



Deutscher, Thomas B. Punishment and Penance: Two Phases in the History of the Bishop's Tribunal of Novara

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might conclude that the reception of La Boétie's work has not always been sweetness and light.

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Deutscher, Thomas B.

Punishment and Penance: Two Phases in the History of the Bishop's Tribunal of Novara.

Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013. Pp. xiii, 215. ISBN 978-1-4426-4442-7 (hardcover) \$60.

This interesting volume analyzes the documentation related to the diocese of Novara in two distinct time periods: after the Council of Trent (1563–1615) and in the second half of the eighteenth century, when Novara is annexed to the kingdom of Piedmont-Sardinia.

Geographically speaking, the diocese of Novara was the northernmost part of the duchy of Milan, which from the 1530s was under Spanish control, as were many Italian states. The extreme western border of the diocese was Switzerland and the local diocese of Sion. This border, frequently crossed for trading, was considered a soft spot and possible way of entry for Protestant doctrines. Because of this, especially during the Counter-Reformation era, bishops and administrators of the Novara diocese made a particular effort to keep under control the roads connecting with Switzerland. Among the many bishops of Novara, the most active was Carlo Bascapè who, like his predecessors, followed instructions given by Carlo Borromeo. Bascapè, in order to better manage the territory and the farthest parishes, reorganized the diocese into vicariates, and the vicariates into four distinct administrative regions.

The technical and practical aspects of the reorganization of the diocese should have offered the possibility to control and prosecute a series of sins that implicated both ecclesiastical and lay people. These included heresy, illicit magic, blasphemy, witchcraft, and bigamy as well as usury and physical violence. The ecclesiastical court should have prosecuted and judged on every matter that involved the life of parishioners, using the "tool" of moral control and the administration of sacraments (or its estrangement) to achieve discipline. But

on this point, many different powers and courts both lay and ecclesiastic—such as the Inquisition—were in conflict, overlapping and limiting one another. Often a defendant would appeal to one of them in the hope of obtaining a more favourable verdict; and in some cases, the threat of an appeal to Rome would impede necessary and swift local actions.

Especially after the Council of Trent, legal documentation of the ecclesiastical court of Novara shows a steady effort to enforce social and behavioural rules—so that clergy might represent the Catholic Church more effectively. In Novara as elsewhere, the attempt to institutionalize clergy took the form of seminars, proper clothing, and a uniformity of conduct and morality among priests (4). The goal was the “creation of a professionalized clergy, set apart from the people of the diocese by training, clothing, manners, and sense of spiritual mission” (142).

Despite such commitment, however, the results were disappointing. After 1600, for instance, cases of concubinage and adultery were no longer being prosecuted. Ideas following the Enlightenment seemed more frightening than physical attacks between laypeople and ecclesiastics. Court documents of the earlier of the two periods are “records of formal trials conducted at Novara before the vicars general and prosecutors ... and recorded in folio volumes” (10), while documents from the eighteenth century are sparser and more scattered. Tied by birth to the places where they exerted their role, many priests were accused of sins that encompassed theft, gambling, illegitimate fatherhood, concubinage, physical violence, and carrying banned weapons. Without generalizing, the documents reveal priests as human beings first and foremost: people who have difficulty in accepting a role that, in many cases, they did not choose or “feel”; who act and think in an “earthly” way despite the efforts of the diocese to create a very different image.

In most cases, however, the punishment for poor behaviour among clergy was minimal, and only in extreme cases of repeated violation was it strengthened. Deutscher’s explanation for the lack of consistent punishment and juridical prosecution of clergy is convincing: he cites a shortage of suitable candidates for the priesthood, a chronic weakness in the courts, and above all a continuous effort to treat admissions of guilt by the clergy with compassion. We do not know the final results of many trials, because of the loss of documentation reporting the sentence: this too makes us wonder if punishment was ever applied.

Punishment and Penance is written in a clear and precise way. Even now, the trials of the ecclesiastical courts are a neglected archival source—seldom used to reveal a social reality that is more nuanced than other, more limited institutional sources suggest. For an Italian scholar, this book is a pleasant discovery. We tend to consider only the larger regions, such as Rome or Milan, which have created, through their religious history, a path that we imagine to be similar everywhere. It is extremely interesting and useful to discover that minor realities had their own autonomy and a specific development of their own peculiarities, adapted to real life.

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Gaposchkin, M. Cecilia (ed.).

Blessed Louis the Most Glorious of Kings: Texts Relating to the Cult of Saint Louis of France. Trans. M. Cecilia Gaposchkin and Phyllis B. Katz.

Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2012. Pp. xi, 307. ISBN 978-0-268-02984-5 (paperback) \$39.

This collection of primary texts offers readers a vivid sense of the various hagiographic and liturgical materials that might have formed part of the devotional tradition surrounding a saint in the later Middle Ages. In a paperback book that fits comfortably into the hands, Cecilia Gaposchkin presents editions of various Latin texts related to the cult of Saint Louis (b. 1214, r. 1226, d. 1270) accompanied by facing page English translations by Gaposchkin and Phyllis Katz. As Gaposchkin notes in her introduction, scholars most commonly know Saint Louis from Jean of Joinville's *Vie nostre saint roy Loöys*, which was completed by 1308 and is available in many translations today. Gaposchkin argues, however, that "this reliance on Joinville misrepresents the Saint Louis of the later Middle Ages, since Joinville's text was virtually unknown beyond the royal court before it was first printed in the sixteenth century" (1). Her collection, in contrast, presents a selection of hagiographic and liturgical texts that, she contends, were directly involved in the construction of the medieval cult of Saint Louis.

Specifically, her collection includes editions and translations of two previously unpublished Latin *vitae*, the *Gloriosissimi Regis* and the *Beatus Ludovicus*,