

Stéphane Gal, Marianne Clerc (dir.), Le siècle des Lesdiguières. Territoires, arts et rayonnement nobiliaire au XVII^e siècle. Préfaces de Jean-Pierre Barbier et Lise Dumasy, Grenoble (Presses universitaires de Grenoble) 2019, 491 p. (La Pierre et l'Écrit), ISBN 978-2-7061-4250-5, EUR 39,00.

rezensiert von | compte rendu rédigé par
Paul Sonnino, Santa Barbara, CA

One of the most welcome developments in recent European historiography, as exemplified by the works of Claude Dulong, Daniel Dessert, and Joseph Bergin, is the exploitation of the rich archives of France for the early modern period in an attempt to »follow the money«. The advantage of such efforts is that they in no way imply that greed is the universal solvent, far from it. The evidence, if carefully considered, is capable of demonstrating that in some cases it is not, and that, in almost every instance many other motives enter into the behavior of humanity. The present work on the meteoric rise of a petty noble family from the Dauphiné during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries would appear to be a contribution to this fruitful effort. Unfortunately, it falls somewhat short of the mark.

The book begins, after a brief introduction, with a helpful article regarding the holdings on François de Bonne (1543–1626), the future Duke de Lesdiguières, in the Archives départementales de l'Isère. It was he who laid the groundwork for the creation of a kind of dynasty through becoming a Protestant, exploiting his military prowess in support of Henry of Navarre during the wars of religion, and engaging in a number of strategic marriage alliances for his daughters. In this process he expanded his power and wealth beyond Dauphiné into Provence. He remained loyal to Henry of Navarre when the *vert galant* converted to Catholicism in order to become King of France, while assuaging his Huguenot supporters by issuing the Edict of Nantes. François was still a Huguenot when Henry was assassinated in 1610.

In the following reign, Marie de Medici, who was regent for the young Louis XIII, promoted him to a ducal title. This was apparently not enough for the new duke since, with the passage of time, he reconsidered and in 1622, six year before his death, he abjured his Protestantism, in return for which the young king awarded him the highest military rank in the monarchy, that of »Constable of France«. As to the article on the departmental archives, it might have been even more helpful if it had included other sources regarding the duke and his dynasty in depositories throughout France, and if its rough »Généalogie simplifiée« of the Lesdiguières dynasty was not in such small print that it requires a microscope in order to read it.

When we get to Part I of the book (it is divided into parts rather than chapters) the first article that we meet is one titled »Lesdiguières et l'iconoclasme« which seems to beg the question



Herausgegeben vom Deutschen
Historischen Institut Paris |
publiée par l'Institut historique
allemand



Publiziert unter | publiée sous
[CC BY 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

of how François became a Huguenot in the first place. Nor does it address itself to the title of the article, except to conclude, on the basis of exchanges of accusations between Catholics and Protestants that it was very hard to accuse him of »systematic« iconoclasm, even though the author does admit that he was »un guerrier politique« and not »un guerrier de Dieu« (p. 55). There is something missing in this explanation.

From this initial effort to deal with the subject of the book, we come to a series of articles without numbers which seem to divert us from it by informing us about the people around François de Bonne de Lesdiguières, such as who was his cartographer, who made his armor, and who painted his portraits, but these articles, aside from being replete with speculations like »difficile de décrire la relation« (p. 64) »ait pu être un cadeau de Emmanuel Philibert«(p. 80), and »attribué à Antoine Schanaert«(p. 98), end up by being extensive digressions on the artists themselves, and even more often on the state of their particular art in the 16th and 17th centuries. The most explicit attributions are those of his sculptor Jacob Richier, who produced Lesdiguières' bronze equestrian and his mortuary statue.

The book however, does not stop with François, the first duke. It jumps as early as p. 117 to Charles de Créquy, the second Duke de Lesdiguières. Since the first duke left no male heirs, his entire estate ultimately went through his only surviving daughter, Françoise de Bonne who had married Créquy, who was himself the scion of a family whose genealogical table appears on pages 142 and 178–179 in more legible type. But the worst part of it is that this book does not contain an index, so that by this time the reader is getting lost in a babble of Françaises and Bonnes, Agoults and Créquys, marquises and counts, all with similar names and titles.

Charles de Créquy (1575–1638), who has never been a Protestant, was also a military man, and he had hitched his wagon to the star of Cardinal Richelieu, who was rising in the confidence of the young king. Less crafty than his father-in-law, more impulsive and vindictive, he was just the kind of general that Richelieu favors in his »Testament politique«: not especially brilliant, but one who did not lose his cool¹. The article on him by Christophe Caix is one of the best in the book, sensitive to Créquy's character and providing a good description of the bloody Battle of Tornavento on June 22, 1636, where Créquy's impulsive advance into Milanese territory almost produced a catastrophe, while his determination and the arrival of the Duke of Savoy at the last minute prevented a devastating defeat.

