Performance, Stacey argues, was crucial to the status of all learned and artistic classes in early medieval Ireland, including Christian clerics. Intellectuals not only had to memorize the concepts and principles of their fields of expertise, they also had to demonstrate their specialized knowledge in aesthetically pleasing ways in order to preserve their authority. While priests chanted Latin prayers and bards sang memorized rhymes and melodies, jurists rehearsed mythological legal narratives and performed in obscure judicial jargon. (One text even regulated the number of breaths an advocate might draw during his oratory, depending on the status of his client—the more noble a client, the more breaths allowed his representative while performing.) When legal scholars wrote about stolen cows or trespass, they used intentionally archaizing, difficult prose codes. (What could be more appropriate for a culture whose greatest epic was about cattle rustling?) Their clients and audiences had to work extra hard to understand this code and participate in the legal process. Thus mastery of language not only supported the mastery of jurists and helped determine the outcome of legal conflicts, but also drove the social and political hierarchies protected by laws.

Stacey's argument is more lucid and appealing than the prose of early medieval Irish jurists, but she doesn't shun the jargon of academic specialists. The book weighs in on some traditional disputes among Irish medievalists about the origins of the native legal class, the disappearance of druids, the religious transformation of the *filid* (professional poetic class), the effects of Christian conversion, the relation of oral to written culture, shifts in royal authority, the regionalism of legal schools, and the motivation for the great manuscript compilations of the eighth century. Although some of Stacey's arguments may seem like meaningless jabber to the general reader—for instance, discussions of Irish legal historiography or analysis of the prose styles of particular legal schools—nonetheless, her main points remain clear and compelling to all. Legal performances occurred everywhere in premodern Europe, she asserts, and Irish scripts can help us understand the relation of written to lived law in the premodern world. Instead of applying anachronistic analytical dichotomies to the medieval past—ritual/performance, secular/religious, written/oral—historians should examine the ways that people used, enacted, and recorded their legal words to "establish identities, assert hierarchies, engage audiences, and transform social roles" (249). In this book, Robin Stacey shows how the deep play and dark speech of the Irish can illuminate the European past even for those who lack a single word of Gaeilge.

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Michael P. Breen, *Law, City, and King: Legal Culture, Municipal Politics, and State Formation in Early Modern Dijon,* Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2007. Pp. xiii + 307. $75 (ISBN 978-1-58046-236-5).

Using lawyers in the city of Dijon as his focal point, Michael Breen explores what the formation of the French monarchical state looked like from a local, urban, and legal perspective. Provincial capital of Burgundy and judicial center of the region,

Dijon was home to hundreds of legal professionals in the early modern period. From this judicial population, Breen chooses to examine the role of lawyers who sat in the town council of Dijon during the seventeenth century. Through a close study of these lawyers, Breen traces the relationship of the monarchy to the city, the viability of municipal privilege, jurisdictional rivalries in the city, opportunities for political participation in local politics, depictions of royal "absolute" authority, and the emergence of public opinion as a mode of legitimating royal authority.

Whereas it has become common to argue that the rise of French absolutism under Louis XIV was characterized by a pragmatic and mutually satisfactory compromise between provincial elites and the monarchy, Breen paints a gloomier picture. Unless they possessed substantial wealth, lawyers were progressively excluded from the institutions constituting the emerging state. In the early seventeenth century, venality of office made it impossible for lawyers to become magistrates in the sovereign court known as the parlement. Nonetheless, lawyers successfully regrouped, at least for a time, and readily sat in the town council of Dijon where they defended the city's urban privileges. Given that a good deal of politics in this period was characterized by the defense of institutional privileges in court, lawyers were well-suited to this political role.

