

Reviews

Capot, Stéphane and Paul D'Hollander (eds.). *Confréries et confrères en Limousin du Moyen Age à nos jours*. Limoges: Presses Universitaires de Limoges, 2009. Pp. 210 ISBN 978-2-84287-464-3 (paperback) € 32.

This book is based on papers presented at a 2006 conference that looked at confraternities within the borders of the old Diocese of Limoges from their earliest foundations to the present day. The articles are for the most part by local scholars, with one brief intervention by an envoy from the CNRS in Paris. Many of the articles are accompanied by images, both black-and-white and colour.

The collection explores the historical background to what appears to be a quite lively modern confraternal culture in the Limousin, including several confraternities founded in the past two decades. The editors point out, moreover, that the extensive confraternal history of the region created a source not only of current confraternities, but also of the active mutualist and cooperative movements that became well-established beginning in the nineteenth century.

The collection is divided into three parts. The first is an overview section, beginning with a historiographical survey by the editors. They show that the history of confraternities in the Limousin is not well-known outside the region — Catherine Vincent's book on confraternities in France cites only one — despite some solid early antiquarian and archival work, a few modern articles, and some references in modern monographs. The collection is intended to redress this gap and provide a solid foundation for future research. To that end, the detailed survey of potential and lesser-known archival sources by Stéphane Capot of the Archives municipales de Limoges will prove very useful.

The archival survey is complemented by an appendix that provides a comprehensive list of the approximately one thousand confraternities attested in at least one source from the twelfth century to the present. Most of these are known by just a single brief reference, although two hundred or so have more detailed sources available. A survey of the diocese conducted in 1775–1780 accounts for the majority of this list, citing 657 brotherhoods at the time. In the earlier period, 74 confraternities are attested in Limoges itself between the twelfth and fifteenth centuries.

The second part is a series of case studies that look at the history, customs, literature, and art of Limousin confraternities. A couple of elements stand out as remarkable. The first is the inventory and account book of the *Confrérie du Saint-Sacrement* of the church of Saint-Pierre-du-Queyroix in Limoges, which is beautifully illuminated with colour images of its treasures, some full-page. Several colour and black-and-white photographs are included in the article examining this manuscript.

The other remarkable element is the widespread local tradition of *re-inages*, in which confraternities would annually select a king and/or queen for their major celebration. Two case studies include some discussion of this phenomenon, but it is also mentioned throughout the collection. The confraternity's king might be responsible for paying for the confraternal banquet, or the annual supply of candle-wax, or other expenses. Sometimes the king might be supported by a whole range of festive officials. In 1599, the *Confrérie de Sainte-Anne* had "roi, reine, le migon du roi, le lieutenant du roi, un capitaine, le lieutenant du capitaine, un porte-enseigne, le fou de la confrérie, le lieutenant du fou, un vigneron, un porte-épée, le fait-à-sa-guise, le tête-salé, le fauconnier, un évêque, un prêtre, le paresseux, le lieutenant du mignon, un sergent-majeur, un lieutenant de port-enseigne, le bouteiller du roy" (p. 55). The most charming example of the *reinage* was the two children chosen as king and queen to crown the procession of washer-women who led the "Vierge du Battoir" every year for the confraternity of *Notre-Dame du Bon Secours* in Limoges.

The third part of the book looks at modern confraternal life. It includes a couple of articles and a repertory of thirteen currently active brotherhoods, ranging from some founded in the Middle Ages to two founded in 2007.

This collection's long perspective and comprehensive approach provides the opportunity to see the cycles and patterns of confraternal activity over time. It also provides a useful comparison with other regions, and a solid starting point for future research. As these valuable regional studies accumulate, they are beginning to provide a more complete picture of the full range of confraternal activity across the centuries in Europe.

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