

Nicole Archambeau, *Souls Under Siege: Stories of War, Plague, and Confession in Fourteenth-Century Provence*. Ithaca, N.Y. and London: Cornell University Press, 2021. xiv + 261 pp. Maps, figures, notes, bibliography, and index. \$49.95 U.S. (hb). ISBN 9781501753666; \$32.99 U.S. (eb). ISBN 9781501753671.

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Delphine de Puimichel, Countess of Ariano (in the Campania region) and widow of Count Elzear de Sabran (himself a candidate for sainthood) healed during her life sadness, grief, and anxiety before and after the Black Death. When she died in 1360 at the age of seventy-five, her family and admiring community tried to get her canonized. Sixty-eight pious witnesses (men and women, religious and lay, noble and merchant, leaders and servants, soldiers and knights) testified before papal commissioners in her inquest between May and November 1363, reacting to one or several of the ninety-eight articles of interrogation that summarized Delphine's life events, characteristics, living miracles, and posthumous miracles. These testimonies are the foundation of Nicole Archambeau's reconstruction of the anxieties of people who experienced the crises of the fourteenth century in Provence, a key county of the Angevin Kingdom of Naples, the residence of the papacy at the time, and the site of the major Mediterranean port of Marseille. All witnesses were survivors of the first wave of the Plague in 1348 or the second wave in 1361. In between, they had to cope with the devastating mercenary invasion of 1357-1358, as well as the invasion of the Great Companies in 1361.

Their stories of plague and war in a rapidly changing world provide, in Archambeau's sensitive reading, fresh insights into the society of fourteenth-century Provence and significantly enhance our understanding of how the local community there made sense of crises and found ways to adapt, respond, and live with them around 1350. The author deeply contextualizes these stories, maps the anxieties they transmit, explains their causes, draws a vivid emotional picture of pious Christians in Provence, and constructs with admirable empathy their main strategy to cope with these fears. Internal spiritual transformation involving healing sin and repairing the soul's relationship to God (not a peace treaty or a medical cure) became a primary solution, which they implemented by seeking Delphine's voice and touch for a remedy.

Nicole Archambeau turns the spotlight away from the saint onto the community behind the inquest (its witnesses and organizers) and produces an original social history of a single canonization inquest. This microhistory, which uncovers the witnesses' perspective, highlights a larger and intriguing question of how and why people might turn to their saints at a certain period of time. Here she offers some original answers.

How is confession (the third type of story in the title of the book) linked to all this? For Delphine's Provençal followers, these crises were interconnected through the moral world view of sin and were understood as symptoms of widespread spiritual sickness. Consequently, the

sacrament of penance stood next to pestilence and violent warfare at the center of their existential anxieties. The pious people of Provence described their need for penance to be a fulfilling, transformative experience. Being unable to feel the consolation they expected brought about an internal crisis of confession that rendered healing the spiritual damage of war and plague difficult.

This book is exemplary for the cautious yet rewarding use of hagiographical sources for the reconstruction of historical reality. Beyond the meticulous reconstruction of a canonization inquest (from the initial motivation of the proctor of the inquest to launch the inquiry to the hearing of the last witness), Nicole Archambeau carefully draws meaning from silences in the testimonies and skillfully extracts historical facts and arguments from crafted narratives such as miracle stories, which she reads as survival stories. Looking at these tense years through the eyes of the witnesses in Delphine's inquest allows the author to circumvent the danger of relying on constructed narratives such as chronicles, which were politically influenced versions of the events. In many respects, Archambeau deftly follows Marc Bloch's famous lesson that if we consult hagiographic sources as to the way of life or thought peculiar to the epoch in which they were written (things which the compiler of the source had not the least intention of revealing) we shall find them invaluable.[1]

Each of the six chapters of the book focuses on a specific point of crisis dramatically unsettling the life of the Christians of Provence in the middle of the fourteenth century. The author explains that she identified these moments whenever five or more witnesses described a specific time or event when they were in danger.

