

Jean de Joinville Biography

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Biography

The French nobleman and author Jean de Joinville (1224-1317) is known for his *Life of Saint Louis*, a chronicle that furnishes intimate glimpses of King Louis IX.

Jean de Joinville was born in the second half of 1224 or the first months of 1225 and became lord of Joinville and seneschal of Champagne at an early age. He was 17 when he attended with his overlord, the poet Thibaut de Champagne, the feast at Saumur in 1241. When Louis IX left on the Seventh Crusade, Joinville dutifully followed him to Egypt and Palestine and fought there, but he had little enthusiasm for military action. After the taking of Damiette in 1249, the only real success of the whole expedition, Joinville and the King were taken prisoners and shared certain perils until they were released by ransom. In 1254 Joinville was back home, occupying himself with administrative duties. When Louis set off for the Eighth Crusade, Joinville begged off on the grounds that his duty was to protect his people at home.

About 1305 Jeanne de Navarre asked Joinville to write his memoirs of Louis, but she was long dead by the time the old gentleman had dictated his *Livre des saintes paroles et des bons faiz nostre roy saint Looy*s (*Life of Saint Louis*), dedicated in 1309 to the Dauphin. The events recorded are recalled with remarkable accuracy and clarity; the visual effects are outstanding.

The *Life of Saint Louis*, written with no idea of publication, is perhaps the most personal series of reminiscences that have come down from Louis's century. Unlike the more formal histories, this little book is subjective. The first part is concerned with the exemplary integrity and virtue of its subject. The second contains a sympathetic account of his career from his birth (1214) and coronation (1226), emphasizing naturally the Seventh Crusade with a frankness that includes the King's fears and reveals a rather ill-conducted campaign. The last chapters tell of Louis's second crusade, his illness and death (1270), and Joinville's participation in the canonical inquiries that led to the canonization of Louis. Joinville's other writings include a devout commentary on the Credo, which shows considerable scriptural knowledge, a pious epitaph on his forebears, and a few letters.