

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 978150175366; \$32.99 U.S. (eb). ISBN 9781501753671.

Response Essay by Nicole Archambeau, Colorado State University

I am profoundly grateful for the care with which the four reviewers read and critiqued *Souls under Siege*. I learned a great deal from their questions and insights. Each reviewer emphasized the importance of the canonization inquest of Countess Delphine de Puimichel, which took place in Apt, Provence in 1363. This legal procedure is the spine and nervous system of the book. Therefore, I will structure my response around the inquest as well in order to best respond to the reviewers. I used the stories told in the inquest to show how people made sense of the overlapping crises of war and plague. Their stories made me aware of another crisis in pastoral care that increased their anxiety and sadness during a disrupted time. Focusing on the witnesses' experiences allowed me to bring together four topics usually studied separately: war, plague, pastoral care, and the history of Provence.

It was surprisingly difficult when writing this book and presenting material at conferences to steer attention to the witnesses and away from Countess Delphine, the main figure of the canonization inquest. One is drawn to Delphine because everyone in the inquest was talking about her. As several reviewers point out, Delphine was a proto-saint to these witnesses because they chose to see her that way. They saw her piety and chastity. They experienced her wondrous speaking abilities and the miracles that happened around her. Their testimonies are what we have. Therefore, I had to be very careful not to talk about what Delphine could do (as the witnesses did), but instead what witnesses *believed* she could do. Or, even more cautiously, what the witnesses *said* that they believed she could do. This distinction takes work as a writer and reader. These witnesses stated that they believed Delphine had a special link to God because of her sanctity and therefore could intercede for them. For them, the miracles came from God, while the consoling stories or the stern talking-to many received came directly from Delphine. I worked to retain their separation of God and Delphine, while simultaneously keeping the witnesses front and center.

As reviewers point out, I used what I called moments of danger, which emerged organically from witness testimony, as an organizing tool. This proved an effective way to keep witness testimonies at the center of the book and to avoid imposing my own research interests on them. But it does create some unexpected experiences for the reader. Plague is the starkest example, for me as well as for several reviewers. When I set out to write this book, I wanted to focus on plague, and I assumed the witnesses would speak about it frequently because they had lived through the first two waves of plague in 1348 and 1361. But I quickly discovered that the witnesses and organizers did *not* want to focus on plague. No article of interrogation asked directly about either wave of plague that the witnesses lived through, and witnesses did not speak of it in a systematic way. I

gleaned what I could and wrote an article for the *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* that focused on plague.[1] But by choosing to allow the witnesses to lead the organization of this book, plague became a backdrop rather than a focal point.

The rigorous focus on what witnesses considered moments of danger led Sari Katajala-Peltomaa to wish the book had addressed a different set of questions, including the following: What was a miracle at this time? Who was Countess Delphine? And how did the proctor of the inquest shape the articles of interrogation and witness selection? Katajala-Peltomaa was an early explorer of canonization inquests and has been at the forefront of understanding this crucial source genre for medieval history. Answers to some of these wonderful questions are dispersed throughout *Souls under Siege*. For example, both the introduction and chapter three consider the proctor, Master Nicolau Laurens, who selected many witnesses and wrote the articles of interrogation. I also dealt with many of these questions in even more depth in my dissertation and separate articles.[2] As I wrote this book, however, I found that answering these questions in a traditional background chapter at the beginning drifted too far from the focus on witnesses' moments of danger.

Katajala-Peltomaa also asked for comparisons to other Provençal inquests. This is an astute question because, with the papacy in Avignon in the fourteenth century, there were four canonization inquests in Provence, more than any other single region of Europe. I did not focus on comparison, however, because Gérard Veyssière's *Vivre en Provence au XIV^e siècle* does this quite well.[3] In my dissertation, I explored some comparisons with the structure of other inquests and other hagiography from Provence, which Veyssière did not emphasize.[4] But there was little room for this kind of comparison in *Souls under Siege*. Comparison would have introduced hundreds of witnesses and a larger time frame—roughly eighty years rather than thirty—making the book much longer and much less focused.

