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Robert F. Berkhofer III, *Day of Reckoning: Power and Accountability in Medieval France*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004. vi + 270 pp. Appendix, notes, bibliography, and index. $49.95 U.S. (cl). ISBN 0-8122-3796-X.

Review by William Chester Jordan, Princeton University.

The questions that motivate this monograph are "when, how and why" Benedictine monks began to conceive of their estates in an economic way (p. 64). These questions are related to wider concerns about the emergence of calculations of profit by the managers of ecclesiastical and lay estates and the development of auditing in the kingdoms and principalities of Europe at roughly the same time. What gives the study a special twist is the author's insistence that the transformation of attitudes about how to think about estates was as characteristic of old Benedictine monasteries as it was of the newer twelfth-century orders, especially the Cistercians. Berkhofer concentrates on five French Benedictine houses to make his points: Saint-Bertin, Saint-Germain-des-Près, Saint-Denis, Saint-Vaast-d'Arras, and Saint Père-de-Chartres.

As the author shows, there is no doubt that in the twelfth century, the period on which he concentrates, abbots and their staffs looked at their estates in part (perhaps in large part) in an economic or one might say, though the author does not, in a proto-capitalist manner. And to support this Berkhofer intelligently exploits records which could be, under less capable eyes, profoundly misleading. His discussion, for example, of the limitations of using papal confirmations to map the level of sophistication among ecclesiastical lords in their understanding of local monastic estate management is a real gem (pp. 64-65). And his knowledge of the evidentiary base of the five monasteries is admirable in every respect. His several appendices describing and analyzing the monastic charter collections will be useful for anyone wanting to pursue the topic of estate management as well as any number of other topics, such as monastic office holding and the changing power of abbots as revealed in the titles they claimed in their acts (pp. 170-96).

Indeed, one conclusion of Berkhofer's study that is perhaps unsurprising but to which he gives an interesting twist is the fundamental importance of formidable abbots to make estates produce the necessary funds for their projects. There may have been large structural and developmental reasons to explain the shift to the greater economic conceptualization of estates--if this shift really occurred--but the results would have been far less dramatic if the abbeys studied did not have rulers like Suger of Saint-Denis.

I said, "if this shift really occurred." Berkhofer acknowledges that the Carolingian period provides evidence of something like an economic understanding of estates and estate management. But from the decline of the Carolingians until the twelfth century, there was little built on this tradition, if I read him correctly. Carolingian documents would have been consulted, even updated at times, but nonetheless things were almost completely new in the twelfth century. In a single paragraph on page 111, this point is emphasized by repetition: "new economic thinking"; "new system"; "new revenues"; "new method of allocation"; "new revenue allocation system." On the page before, Berkhofer talks about "a newer, more ambitious spirit of making sure every penny owed was recorded and then extracted."

Language like this, which suffuses the book, is so insistent that it undermines its own rhetorical purpose. In fact, it raised doubts in my mind. If everything was so new in the twelfth century, what was replaced? What was the nature of the old? It is on this point that the book may fail to persuade. Traditional management of seigneurial estates lacked "dynamic use of the patrimony" and instead was inspired by "primarily social or religious, not economic" factors (p. 90). The conclusions in chapter two that precede these statements are actually quite vague on the precise nature of "traditional patrimonial management," even as the author asserts that there was a need for a profound psychological shift, a "psychological acceptance of change" for the new mentality to flourish. How different was the period before the twelfth century? "Monks," Berkhofer writes, "had long possessed the ability to administer, but in the twelfth century they found (or rediscovered) that they wanted to increasingly" (pp. 88-89).

I confess that I am at a loss to know precisely what this means and would have appreciated more specificity about traditional, that is, post-Carolingian pre-twelfth century, patrimonial management. Did it, whatever it was, disappear in the wake of the new economically-based approach? The author says no. "Religious and political necessities remained extremely important in shaping monastic estates." Nonetheless, "economic thinking began to have greater influence" (p. 92). What is called for, and one hopes that Berkhofer will turn his considerable talents to this, is the prehistory of the twelfth-century situation. Its novelty depends on a persuasive demonstration that anti- or non-economic estate management was truly predominant before about the year 1100 in the five monasteries studied. Until that feat is accomplished one cannot say just how new the twelfth-century situation was. One should not prejudge the outcome of such a study. It may well be the case that the twelfth century on this point, as on so many others, looks like and is a revolutionary moment.

Even if I have called the argument for newness in Berkhofer's book into question, the extraordinarily fine-grained analysis of Benedictine estate management in the twelfth century that he does offer us, whether it was new or not, is a major contribution to our knowledge of fiscal, administrative, and institutional history in the period. And it certainly makes those supposedly staid and hidebound Benedictine monks look a lot more adept than scholars sometimes portray them.

William Chester Jordan
Princeton University
wchester@princeton.edu

See also Robert F. Berkhofer III's response to this review.

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