The first addresses the impact of King Robert of Naples's death in 1343 and is mainly based on the testimony of Delphine's maid, who reveals impressions of Naples and its royal court that Delphine attended, hence the extraordinary information regarding the ensuing political turmoil that emerges from this testimony. Though no witness directly marked the king's death as a moment of danger per se, in many ways it was the root of the dangers discussed in the following chapters. Robert's efforts to secure the throne for his granddaughter, Johanna (the eldest surviving child of his eldest son), instead of the son of one of his brothers, set in motion rebellions among his other potential heirs, which made Provence a battleground for decades and seriously affected the lives of the people of Provence. Within a year of Robert's death, his will, originally designed for a peaceful transition, was broken, wreaking havoc in the Kingdom of Naples. The political situation turned from one that favored Provençal, French, and Hungarian interests to one that favored the families of Robert's younger brothers, and fissures that had always unsettled the kingdom opened into rifts. Archambeau shows how the depiction of Delphine in Naples and her strong relationship with King Robert and Queen Sanxia and at the same time the silence about even a limited relationship with Johanna were extremely significant. Delphine was portrayed in the testimonies as a humble woman turning her back on luxury and worldly power in opposition to Johanna. By aligning Delphine with King Robert and Queen Sanxia, who had brought the aristocracy of Provence into their government when Johanna broke King Robert's will and started to draw away from Provençal lords as political allies, 1343 is marked as a destabilizing moment of change. It unleashed political turmoil and consequently a series of moments of danger when witnesses turned to their holy woman for aid.

The second chapter is devoted to the first moment of danger, the so called “war of the seneschals” (1347-1349). The context of plague, invasion, and political division reveals this moment to be have been a moment of danger for the people of Provence. The “war” emerged from the removal of Raymon d’Agoult as seneschal of Provence by Queen Johanna, who tried to replace him with her trusted ally, Giovanni Barrili. This situation split the lords of Provence and almost deteriorated into open civil war. The testimonies show that Delphine cared for others and endured physical suffering to bring peace to the feuding parties. She had the ability to heal the souls of warring men by transforming discord into harmony. Her work entailed physical suffering as she traveled to visit those in conflict. When faced with other grave sins and offenses to God and the subjugation of Christians, she would weep and afflict her own body, causing herself fever, thus revealing her sensitivity to the suffering of others and the affront to God. Delphine brought peace to warring lords through her presence, her words, and her own suffering at the time of plague. These testimonies give a sense of how people understood the interconnectedness of political violence in the midst of plague.

It is noteworthy that plague (*prima mortalitas*—the “first mortality” for the wave of 1348) is conspicuously missing from the articles of interrogation that framed the testimonies, as if witnesses did not have to explain the impact of the plague to the papal commissioners, who had lived through it as well. Plague commonly appears in the testimonies as a fixed point of reference or a time-marker for understanding the past. A single story of miraculous healing from the first wave of the plague tells about the curing of a Provençal aristocrat whose family did not abandon him, but instead provided him with medical care and prepared an elaborate funeral for him. Five stories transmit cases of healing plague sufferers during the second wave in 1361. In all cases, a total internal transformation of the heart (and occasionally of behavior), followed by great devotion and a vow to Delphine, explains the miraculous cure that followed the failure of conventional medicine. Whenever such stories of healing appear in the testimonies, they describe miraculous healing of plague or other acute illness as deeply linked to the stories of mercenary attacks that unexpectedly transformed life in Provence. The anxiety caused by war and violence appears from this book to be substantially more severe than that caused by plague and other acute diseases.[2]

Six witnesses told the papal commissioners how Delphine changed the hearts of feuding lords. She helped them move from a dangerous state of hatred and violence to exchanging the kiss of peace, thus averting war. By calming the anger between these lords, she healed the sickness of violence caused by anger, which the political disruptions of 1347-1349 had caused. Inviting Delphine to speak to the warring lords, Archambeau tells us, was a solution similar to the use of relics in the peace of God movement. For the witnesses, the living Delphine was like a relic: a noblewoman who had renounced great wealth to work alongside residents of a hermitage outside Ansouis and nuns in the Holy Cross convent in Apt, and a virgin who inspired others to the sacred state. The testimony of Philippe Cabassole, the bishop of Cavaillon and the patriarch of Jerusalem as well as the rector of the Comtat Venaissin, who testified in Avignon and addressed twelve of the articles of interrogation, lies at the heart of this chapter. He was also the patron of Francis Petrarch, who dedicated to him his famous *De vita solitaria*.

