. On 28 May, country-folk in Saint-Leu-d’Esserent along the Oise River attacked a group of nobles passing through, killing nine of them, including the nephew of the previously murdered marshal of Normandy. The author convincingly walks readers through her reasoning behind how and why the villagers committed this act of violence in this particular location. While acknowledging that the direct role of the Parisian reformers is ultimately unknowable, Firnhaber-Baker concludes that “[t]his was a planned attack...by a geographically diverse group who came together for that purpose, not a spontaneous uprising in that village by its normal population” (p. 83). The author then examines how the violence at Saint-Leu-d’Esserent quickly transformed into a wider phenomenon in chapter four, “All Masters: From Massacre to Movement.” Because Guillaume Calle was named leader of the Jacques *after* the attack, the massacre likely predated and even brought about official rebel leadership, which, she contends, was built on a pre-existing “organizational scaffolding” (p. 113). She spends the rest of the chapter discussing various long-term indirect contributors to the revolt: the “[c]rises of the moral economy” exacerbated by war with England, the Great Famine, and Black Death (p. 106).

Chapters five through seven are thematic and will be of greatest interest to social and cultural historians. Violence and destruction are the focus of chapter five, “Noisy Terrors: The Violence

of the Jacquerie.” Firnhaber-Baker rightly gives greater weight to the judicial sources—imperfect as she acknowledges they are—in assessing what interpersonal violence the Jacques actually committed, which was generally much less gratuitous than the chroniclers claimed. The Jacques’ targets, moreover, were more often the lesser nobility than those higher up, for “[i]t was their social status, with its odour of military failure, material excess, unearned privilege, and moral treachery, that made them targets” (p. 123). At the same time, she astutely points out that “even a few murders would be every bit as terrifying to nobles as the chivalric chroniclers make out” (p. 132). Likewise, the castles and houses that the Jacques attacked belonged both to Valois loyalists and to the nobility more broadly. Finally, the author highlights the sometimes symbolic and performative nature of acts of theft, as Jacques were recorded dressing and dancing in clothing stolen from their noble adversaries.

The subject of chapter six, “Captains and Assemblies: The Organization of the Jacquerie,” is the infrastructure of the revolt. Firnhaber-Baker posits that Guillaume Calle was a literate man of wealth and possibly a mason with his own seal. Although the sources reveal less about local village captains, she shows that they likewise were often men of means, some already in local offices. In terms of mechanics and logistics, assemblies were instrumental to the revolt even as its structure was both “hierarchical and coercive” (p. 144). This coercion often originated from the rank and file, especially in questions of violence. She concludes not only that “[t]he movement was rife with ambivalence and dissension” (p. 165) but also that “[i]ts methods reflected the participatory norms of rural communities as much as the hierarchical discipline that leaders like Calle tried to impose upon it” (p. 168).

In chapter seven, “The Non-Nobles: Rebels and their Communities,” the author examines the gender, ages, and economic statuses of the Jacques as well as their relationships with their urban counterparts. Although the number of identifiable Jacques pales in comparison to the total number involved, and those whose names we do have are overwhelmingly male, Firnhaber-Baker makes the too often overlooked point that the Jacquerie—and revolts in general—depended upon the cooperation of non-militant family members at home. Their noble opponents recognized this fact when they later avenged themselves on entire villages, not just the fighters. Her main point in the chapter, however, is that the Jacques’ ultimate failure stemmed from their tenuous bonds with the towns and cities around them, bonds that did not hold when the Counter-Jacquerie, discussed in chapter nine, unleashed itself upon the Jacques.

Firnhaber-Baker continues chronologically for the final three chapters, beginning with the events of 10 June 1358 in chapter eight, “Slaughtered like Pigs: The Battles of Meaux and Mello-Clermont.” She first explores the failed assault the Jacques, local countryfolk, and Parisian reformers mounted against the Marché at Meaux, turning then to the clash near Mello and Clermont between Jacques (led by Calle) and Charles of Navarre, whose side comprised not only Navarrese and English troops but also French nobles. Historians have traditionally been divided regarding Charles of Navarre’s involvement, but Firnhaber-Baker contends that his “decision to support the nobles was probably based more on political opportunism than morality or class solidarity,” as some historians have argued (p. 208). In chapter nine, “Hatred and Malevolence: The Counter-Jacquerie,” the author considers the noble and both French and Navarrese royal activity that followed the events of the previous chapter in northern France and even further south. Firnhaber-Baker convincingly demonstrates that “[t]he intertwining of personal or civic hatred with the political or military aims of the rebellion and its suppression reflects the multiplicity of actors and their varied and overlapping motivations” (p. 239).

Firnhaber-Baker does her most impressive work in chapter ten, “Good Love and Hard Words: The Legacy of Revolt.” Ten days after Étienne Marcel’s murder, the Dauphin granted a plenary pardon to the Jacques, the Parisian reformers, and those involved in the Counter-Jacquerie. Nevertheless, in the months and years that followed, individual Jacques—and some of their opponents—requested personalized pardons too. These remissions and other legal action taken in the revolt’s aftermath are the focus of this chapter. Firnhaber-Baker compellingly argues that the plenary remission was strategic on the Dauphin’s part because criminally prosecuting everyone implicated in the revolt was not possible. Moreover, the remission stipulated that any future disputes had to be adjudicated in royal courts, thus simultaneously reinforcing and projecting royal power while also casting the revolt as one between nobles and peasants, not one against the crown. The author contends that “[t]his conciliatory strategy amplified royal authority by enabling the crown to shape the narrative of the revolt and its aftermath to its advantage” (p. 247). By examining the individual remissions, civil suits, and accords resulting from the conflict, she posits that “[t]he affective language of the documents should be understood as reflecting rhetorical and legal strategies as much as or more than the subjective emotions of parties” (p. 261).

The conclusion, subtitled “Forgetting and Remembering the Jacquerie,” deals with the revolt’s fading afterlife in subsequent centuries and eventual return to historical prominence with the French Revolution, the emphasis on national history in the nineteenth century, and the conflicts and historiographical movements of the 1960s and 1970s. The author also tells readers how she came to the Jacquerie and how her research question transformed over the course of this project from “why?” to “why then?” and “how?”. Her answer is that “the revolt cannot be reduced to a single cause or objective. It was heterogeneous and fluid, its outbreak and course as dependent upon chance as upon planning” (p. 270).

One of the many strengths of *The Jacquerie of 1358* is how well-rounded it is. As Firnhaber-Baker points out, her emphasis is not simply on the political, as studies of medieval revolts have tended to be, but rather the confluence of the social, cultural, and political forces that motivated participants to act when and how they did. The book’s most obvious weakness, however, is that the figures and especially the maps do not do justice to the author’s work. The numerical data could have been presented more clearly and intuitively, and the maps needed much greater detail and editing. That said, Firnhaber-Baker’s book is a deeply nuanced treatment of a complex ensemble of events, and she adroitly navigates disparate and sometimes outright contradictory sources. Medievalists and historians of unrest and social movements alike will undoubtedly benefit from engaging with this book.

## NOTES

[1] Siméon Luce, *Histoire de la Jacquerie d’après des documents inédits*, new edn. (Paris, Honoré Champion, 1894).

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