Bruce Venarde's questions about the experience of violence cast a different light on witness testimony that guides *Souls under Siege*. Informed by his research in spiritual experience, Venarde asks, "[D]id people experience the chronological moments of danger more profoundly because they already had many spiritual doubts? How did individual consciences and circumstances interact?" Joseph Ziegler asks a similar kind of question when he considers the underlying source of witnesses' reactions to Countess Delphine's transformative power. Ziegler was an early adopter of canonization inquest testimony for the history of medieval medicine, and his influence is clear throughout the book. These reviewers' insightful questions are difficult to answer, however, with the anthropological linguistic approach that I took with the source. For this approach, I needed to find these sentiments stated in witness testimony in order to make any claims. Rarely did any witness express how their individual conscience and larger circumstances interacted. For example, no witness linked the appearance of plague with sinful behavior, their own or in general. I had to bring in texts written by the known friends of witnesses in order to explore this commonly expressed idea. My choice to focus so closely on the witnesses and their testimonies limited what I could include in the book. But it also freed me from a temptation to make assumptions, which ultimately helped me see how the witnesses experienced the sacrament of penance as a moment of danger. I hope that other sources will allow more exploration of the important questions Venarde and Ziegler raise.

Elizabeth Casteen's critique about building an argument around the silence of the witness, Bertranda Bartomieua, is similar to Venarde's and Ziegler's questions about witnesses' spiritual doubts and underlying feelings. I highlight Bertranda's silence about Queen Johanna I of Naples in chapter one. None of the witnesses mentioned Queen Johanna, which is a surprise for this canonization inquest, but Bertranda's silence was especially significant because, as Delphine's maid and companion for almost fifty years, she would have met Queen Johanna. Bertranda mentions Queen Sanxia of Naples, but not Johanna. There were many factors that led me to choose Bertranda as the main witness for chapter one, including the breadth of her testimony, her travels with Countess Delphine, and the unique situation in which she gave her testimony. (She testified from her own bed, rather than in the church where other witnesses testified.) Bertranda allowed me to introduce witnesses' experiences of testifying as well as the political background of Provence as part of the Kingdom of Naples. Because Bertranda was over sixty years old when she testified, her testimony also allowed me to highlight the temporal distances between events she lived through and her statements at the moment of testimony. As I point out in the book, and as Katajala-Peltomaa emphasizes, decades of memories and political demands shaped the stories a witness like Bertranda told.

But Casteen's critique comes from deep knowledge of Queen Johanna I of Naples, knowledge that I gratefully drew on when writing *Souls under Siege*. She is right that revealing a silence and basing an argument on it is difficult. I cannot explain why Bertranda and all the other witnesses were silent. But when someone who spoke as much as Bertranda did about Delphine was silent about an important person she knew, it resonates. After reading Casteen's comments, however, I would like to have spent more time on the silences of other witnesses. For example, the silence of Master Guilhem Enric about Queen Johanna and events in which she was involved is even louder than Bertranda Bartomeiua's. I mention Guilhem on page 39, but I could have said much more. He was part of both King Robert's and Queen Johanna's government in Provence. From 1331-1337, he was an advocate and proctor in the royal court of Provence. During the crucial events of 1348-1349, he was the *juge mage* of Provence. The year after Delphine's inquest, in 1364, he became the *maître rational* of Provence.[5] He said nothing in the inquest about events that he would have watched unfold. And he knew the people involved for decades before and after the events. It is unlikely that Guilhem was just a reticent witness. He had no problem telling stories of the miraculous appearance of men on horseback protecting Ansouis, which he had only heard about from others. But he chose to remain silent about Queen Johanna and about events and people he knew. This was an active silence that showed a spotlight on what he did not speak about. Similar to Guilhem Enric's testimony, a document that I referenced to but did not delve into would also have highlighted the tumult that people in Provence felt at the time. Document FF36 in the Archives Municipales d'Apt provides evidence of a court case against the men of Apt for attacking the Jewish community in that town. Ultimately, I decided that the document did not include enough witnesses and would have distracted from the focus of the book. But in this document, the men of Apt claimed that a lack of leadership caused their attack on the Jewish community, which is further evidence of the instability people felt (and perhaps took advantage of in dangerous ways). This document is being prepared for publication by Noël Coulet and will appear in 2023 in *Provence historique*.

