

Jennifer Britnell. *Le Roi très chrétien contre le pape: Écrits antipapaux en français sous le règne de Louis XII.*

Textes de la Renaissance 169; Série Littérature des rhétoriciens 2. Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2011. 434 pp. €59. ISBN: 978-2-8124-0279-1.

Jennifer Britnell (who sadly died in July 2011 only days after this book was published) built a good career doing critical editions of the works of the poets of Louis XII's reign and writing their biographies; in this book she turned her attention to the context of many of their works, the bitter dispute between the French king and Pope Julius II from 1510 to 1513. Among the many feuds between French monarchs and popes involving Philip IV and Boniface VIII, Henry II and Julius III, Louis XIV and Innocent XI, the one between the "Father of his People" and Papa Terribile is the least well-known yet was perhaps the most productive in literary output. Examining the content of these works directed against Pope Julius by a cadre of respected authors is the purpose of Britnell's book.

After a brief introductory chapter providing the political context of the feud between king and pope, the author examines whether the word *propaganda* is appropriate for the era, as it is a modern term. Since Louis XII actively sponsored a large portion of the anti-papal literature, she concludes that it is, and she further shows that Louis had an active policy of sponsoring royal publicity even prior to the feud with Julius. The war against Venice of 1509, in which France took part as a member of the League of Cambrai, led to the production of a vast number of pieces justifying the war and praising Louis for his victories in it. Royal sponsorship of many works by such authors as Jean D'Auton, Jean Marot, Pierre Gringore, Jean Bouchet, and Jean Lemaire de Belges helped create the royal privilege to print — that era's equivalent of copyright.

When Julius II in 1510 turned the League of Cambrai against the French for the purpose of driving the barbarians from Italy, Louis had a cadre of authors in place to promote the Gallican cause against Rome. The bulk of the book is devoted to a close analysis of these works, arranged according to genre and content. Britnell

also provides an annotated bibliography of “The Texts in French concerning the War against Julius II,” which indicates the provenance of both printed and manuscript sources. Among the themes she finds in those works are the proper understanding of the term *Roi Très Chrétien*, that the French king serves as both protector and corrector of the popes; conciliarism, the French king’s obligation to call a general council (which he did at Pisa in May 1511) to oversee the papacy; his right to wage war on an evil pope; the defense of the Pragmatic Sanction of Bourges; and the corruption in the clergy. In respect to the last, Britnell quotes François Villon to the effect that priests scrupulously follow the divine command to be fruitful and multiply. Louis’s authors trotted out that commonplace of antipapal authors — that an evil pope is the Antichrist — and they used the prophetic voice to prove that Louis’s victory was inevitable and for the good of the Church. Despite the ardent articulation of an anti-papal position, only one of those works, Lemaire de Belges’s *Traité des schismes*, was later reprinted by the Protestants.

Britnell devotes a chapter to cross-referencing the points of argument found in the thirteen principal French works and Erasmus’s *Julius Excluded*, which was written about the same time, and a second chapter to a closer examination of the contrasts between the French works and *Julius Excluded*. Additional chapters discuss more specifically *sotties* (farces) put on to lampoon the pope and “heroic letters” addressed to the king praising his defiance of Julius. An appendix provides text editions of several of the lesser-known works that have not had modern editions.

This is an erudite and comprehensive textual examination of the antipapal literature emanating from the circle around Louis XII, which gives important insights into largely ignored aspects of French Renaissance literature. The author, however, makes little attempt to judge its impact beyond those circles or to assess whether Louis’s propaganda campaign might have influenced Henry VIII and his courtiers some fifteen years later. But given that the French people remained loyal to their king — perhaps the least loyal subject was his queen, Anne of Brittany, who strongly opposed his confrontation with Julius — despite excommunication, threat of interdict, and huge expense of war, it is plausible to argue that the campaign had its desired effect.

FREDERICK J. BAUMGARTNER

Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University