

20.10.06 Macé, La majesté et la croix

Main Article Content

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Macé, Laurent. *La majesté et la croix: Les sceaux de la maison des comtes de Toulouse (XIIe-XIIIe siècle)*. *Tempus*. Toulouse, France: Presses universitaires du Midi, 2019. pp. 389. ISBN: 978-2-8107-0588-7 (hardback).

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Laurent Macé's *La majesté et la croix* forms a trilogy with his *Catalogues raimondins (1112-1229)* [Toulouse, 2008] and *Les comtes de Toulouse et leur entourage, XIIe-XIIIe siècles: Rivalités, alliances et jeux* (Toulouse, 2000), in which he offers a multifaceted history of the counts and the county of Toulouse during the twelfth and the thirteenth centuries. Each volume corresponds to a progression through the French academic cursus, from archival research (*Catalogues*) through the doctoral dissertation (*Les comtes de Toulouse*) to the habilitation (*La majesté*). No stone has been left unturned in these meticulously researched accounts, which are characterized by a comprehensive command of the secondary literature and a thorough gathering of documents, seals, coins, chronicles, and Occitan lyrics. Particularly remarkable is Macé's European tracking of published and unpublished *acta* issued in the name or at the behest of the counts of Toulouse, including copies in medieval cartularies, descriptions in medieval notarial and *inspeximus* instruments, and modern transcriptions by Renaissance antiquarians and Ancien Régime scholarly monks. Calendared in the *Catalogues raimondins*, the resultant corpus of comital charters remains somewhat disappointing, because of the paucity of extant sealed originals, which thus has forced reliance upon fragmentary seals and diplomatic texts of dubious tradition. This impoverished heuristic situation has not deterred Macé from focusing an entire monograph, *La majesté et la croix*, on the seals of the Toulouse lineage, nor from advancing arguments about the dates of their creation, the significance of their use, and the meaning of their graphic designs, within a comparative context provided by the mediatic cultures of the Plantagenets and the king-counts of Barcelona.

The study is divided into three parts, whose overlapping content and argument lead to some repetition. Part I offers a thorough dissection of the evidence for and the circumstances during which the counts initiated and maintained the sealing of their deeds. Despite a tendency to massage problematic charter evidence in characterizing the counts' sealing performance, Macé has succeeded in advancing by some fifty years the beginnings of comital sealing, traditionally thought to have originated in the 1210s with Raymond VI (1156, r.1194, d.1222), about a half-century later than neighboring elites. Macé shows convincingly that Count Raymond V (c.1134, r.1148, d.1194) was the architect of his dynasty's seals and sealing practices. Raymond V introduced documentary sealing in both wax and lead during the second half of the twelfth century, displaying images and emblems that, with minor modifications, were retained by his hereditary successors, Raymond VI and Raymond VII (1197, r.1222, d.1249). The relative homogeneity of this representative practice suggests to Macé a tight and supportive connection to the Raymonds' continuing identification with their Provençal origins in the county of St

Gilles, as well as their desire for political expansion within Provence where they faced competitive claims by the pope and the counts of Barcelona. Macé demonstrates a comital investment in seals as means of sustaining a dynastic-patrimonial consciousness and of maintaining the ubiquity of comital rule over dispersed and at times contested territories.

Unlike neighboring magnates, the counts of Toulouse were not artistic patrons. Although they had affinities with the new monastic orders, they were absent from traditional networks of spirituality. They had a large entourage of lawyers, administrators, scribes, and public notaries, but they did not inspire dramatic narratives of their heroic feats nor did they have chroniclers at court or monastic scriptoria in charge of their dynastic history. They lacked a familial necropolis. Thus, Macé argues, seals and their graphic and iconographic design became crucial repositories of the Raymonds' memorial and political propaganda as well as ideological agents of its diffusion. The poor quality of the seal illustrations provided in the volume, itself largely the result of the virtual illegibility of most extant impressions, weakens Macé's iconographic readings but not his discussion of the role seals may have played in weaponizing the counts' lordship over the duchy of Narbonne, the county of Toulouse, and the margraviate of Provence (the future Comtat-Venaissin). These territories formed a principality, ruled from two centers (Toulouse and St Gilles) and stretching from the upper Languedoc to the east of the Rhone river, that was vast and discontinuous. A map might usefully have further clarified this complex geography, which required the comital court to be itinerant since each unit in the federation had a separate administration.

