



*L'Anjou des princes fin IX^e-fin XV^e
siècle*

Jean-Michel Matz and
Noël-yves Tonnere

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Review by: Zita Eva Rohr



L'Anjou des princes fin IX^e-fin XV^e siècle. By Jean-Michel Matz and Noël-Yves Tonnere. Paris: Picard, 2017. ISBN 978-2-7084-1023-7. 408 pp. €34,50.

L'*Anjou des princes* is a well-written, clear-sighted, and very accessible narrative history—the harvest of the undoubted expertise of its two contributing authors. Jean-Michel Matz and Noël-Yves Tonnere commence their study with a brief but well-argued introduction, laying down the timeframe and purpose of their undertaking. They dismiss the arbitrary periodization of the era to which we refer to as the Middle Ages—the fall of the Roman Empire in 476 and the ‘discovery’ of America in 1492—because these events had very little impact upon the history of Anjou (9). Instead, the chronological limits of their work are determined by local factors—a coherence expressed in the title of their volume that specifies its coverage from the middle of the ninth century to the end of the fifteenth century. This period witnessed a succession of ‘princes,’ whether they were viscounts, counts, dukes, or indeed kings—titular and regnant. Geographical frameworks are identified, and territorial links with other regions are not ignored, but these are only brought into play and unpicked according to their importance to, and interactions with, Anjou. This decision permits a deeper understanding of the place of Anjou, its polity and government, as well as the ways in which its territorial ambitions were realized—or were not. Matz and Tonnere make the point that the series of territorial constructions undertaken by Anjou’s ‘princes’ were astonishingly improbable and at times surprisingly successful; an observation made elsewhere by several scholars.

Matz and Tonnere make a well-argued case for the geopolitical and political importance of the principality to the kingdom of France and indeed to wider medieval western Europe. The authors also aim to offer an integrated narrative for this period of Angevine history, attentive to its institutions and political, economic, socio-cultural, and religious frameworks, and above all to the men and women who made these pulse and live, which they fulfil to a satisfactory degree. Having first lamented the authors’ lack of analytical engagement with the many and ‘unexceptional’ influential women who helped shape and underwrite the success of this important and geo-politically strategic principality, this reviewer paused to consider that they had titled their work, *L'Anjou des princes* rather than *Les Princes d'Anjou*. It is not therefore just the men and women at the top of Anjou’s medieval social and political hierarchy who drive their joint historical narrative, but rather a multitude of contextual, cultural, social, political, geographical, and religious inputs and factors as well as an array of demographically diverse players. Notwithstanding this observation, while female protagonists such as Yolande of Aragon (d. 1442) are called forth some twenty times by Matz, it is still rather troubling

that some of the most recent published research undertaken concerning her is omitted from mention—most strikingly the scholarship published in English. Matz does indeed list Marion Chaigne-Legouy's very excellent, but as yet unpublished, 2014 doctoral thesis in his "Some Readings" list at the end of Chapter 14, but he makes no bibliographic reference to it—nor does he engage with it—at any point during his discussion. Many of Matz and Tonnere's approaches and methodologies strike one as being more than a little 'old-school,' particularly their frustrating and quite maddening tendency to avoid including bibliographic references to their sources—both primary and secondary—consulted in support of their thoroughly engaging and frequently informative chrono-thematic narrative. Nor are there any footnotes or endnotes of consequence. No detailed bibliographic references are given for block quotations. All that is offered to an engaged reader, hungry to chase down their sources and to know more, is a fairly patchy, and at times rather antiquated and largely franco-centric, list of "Some Readings" (Quelques Lectures) included at the end of each chapter. This might have been accepted practice in French historiography of earlier years; thankfully, however, most French scholars now include and acknowledge their sources in full to assist students, non-specialists, and indeed established scholars seeking to excavate further into sources consulted and exploited by their fellow scholars.

The book is divided into five chronologically and thematically linked parts, with Tonnere tackling the first three and Matz the final two. In his opening two chapters of Part I, "L'Ambition tenace des comtes d'Anjou" (The Tenacious Ambition of the Counts of Anjou), Tonnere describes how, before launching into a series of territorial conquests that would unfold during the eleventh century, the first Angevine counts succeeded in gathering together the main Carolingian dynasties of western France by deploying their carefully constructed matrimonial alliances during the second half of the tenth century. In Chapter 3 (again, infuriatingly without giving bibliographical references), Tonnere offers his reader an informative overview of Angevine nobility between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries. In Part II, "Un grand Foyer spirituel et artistique" (A Great Spiritual and Artistic Centre), Tonnere sheds considerable light upon the ways in which the Church was intimately linked to comital power and authority; religious life in the twelfth century, including the success of Gregorian reform and its new spiritual obligations; Anjou as a major cultural hub for intellectual advances; and the richness and dynamism of Angevine artistic practice. Part III examines the development and growth of Anjou from its situation during the mid-tenth century, its land-clearing activities and infrastructure projects, the configuration of its spaces, and the hierarchization of its housing. These advances led to an extended period of economic growth, a liberated and diversified peasantry, and a

dynamic society under construction that witnessed the creation of its second largest centre, the new town of Saumur.

Having made a considerable contribution to our understanding of the history of the construction of early and central medieval Anjou, Tonnere hands over to Matz who seamlessly takes up their joint narrative in Part IV, introducing the eras of the Capetians and first Valois 'princes' that spanned the thirteenth to mid-fourteenth centuries. Chapter 10 reveals a period of Angevine prosperity, which saw the zenith of rural development, yet limited urbanization despite Anjou's economic prosperity. Chapter 11 plunges into the pre-eminence and renewal of the Church, spiritual life, as well as education and literary culture. In Chapter 12, Matz's attention turns to a darkening horizon for the principality and its populations, highlighting the issues raised by over-population, famine, and initial societal problems such as increasing poverty and the charitable and civic responses to it against the backdrop of the first phase of the Hundred Years War.

The final section, Part V, consisting of five densely-packed yet clearly articulated chapters, covers the period of the Valois duke-kings from the mid-fourteenth century to the end of the fifteenth century when the last surviving duke of Anjou, Charles V, bequeathed Anjou, Maine, Provence, and his claim to the throne of Naples to his acquisitive cousin King Louis XI, thereby ensuring the end of this geo-politically important Angevine 'empire,' henceforth definitively integrated into the French Crown.

Despite its frustrating lack of bibliographical references and occasional factual errors (concerning Eleanor of Aquitaine and Yolande of Aragon, in particular), Matz and Tonnere have produced a very useful work that is essential reading for anyone wishing to acquire a deeper understanding of *L'Anjou des Princes*.

ZITA EVA ROHR
Macquarie University