Chapter three is devoted to the second moment of danger—the mercenary invasion of 1357-

1358, when after the truce of Bordeaux in 1357, some four thousand mercenaries entered Provence, captured towns, and besieged Marseille and Aix. It reflected the grim reality that caused the people of Provence to be drawn into the fringes of the Hundred Years' War, by the increasing availability of mercenary soldiers who were left unemployed during truces and were happy to join and fight local battles. In this particular case, the assault on Provence served the camp opposing Queen Johanna and King Louis, and was possibly supported by King Jean and the dauphin, Charles, who resented the sale of Avignon to Pope Clement VI in 1348. The main part of the invasion and fighting ended in August 1358, when its leader, Arnau de Cervole, left with the majority of his men to defend Dauphin Charles against the Jacquerie in Paris.

The testimonies referring to this fighting, which left the region shaken, allow Archambeau to gain insight into how people understood this violence as both physical and spiritual, opening the way for a spiritual solution. Inquest documents show the centrality of this moment for Delphine's sanctity when many turned to her and she aided individuals and whole towns. Four articles of interrogation about this moment describe Delphine's protection of combatants and noncombatants and the transformation of a captured mercenary into a penitent. Some thirteen witnesses reacted to these articles, described the violence, and turned to Delphine for help, emphasizing her ability to bring peace. For them, Delphine was a pious leader providing a solution to the problem of mercenaries, partly by addressing the problem as a spiritual rather than a political or economic one.

From the testimonies, we acquire firsthand information about mercenary warfare: how mercenaries attacked vulnerable towns; about defenders' response to the mercenaries; the plight of besieged towns and inexperienced defenders; and the reaction that a thwarted attack could generate among a group of people living in fear. All testimonies share stories of successful protection and spiritual transformation through the merits, the presence, or the active intercession of Delphine. When told by female witnesses, they present women as defenders, not just victims, during mercenary attacks. We are also encouraged by these testimonies to reflect about the place of saints among knights on the eve of crucial battles. More than one witness demonstrates the knight's awareness of danger and fear that compelled him to go to Delphine before the battle and commend himself to the holy woman seeking protection.

Chapter four covers the third moment of danger. It documents witnesses' needs and experiences in 1361, during the second wave of plague that occurred simultaneously to a massive mercenary incursion following the ratification of the Treaty of Brétigny and the removal of mercenary troops from the Burgundy region. Five Great Companies made up of tens of thousands of experienced soldiers found their way to the lower Rhône valley in that year, with no single leader, no single goal, and no legitimate reason to be in the region. At least ten witnesses (overwhelmingly women) pinpoint 1361 as a moment of grave danger of mercenary attack, plague, and fever. Their stories help us see the impact on health that mercenary invasion had, not just in the short term by possibly reintroducing the plague, but also in the long term by disrupting food production, storage, and shipment; straining energy sources and sanitation; destroying infrastructure; and bringing displaced populations in contact. The stories show how the Provençal community that venerated Delphine's sainthood when she was alive, continued making her part of the survival of the region even after her death. Here too, the testimonies, containing several stories of transformation from a terrified state to courageous behavior thanks

to Delphine's intercession, uncover women's protective and leadership roles in their communities and how these roles could expand during times of heightened violence. Delphine's transformative power—from hatred to friendship; from a violent attacker into a devoted penitent—answers the need of many, at the time, to experience an internal conversion. Is this the reaction to the spiritually damaging violence surrounding them, or to the spiritual and moral ambiguity characterizing the Angevin court in Naples under Johanna I, and a critique of this violence and immoral politics, as Archangeau suggests?