Westward, in Spanish-influenced Languedoc, the county of Toulouse did not achieve administrative centralization so that the counts' *acta*, though sealed by a comital clerk, were written by scribes who might be either in the comital entourage or provided by the parties involved. Eastward, in Provence and in the Rhone region where the influence of Roman Law and Italy loomed large, the counties of St Gilles, Nîmes, Mauguio (Melgueil), and the margraviate of Provence had organized chanceries headed by a judge-chancellor. Instituted by the count and charged with maintaining his seal (a metallic bulloterion), judge-chancellors subscribed and sealed documents they had dictated to notaries (some of them public) in the name of the counts. Significantly, it was in these eastern regions that comital sealing occurred most reliably, with seals used there displaying distinctive Provençal characteristics, such as being formed of metal rather than wax and bearing inscriptions which numbered the Raymonds with ordinals reckoning their descent from Raymond of Saint-Gilles and Tripoli (d. 1105). The heraldic design that was to become emblematic of the counts of Toulouse, the cross clechy, voided, and botonny, first appeared on coinage minted by Raymond V near Avignon in the 1150s, and soon thereafter on the reverses of his bulls for Saint-Gilles, Mauguio, and the margraviate of Provence. This cross is commonly known as the cross of Toulouse but medieval Occitan poets referred to it as the *crotz ramondenca*, the Raymond cross. Macé sees in the *crotz* a mediatic coup, a richly polysemic sign that recapitulated the crusader ancestry of the counts of Toulouse who had descended from Raymond of St Gilles, their participation in the peace movement, and the salvific protection they derived from the Holy Cross of Avignon, all of which served to justify their title as margraves of Provence despite challenges by the lord of Montpellier and the count of Barcelona. Macé thus emphasizes the extent to which seal usage by these eastern comital chanceries helped spread the influence and authority of the counts of Toulouse, nurturing their oriental dreams toward Provence and Outremer and, after the Albigensian crusade put an end both to their ambitions and to their control of the full principality, providing an instrumentality which supported Raymond VII's ability to regain his county.

In Part Two, Macé provides a penetrating interpretation of the counts of Toulouse's double-sided wax seal. The equestrian figure on the seal's reverse underwent slight updates over the years, which the author construes as indices of the transformation of comital status, from Carolingian leader of the host, identified by his bearing of a pennant, to prestigious knight, emblemized by his heraldic sign. Much is made of the male seated figure, bareheaded, clad in an antique robe, resting a sword on his knees and holding a castle, which appears on the obverse of the wax seal. Macé reads this arrangement as an image of majesty infused with the tenets of Pauline and Augustinian political thought and designed to project the divine origin of Toulouse princely rule mandated with the regalian mission to ensure peace and justice. He further associates the regal posture, traditionally a sigillographic prerogative of kings and emperors, with the hypergamy practiced by the counts, all of whom married royal daughters. Thus, it is inferred that not only would Raymond V have initiated seal usage by virtue of his marriage to Constance, sister of King Louis VII of France and widow of Eustace of Blois, son and heir to King Stephen of England, but that the model for the seated posture on his wax seal is based upon Constance's seal, which displays a seated female figure holding an orb and a cross. This may well have been the case; however, the first evidence of Constance's sealing occurred in Paris and postdates her repudiation by Raymond V, while her seal design suggests English influences with similarities to the seals of Empress Matilda and her mother, Matilda of Scotland. Macé is also perhaps too hasty in identifying the seated figure on the seals of the Raymonds, which is devoid of traditional regalia, as a type of majesty. He might have considered as an alternative source of inspiration the contemporary bulls of the neighboring lord of Montpellier and count of Forcalquier, which were similarly engraved with seated and classically dressed personages. Their playing of musical instruments, while the Toulouse figures are holding sword and castle, would suggest shared values of chivalry, lordship, and courtliness. Nevertheless, the Raymonds' waxen seal design seems to have characterized lordship over the county of Toulouse. Simon and Amauri of Montfort abandoned their prior specific panoply of sigillographic images to adopt the Raymond model of a seated figure with sword and castle when they were granted the county of Toulouse during the Albigensian crusade. Their new seals, however, retained the arms of Montfort and abstained from incorporating the cross of the Raymonds. Conversely, the Capetian, Alphonse of Poitiers, count of Toulouse by his marriage to Joan, daughter and heiress of Count Raymond VII, used, as his wife also did, seals designed with Capetian and Castilian styles and emblems, displaying the Raymond cross only as a small counterseal.