Owing to factional disputes at the local level, and the tenuous grip of royal authority over the town before Louis XIV, Dijon was characterized by a fairly open political system in which both municipal elections and patronage by the powerful provincial governors played a role. Following the civil war known as the Fronde (1648–1653), however, the Sun-king's government succeeded in imposing its grip more firmly over municipal political life. The crown's own officials (intendants) and the provincial governor came to control the appointment of individuals to the town council. The vibrant political life of Dijon was tamed as the town council was transformed into a royally supervised oligarchy that largely did the work of the crown.

Lawyers were unable to play an active municipal role in this political climate. Instead of abandoning their interest in politics, they channeled their concern into scholarly pursuits. Rather than glorifying the magnificence and sovereign authority of Louis XIV, Dijon's lawyers turned to a careful study of provincial customs and revived contractual, constitutionalist interpretations of royal power. Breen argues that one lawyer, Claude Gilbert who wrote a critique of Louis XIV's France under guise of a Utopia, actually embraced republicanism.

Finally, in his epilogue, Breen suggests yet another transmutation. In the eighteenth century Dijon's excluded but scholarly minded lawyers helped to create a "public sphere" of debate that blended traditional legal concepts such as provincial custom with newer rhetoric about the right of the "public" and "citizens" to participate in politics. Thus the legal public sphere of the seventeenth century, rooted in the legal defense of customary rights and privileges, played a noteworthy role in the formation of the wider enlightened public sphere characterized by a more abstract and broader defense of civic rights. A detailed analysis of eighteenth century political life, however, goes beyond the scope of this book.

Breen's story of the transformation of urban government from a relatively inde-

pendent body to a closed, oligarchic, administrative arm of the monarchy supports a long-standing historiographical tradition that stretches back to Alexis de Tocqueville. Although Breen emphasizes the routinization of authority characterizing local government under the emerging administrative state, the widespread sale of municipal office under Louis XIV and continuous patron-client ties point to the creation of a well-oiled political machine rather than a modern bureaucracy.

Breen's archival research is meticulous, but tends to be somewhat narrowly focused on lawyers' relationship to the town council. His book thus leaves a number of other issues aside. The mayor of Dijon played an essential role in the Third Estate of the provincial estates of Burgundy, but the provincial estates scarcely receive a mention in the book. There is also no comparative context elucidating the role of lawyers in institutions outside the town council. Nonetheless, Breen's narrative of Dijon's lawyers provides a well-written case study of municipal political culture and state formation from the ground up that illuminates the story of lesser provincial elites that often have been ignored in the scholarly literature.

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Alan Cooper, *Bridges, Law and Power in Medieval England, 700–1400,* Rochester: Boydell Press, 2006. Pp. 185. $80 (ISBN 978-1-84383-275-5).

The ordinary person rarely gives much thought to bridges until a tragedy such as the recent collapse in Minnesota occurs. Since then, much concern has been expressed about infrastructure in general and aging bridges in particular. Squabbles have broken out among governmental bodies over the question of responsibility for maintenance. These concerns are not new, of course. As Alan Cooper, in his compact and cogent book, *Bridges, Law and Power in Medieval England, 700–1400,* argues such difficulties and conflicting interests have existed as long as there has been infrastructure to maintain. In the course of discussing the building and upkeep of bridges in the medieval period, Cooper reaches some large conclusions concerning changing notions of medieval kingship and governmental power. That he does so through a careful reading of the documentary evidence combined with an eye for legal theory and political and economic reality makes this a satisfying and enlightening book.

On his way to making conclusions about conceptions of power and how those concepts changed, Cooper follows some fascinating paths—several leading to the Continent. In discussing the odd fact that bridges are mentioned in charters long before there were, in fact, many bridges to mention, the section of the chapter on the Synod and Charter of Gumley (the text of which he provides in an appendix) is of particular interest, demonstrating as it does the influence of St. Boniface on that early Charter and his probable role in stressing the importance of bridges well before the reality in England required it. Later on, in discussing the use of the theory of the Via Regio to rationalize pontage tolls, he examines the fascination of twelfth-century legal scholars with Roman law and argues convincingly that