The last two chapters look at a sacramental rather than a chronological moment of danger, when individuals were not able to complete the sacrament of penance or were not sure of the internal state of their souls. Over half the witnesses in the inquest testified to experiencing some kind of difficulty with one element or more of a complete confession (for example, loss of memory, the inability to speak at all or say their sins aloud, limited ability to repair their relationship with God and to intend not to sin again, or the absence of the appropriate internal state to confess). So, one of the most dangerous moments Delphine's pious witnesses faced was the sacrament of penance. The heightened physical danger during this time increased the number of confessions, yet some people did not feel assured about their souls. People expected not to feel doubts of conscience after completing the sacrament. They were seeking certainty or assurance about the state of their souls. When this did not happen, they experienced anxiety, sadness, and suffering. It was Delphine who wondrously moved them to change their lives and to undergo an internal transformation that enabled them to escape dangers to the health of their souls. "Through witness testimonies, Delphine's voice emerged as a kind of aural body relic" that touched and healed the sufferers, bringing to them the consolation they were seeking in the sacrament of penance (p. 148).

Master Durand Andree, a canon in Apt and a qualified medical doctor who was also one of Delphine's confessors, even organized group meetings with Delphine, at the end of which the sufferers left Delphine's presence having been consoled regarding their doubts of conscience and feeling assured (*certificatus*). He gives us a rare glimpse of a healing practitioner trained both in medical and pastoral care and aware of the physical and spiritual damage that doubt and anxiety could cause. He and many other witnesses attest to the fact that after hearing Delphine's words of healing (*verba salutis*), they were inspired with an irresistible desire to confess. On other occasions, Delphine's words and voice removed theological doubts or doubts concerning the understanding of the sacred texts in a series of learned clerics. People systematically experienced internal transformations when they heard Delphine speak about God. The consolation of Delphine's words helped witnesses face the spiritual disasters of the first and second mortality and waves of mercenary invasion.

When taken together, the stories of the witnesses in Delphine's inquest reveal a concept of health that included body and soul equally. The stories of the witnesses were suffused with a language of health and healing. Individuals described outward behavior (violence against the Christian community and devastating warfare) as sickness of the soul that caused people to sin continually risking both their physical and spiritual safety. Words like *remedia* or *salus* were used simultaneously for physical and spiritual illness. Health was as much about peace and safety as it was about physical robustness. As for the witnesses, they seem to have been more interested in their souls and their spiritual world than in the welfare of their bodies or their physical world.

Violence was too often a sin with as strong a spiritual impact as a physical one. The testimonies reveal how they understood the multiple crises they faced as spiritual *and* physical crises.[3]

A genealogical chart of the main protagonists of the political struggles in the Kingdom of Naples and a summary of the inquest's articles would have facilitated the reading of this exciting book and could have perhaps stimulated others to study this particular document from different perspectives. Nevertheless, Nicole Archambeau has admirably sieved and combed her source and produced a book that is a significant contribution to the study of fourteenth-century Europe, not only of Provence or medieval France. She convincingly shows that despite their limitations as a historical source, miracle stories about a local saint, if sensitively contextualized, can be used to deepen our understanding of the lived experience of the witnesses in canonization processes. Those interested in medieval religion and hagiography as history, in the history of medieval medicine and plague history, and in the history of war and violence in the Middle Ages will relish this book.

NOTES

[1] Marc Bloch, *The Historian's Craft*, trans. Peter Putnam (New York: Vintage Books, 1953), p. 63. For recent studies on hagiography and history, see Sari Katajala-Peltomaa, Jenni Kuuliala, and Iona McCleery eds., *A Companion to Medieval Miracle Collections* (Leiden: Brill, 2021); Samantha Kahn Herrick, ed., *Hagiography and the History of Latin Christendom, 500–1500* (Leiden: Brill, 2019).

[2] For more about plague, abandonment and saints, see Samuel K. Cohn, Jr., *Epidemics: Hate and Compassion from the Plague of Athens to AIDS* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), pp. 49-92.

[3] For some recent and important publications relating to the central themes of this book see, for example, Sari Katajala-Peltomaa, *Gender, Miracles, and Daily Life: The Evidence of Fourteenth-Century Canonization Processes* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2009); Sharon Strocchia and Sara Ritchey eds., *Gender, Health, and Healing* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2020); Jenni Kuuliala, "The Saint as Mediator: Medicine and the Miraculous in Fifteenth- and Sixteenth-Century Italy," *Social History of Medicine* 34, n. 3 (2021): 704-722; Kuuliala, *Saints, Infirmary and Community in the Late Middle Ages* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2020); Sara Ritchey, *Acts of Care: Recovering Women in Late Medieval Health* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2021).

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