The diffusion of the Raymond cross is the subject of Part III. This cross, together with the title of count of Provence, was adopted on their seals by the counts of Forcalquier from the late twelfth century onward. A novel display, it publicized a long-term genealogical memory, referring to the common descent of Toulouse and Forcalquier from the earliest house of Provence in the late tenth century. In general, the adoption of the Toulouse cross followed ties of kinship, achieved by marriage to a count of Toulouse or his relatives, including legitimate progeny, natural (frequently female) children, or nephews and nieces themselves also often of illegitimate descent. The pattern of emblematic diffusion thus testifies to an inclusive kinship, in which close ties were maintained and displayed regardless of birth status, enabling a flexibly-defined progeny to tap into the symbolic capital of the Raymonds. Macé suggests that the spread of their heraldic emblem during the counts' lifetimes remained virtually confined to their extended lineage. He might have mentioned that, emulating the usage of the city of Toulouse whose earliest seal, in the 1210s, displayed a haloed Christological lamb carrying the Raymond cross, many urban consulates in Occitania had, from the mid-thirteenth century onward, seals engraved with the cross, which, to this day, remains a visible and powerful symbol of Occitan history and cultural identity.

Two prevailing assumptions animate Macé's study. The first, derived from sigillography's traditional focus on the seals of elites, presumes seal usage to be a sign of cultural progress and social grandeur, with sealing and its paraphernalia considered closely responsive to politics, policies, and programmatic strategies of identity. Macé's discussions of seals, thus, inhabits an intense political narrative, whereby the context of analysis becomes the content of interpretation. The second assumption, inspired by the author's admiration and advocacy for the counts of Toulouse, frames their seals as evidence of a prestigious ancestry, as agents of comital achievement, and as illustration of chivalric fame. While Macé acknowledges that seal information is propagandistic, devised to influence politics and to stimulate competitors' acceptance of the Toulouse's authority, he at times allows bombastic claims to slip into the domain of actualities with speculation becoming the basis of causal inference. Seals are joined to a careful selection of contemporary lyrics and chronicles in painting a panegyric image of the counts of Toulouse, which contrasts sharply with their ultimate humiliation during the Albigensian crusade, the extinction of their lineage, and the assimilation of their domains within the Capetian dominions (Toulouse in the French kingdom and Provence in the Angevin kingdom of Sicily) and the Papal state (The Comtat-Venaissin). The author's interpretative parameters, dominated by the primacy of politics and advocacy, leave little room for the specific modalities by which seals shape meaning and communication. In his painstaking identification of minute changes in the seals of the counts, Macé dwells on presumed direct responses to changing political contingencies. This, however, has the effect of minimizing the remarkable persistence of figural typology on the inter-regional and inter-generational seals of the counts, which, further enhanced by the replicating process of imprinting, transcended the temporalities of politics and mediated a sense of the impervious permanence of status. Ultimately, Macé's firm assumption that seals were powerful media in Occitania is challenged by a local documentary culture that was dominated by notarial instruments, and indeed by the fate of Raymond VII's testament, which was rejected as invalid because it was not issued in public form by a notary, even though it bore the seals of the count and several of his relatives.

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