Finally, Katajala-Peltomaa's critique about terminology, in particular the term "story," requires attention. I completely agree with her comments about witness testimonies and, in my introduction,

I make all of the points that she brought up. Far from misleading readers, I provided a thorough definition of the multiple ways that I use the word “story.” Katajala-Peltomaa preferred my phrase, “crafted narrative” (p. 18). As I argue in the introduction, based on my use of Elinor Ochs’s and Lisa Capps’s *Living Narrative: Creating Lives in Everyday Storytelling*, every story is a crafted narrative, co-constructed with the audience, whether that audience is a group of friends or papal commissioners.[6] It was not necessary, therefore, to use the longer phrase throughout the book. Witness identity and the audience shaped how each person spoke. As I noted, this “shaping was not active suppression or censorship... but instead the shaping force of self and audience that we all experience as we tell a story” (p. 18). I hope that readers understand that the definition of the word “story” in the introduction carried the meaning “crafted narrative,” among others, throughout the book. In particular, the term “story” also includes the special category of “danger of death” stories, which have been shown to be moments when people not only recall the details but also re-experience the emotions of the original event. This meaning of the term “story” is just as important as “crafted narrative.”

One of the great benefits of H-France Forum reviews is the added bibliographical references. When trying to cover four major areas of research (plague, warfare, pastoral care, and the history of Provence), I could not include all of the material in the endnotes and bibliography that I wanted. Also, the increasing bibliography surrounding the use of canonization inquests as historical sources is prohibitively large to include everything. Each of the reviewers have added to the bibliography in their areas of expertise, or they have emphasized certain important works that I cited to draw greater attention. Following this spirit, I would like to add two important works by Germain Butaud, who researches mercenaries, among other things, in fourteenth-century Provence.[7]

These four reviews underscore a fundamental take-away of *Souls under Siege*. When a group of people tell stories, they rarely tell the stories you expect. We learn about each person’s knowledge, desires, and assumptions as they react to a shared experience. Ultimately, as the reviewers show, this is a book composed of personal experiences of big events. I’m delighted to see what elements particularly drew readers’ reactions and for the opportunity to understand and respond. I hope these reviews will inspire others to use this fantastic document. The questions that each reviewer raised show that there are more people and connections to uncover and more books and articles to be written. I have found the canonization inquest for Countess Delphine de Puimichel to repay any time spent with it.

NOTES

[1] Nicole Archambeau, “Healing Options during the Plague: Survivor Stories from a Fourteenth-Century Canonization Inquest,” *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 31 (2011): 531-559.

[2] For more on the proctor, Master Nicolau Laurens, see my article ““His Whole Heart Changed:” Political Uses of a Mercenary’s Emotional Transformation,” *Micrologus* 34 (2010): 169-190.

[3] Gérard Veyssi re, *Vivre en Provence au XIV^e si cle* (Paris:  ditions d’Harmattan, 1998).

[4] For comparisons among Provençal inquests and hagiography, see Nicole Archambeau, “Healing Emotional Distress in a Time of Plague and War: Witnesses to the Canonization Inquest of Delphine de Puimichel (1363)” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Santa Barbara, 2009). Chapter two has significant comparisons with other sources.

[5] For an overview of Guillelm Henric’s career, see Germain Butaud, Michel Hébert, Thierry Pécout, and Alain Venturini, “Les Procédures de vérification: Le registre AD13, B 1065,” in Thierry Pécout, dir., *L’Enquête Générale de Leopardo da Foligno en Provence: Réformation et vérification (1332-1334)* (Paris: Éditions du Comité des Travaux Historiques et Scientifiques, 2015), pp. 481-489, at 483 n.11. For his time as *maître rational*, see Thierry Pécout, “Les maîtres rationaux angevins au XIV^e siècle: Le cas de la Provence,” *Reti Medievali Rivista* 20 (2019): 155-187.

[6] Elinor Ochs and Lisa Capps, *Living Narrative: Creating Lives in Everyday Storytelling* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2018).

[7] Germain Butaud, “Guerre et vie publique à Avignon et dans le Comtat Venaissin 1350-1450” (Ph. D. dissertation, Université de Nice, 2001); Butaud, “Les mercenaires et les routiers actifs durant la guerre civile de Provence (1383-1388),” in Guilhem Pépin and Françoise Lainé, eds., *Routiers et mercenaires pendant la guerre de Cent ans: Hommage à Jonathan Sumption* (Bordeaux: Ausonius, 2016), pp. 207-226.

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