

**Serge Brunet (dir.), avec la collaboration de José Javier Ruiz Ibáñez, La Sainte Union des catholiques de France et la fin des guerres de Religion (1585–1629), Paris (Classiques Garnier) 2016, 525 p. (Rencontres, 276), ISBN 978-2-406-06411-4, EUR 93,00.**

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**Mack P. Holt, Fairfax, VA**

This collection of essays emerged from a conference in 2008 specifically to re-examine the historiography of the French Catholic League in the provinces during the last of the religious wars (1585–1598). A consistent theme is that the Sainte Union was anything but united, as the provincial Leagues negotiated on their own with foreign powers and placed their own provincial needs above any agenda coming from Paris. Moreover, the essays also suggest that the provincial Leagues were not nearly as radical as traditional historians have usually depicted them. In this sense, the book is part of an ongoing revisionist effort to re-write the narrative of the League begun initially by Denis Richet and Robert Descimon more than two decades ago. And the editors have assembled an excellent team to carry out this task, as nearly all of them have written major monographs on the history of various provinces during the Wars of Religion. In this sense, the volume works as a companion volume to an earlier collection of essays<sup>1</sup>, and as five authors have essays in both volumes, there is a lot of continuity between the two collections.

In Part One Michel Cassan examines the fragility of the League in the interior provinces of Poitou, Périgord, Limousin, and Velay. He argues that despite the eventual decline of the League in this region, it served as a check on the attempts by Mayenne to unite all the provincial Leagues under his authority. Nicolas le Roux focuses on the center of the kingdom, the provinces of Berry, Orléanais, and Touraine. In this region, he argues, the League was built upon the traumatic memories of the early religious wars. Here, as elsewhere, there was no uniting together as the fortunes of different League cities depended largely on local forces. Olivia Carpi examines the fortunes of eight League towns in Picardie in northern France, and she finds that moderation and autonomy – unlike the more revolutionary League in the capital of Paris – was what motivated the League in this region. Philippe Hamon examines the League in upper Brittany by examining a legal case of a local *sénéchal* who was condemned to death by the Parlement of Rennes. What he finds is that even in a region that is institutionally united by a royal governor, the Duke of Mercœur, provincial estates, and a Parlement, the two largest cities – Rennes and Nantes – diverged along different paths. Ultimately, he concludes that »there did not exist a single geographic region in the entire kingdom where a provincial League controlled a territory extensive enough to make it uniform (p. 130)«. Finally, Mark Greengrass examines the League in Laon to demonstrate how rumors and disinformation served to destroy any urban solidarity among the various League towns and how such propaganda ultimately prevented the League from becoming a truly national



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1 Sylvie Daubresse, Bertrand Haan (ed.), *La Ligue et ses frontières. Engagements catholiques à distance du radicalisme à la fin des guerres de Religion*, Rennes 2015, (Histoire).

movement.

In Part Two Marco Penzi examines the links between the League and the papacy by focusing on the papal legate in France at the time, Filippo Sega. Sega's correspondence shows how the various divisions within the League ultimately limited its success despite the full support of Popes Gregory XIV, Innocent IX, and Clement VIII between 1590 and 1594. Stéphane Gal re-examines the efforts of Charles-Emmanuel, Duke of Savoy to intervene in the French Wars of Religion during the years of the League and argues persuasively that he was much more than the caricature portrayed in most accounts of an ineffective and inconstant political opportunist. In fact, Gal demonstrates that the duke was loyal to his allies and was more effective than he has been credit for, even if his efforts produced very meager results. Fabrice Micallef examines a particular episode of Charles-Emmanuel, Duke of Savoy, in 1589–1590, demonstrating the international dimension of the war between the League and King Henry IV. The duke, having already seized the French marquisate of Saluzzo in 1588, had further ambitions to seize Provence and maybe even the French crown. His military venture in 1589 set off a series of negotiations between the Provençal and Savoyard political elites, as the League towns in Provence contemplated shifting their allegiance from France to Savoy. In by far the longest essay in the collection (114 p.), Serge Brunet likewise shows how in Guyenne and upper Languedoc many French Catholics from the popular classes, what he calls »the little people of the towns and villages« (p. 223), armed themselves and staged popular uprisings against the authority of Henry IV, even after his abjuration in 1593 and coronation in 1594. Emboldened and supported by the King of Spain, Philip II, and seeking tax relief as well as the possibility of an independence from the kingdom of France, these Leaguers ultimately failed, though they did succeed in delaying the recognition of Henry IV as King of France. Finally, José Javier Ruiz Ibáñez examines the efforts of the King of Spain to intervene on behalf of the League in opposing the authority of Henry IV. While providing necessary and significant military support, the Spanish intervention ultimately weakened and then divided the provincial towns in the Pyrenees along the Franco-Spanish border loyal to the League, just as it did in the capital.

Part Three of the collection is titled »From the Political League to the League of the *dévots* (Denis Richet)« in recognition of that scholar's suggestion more than thirty years ago that the precursors of Catholic reform in France in the 1620s and 1630s were the Leaguers of the 1590s. Thierry Amalou examines the fascinating case of the trial and conviction of Gilbert Génébrard, Archbishop of Aix, in the Parlement of Provence for the crime of *lèse-majesté* and his banishment from the kingdom of France. Unlike so many other Leaguer prelates who were pardoned by Henry IV, Génébrard's links with what Amalou calls »the spine of the European Counter-Reformation«, that is, Pope Sixtus V, Philip II, and the Duke of Savoy, ultimately proved his undoing. Elizabeth Tingle examines the origins of Catholic reform in France through the lens of the city of Nantes, where she shows that the foundations of the Catholic reformation in that provincial city were duly laid down by the League in the period after the assassination of Henry III. Ariane Boltanski focuses on the high nobility and demonstrates that Leaguer families funded foundations for militant orders such as the Jesuits, Capuchins, Carmelites, Récollets, and Minims than their royalist counterparts. Finally, Serge Brunet takes a closer look at the Catholics in the southwest and examines the influence of Spain on their religiosity. He argues that we cannot understand the Catholic Reformation in France unless we see it as an international rather than a national movement.

In summary, this collection adds to an already growing body of literature

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on the period of the League that revises older accounts. The 20 pages bibliography at the end of the book is the most up to date and complete list of sources on the subject. Moreover, it makes a strong case that we need to pay more attention to the international dimensions of the League rather than try to understand it solely through its internal dynamics.

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