

**Tom Hamilton, Pierre de L'Estoile and his World in the Wars of Religion, Oxford (Oxford University Press) 2017, XVIII–238 p. (The Past & Present Book Series), num. b/w. ill., ISBN 978-0-19-880009-5, EUR 49,90.**

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Every scholar of the French Wars of Religion knows and has used the famous *mémoires-journaux* or Diaries of Pierre de L'Estoile, a Catholic *politique*, an important confessionally rather undefined and skeptical-Tacitist member of the »lowland of belief [*plat pays de croyance*]« as Thierry Wanegffelen once put it. Since the 19<sup>th</sup>-century editions of his »Journaux« and the collection of »Drôlleries de la Ligue«, the new edition edited by Madeleine Lazard, Gilbert Schrenck, Marie Houlemare and Xavier Le Person has cleared the path for this highly welcome enterprise of a new comprehensive monograph investigating the author-collector L'Estoile.

Tom Hamilton has managed to sketch a vivid portrayal of someone who has served a prism for generations of scholars through which to view everyday events in 16<sup>th</sup>-century Paris during the turmoil of wars, with his sharp, distanced and trenchant characterizations. He does this not only by help of the edited »Registres«, but by trying to reconstruct the whole biography of this member of the Paris Parlement within the social group he belonged to. The notorious biographical *incipit* »Pierre de L'Estoile was born ...« is therefore not to be found on p. 1 but only on p. 69. Instead, Hamilton starts with two interesting and helpful chapters that describe the »Material World« of L'Estoile's household and the »Social World of the Palais de Justice«.

While Florence Greffe and José Loth paved the way for such a view by editing »L'Estoile's *post mortem* inventory«, Hamilton contextualizes this comparatively with the inventories of 35 royal office-holders who died in Paris between 1574 and 1609 from the Archives nationales. Regarding the paintings in the houses (if the subject matter is named or described in the inventories), one realizes that L'Estoile possessed a comparatively very low number of religious motifs (the average of office-holders is 59% of the total, whereas for L'Estoile only 10.8% of his paintings). At the same time, he possessed a far higher proportion of portraits and here a remarkable proportion of portraits of the royal family (46.2%/24.6% L'Estoile versus 13.5%/1.0% on average).

Such are small findings gained through a great deal of labour, but all those details put together allows the reader to imagine the character of L'Estoile's environment in his house purchased in 1575 at the rue des Grands-Augustins in the parish of Saint-André-des-Arts. This is the house, where he collected all the pamphlets, engravings, pasquils of the League; the house, where he noted down and described what happened in Paris, where Pierre Senault of the League ransacked his possessions on 8 January 1589, one day after the Paris League had taken the constitutional oath of disobedience to Henry III sanctioned by the Sorbonne. From this house, L'Estoile could cross daily the Seine to the Palais de justice on the western end of the Île de la Cité, seat of the Parlement de Paris. Here he



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held from 1566 until 1601 the office as *secrétaire du roi* and *audiencier* in the Paris chancery.

Hamilton reconstructs his everyday tasks and duties in that job or office, such as preparing and presenting documents from the Chancery to the royal seal during audiences and also his responsibility to grant royal privileges for books to be printed. Hamilton also places this work within the larger conjuncture of sixteenth century French printing as can be discerned today through the help of retrospective bibliographies like the USTC. Though this is of importance, perhaps the graphs on p. 62 and p. 66 lack a somewhat deeper explanation for readers who might be not as familiar with the printing history of France as is Hamilton, especially because the extremely low level of numbers of privileges granted as well as of Parisian publications advertised at the Frankfurt Book Fair tend to transmit a partial truth or suggest that there was not much printing at all during the League times, contradicted with surety at a later point (p. 141f.).

Certainly, *royal* privilege practice shut down, because parts of the royal state *as a whole* shut down, neither the short Tours exile administration nor for a long time Navarre's orders being able to replace the Paris bureaucracy or to reach Paris at all. Moreover, as Pallier has shown, the League quickly established their own system of granting privileges and invented even something like the first 'state printers' in Paris and Lyon, who possessed general privileges for anything to print which made the request of particular privileges superfluous for them. Likewise, it is not astonishing that there were fewer texts from Paris in Frankfurt. Paris was besieged for a long time and much of the ephemeral prints were produced just for the public more or less inside the city's walls.

Some »export« can be witnessed in the parcels of League diplomats and Capuchins, but the fact that we find many handwritten copies of printed Paris pasquils and engravings in Germany, Italy, Switzerland and the Netherlands shows that they were rare, passed from hand to hand and were copied then by pencil, eventually republished directly in the foreign vernacular. This is why so many *rara* and unique copies largely extant only in libraries whose collections are of clear Paris provenance (like Sainte Geneviève, Sorbonne, parts of the BnF and the Mazarine holdings, though the latter is a complex case).

Hamilton is strong in describing the confessionally mixed, if not neutral, background of L'Estoile – being educated by the Calvinist preacher Matthieu Béroalde – in showing him to care for the family's memory in his collection next to the public affairs; he provides valuable citations and examples from L'Estoile's collections from the middle of the wars of religion until the times of Henri IV. When he points to the *vexata quaestio* of L'Estoile's proximity to Montaigne, skepticism and Tacitism, sometimes one wishes the author had available more space to develop an argument; if the diary for the reign of Henri III is »understood [...] through his reading of Tacitus« (p. 104), examples of how certain forms of Henrician governance, treating »arcana«, using stratagems, behaving like an undercover Tacitean Tiberius in Paris, would have been greatly appreciated. However, Hamilton gives very lively insights about how L'Estoile exchanged poetic Latin comments on current affairs through an »elite coterie«, for instance with Claude de Marteau (p. 120f.).

The pages on L'Estoile in besieged Paris during the League are important as it supplies a depiction of how a declared enemy of that (partially) unleashed apocalyptic movement himself understood his



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and Henri de Navarre's fate to be »determined by God's providence [...] during these years of crisis, l'Estoile felt that God worked through him, as he survived with his family in relative prosperity« (p. 129).

Under the threat of being liquidated by the League (he reports to have seen his name on Senault's list of those to be executed in 1591), he nevertheless continued to collect the pamphlets, poems, pasquils, engravings and pages that form today those precious volumes in the BnF and that run under the name of the »Drôlleries« of the League (p. 140–169). Dark humour, pressure, fear for life and, all skepticism aside, a strong belief in God's protection went hand in hand in this. These sources make L'Estoile one of the late Renaissance men whose »individuality« we can grasp better than of many others. Short notes are reminiscent of comparable collections like the Zurich Wickiana and the »Thomason Tracts« (p. 164f.) as Hamilton always tries to situate his (already well-known) particular case in a broader context and the quickly evolving methodological context of printing history, material history and intellectual biography.

The last chapter presents the character of L'Estoile's important library (822 books) again in comparison with other office holders of his time. It shows the *politique* rising under Henri IV and in correspondence with agents and messengers heading for reconciliation and eventual re-union with international irenic Calvinist circles, a context first highlighted magisterially by Vivanti. Recent work (though not published in French or English) on Jean Hotman, Bongars, Lingelsheim and those circles could have been fruitfully addressed, but Hamilton's narrative remains effective. Some tiny typographical or Latin transcription errors (p. 172, n. 39, 40; and p. 188, n. 135) could be corrected in a forthcoming paperback edition.

All in all, Tom Hamilton presents a densely researched, sensible and carefully written intellectual and socio-political biography of one of the most central, individual, and interesting testimonies of the period of radicalization during the French Wars of Religion.



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