Among the many disheartening aspects of the book is its chaotic organization. After having gotten as far as the military career of the second Duke de Lesdiguières, the book suddenly reverts to an article that begins with a lengthy listing of his ancestors, effectively distracting the reader from any sense of chronology. Admittedly, this reversion to the Créquy heritage does permit the book to advance to a collateral branch of the Créquy family, which produced two historic personalities, one a Charles, another a



Herausgegeben vom Deutschen
Historischen Institut Paris |
publiée par l'Institut historique
allemand



Publiziert unter | publiée sous
[CC BY 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

¹ Richelieu, Testament politique, Second Part, Chapter IX, Fourth Section.

François, and a less visible Antoine, all described in the subsequent article.

Charles (1624–1687), in the best family tradition, began with fourteen years in military service, but then decided to turn his talents to a diplomatic career, highlighted in 1662 by his flamboyant embassy to the Holy See where, according to the author of this article, Créquy's »attitude hautaine et méprisante« toward Pope Alexander VII provoked a clash between his suite and the pope's Corsican guard, which forced the ambassador to leave Rome and Louis XIV to seek reparations.

The problem here, however, is that we have no evidence that Créquy's attitude was menacing. Clashes of this kind were frequent between coachmen, particularly in Rome, where each embassy enjoyed extensive extraterritorial privileges. Moreover, what evidence we have suggests that the ambassador was much more accommodating than his king, who immediately expelled the papal nuncio from Paris and when Créquy back in France, recognized a new nuncio whom the pope sent to negotiate, Louis did not approve of it, and informed Créquy that his intention was to treat the court of Rome harshly until it had satisfied him. The embarrassed Créquy had the intelligence to figure out that the king wanted to bully the pope into submission, but he also had the courage to reply to Louis that whatever satisfaction might be obtained, it would never obtain the submission of Alexander VII. All this information is published and also available in the Archives des Affaires étrangères in La Courneuve. Not pursuing it in this article misses the whole purpose of such studies, which is presumably to trace the evolution of aristocratic behavior.

As to Charles' brother François (1627–1687), he survived an early association with the unfortunate Nicolas Fouquet and, in complete conformity to the family tradition, rose to the rank of Marshal of France by 1668. He was proud, and, like his fellow marshals, refused to serve as a subordinate of the great Turenne in the first campaign of Dutch War though, like his colleagues, he continued in his independent commands. The amazing thing about this article, however, is what happened to him in this same war during the campaign of 1675 when Louis sent him to support Turenne in Germany. There, in attempting to relieve a siege that the Imperialists were laying before Trier, which was garrisoned by the French, he ran into a ferocious enemy army that completely routed his own and had to take refuge in the city, where the starving garrison obliged him to surrender it along with himself. Here again, accounts of the campaign have been published, and the Archives de la Guerre at Vincennes is replete with his correspondence. Yet this article on this François de Créquy does not say a word about this setback.

This surprising omission is followed in Part II of the book, by a return to the spaces in which these Lesdiguières functioned. It begins with an article on the château of Vizille, purchased and developed by the first duke, then enhanced substantially by another François de Créquy (c. 1596–1677) third Duke de Lesdiguières. The article describes in words and with architectural plans the layout of the three floors of the château, but anyone who



Herausgegeben vom Deutschen
Historischen Institut Paris |
publiée par l'Institut historique
allemand



Publiziert unter | publiée sous
[CC BY 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

wants to make sense of both the description and the plans will have to resort to the modern photographs on Wikipedia.

Next comes an entire group of articles unabashedly dedicated to a family of sculptors. The Richers, who worked for a variety of patrons as well as for the first duke, and one of the articles in this series seems inordinately concerned (without coming to any conclusions) about the provenance of a bronze Hercules that adorned a fountain in the château of Vizille. Another article is devoted to the hangings in gilded leather found in the various residences of the Lesdiguières dynasty which quickly wanders into an essay on the manufacture of gilded leather in Europe. More pertinent is an article on the furniture and tapestries of Duke Charles de Créquy the ambassador, who was indeed a connoisseur, and whose collection included paintings of Titian, Veronese, Poussin, Holbein, Rubens, and Van Dyck. Two articles, one on the collections of Catherine de Rougé (1641–1713) and one on the collections of her husband the marshal are interesting to me less for the recapitulation of their possessions than for what they reveal about her apparent capacity to dominate him, gender relations often offering surprising twists. Finally, the articles on Paule de Gondi (1655–1716), the affluent widow of the fourth and last Duke de Lesdiguières, tell us more about her fantasies and her favorite painter than they do about the decline and fall of the Lesdiguières dynasty.

Part III of the book begins with a most fascinating article by Stéphane Gal, namely a discussion of an epic poem about the first duke titled »La Diguéréade«, which the author of the article skillfully dates for between 1611 and 1617 and praises it »avant tout« for describing an emerging »identité nobiliaire et territorialisée«. Gal identifies its author as a learned lawyer named Guiges Basset, presumably belonging to a »cercle des Politiques«, (p. 395, 398, 400), who were enemies of the Catholic League, and who admired in the duke's adherence to Henry IV a fellow champion of political reconciliation. Furthermore, Gal expresses some surprise that this learned lawyer displays considerable intimacy with the art of war and speculates that he must have been present in some capacity at Lesdiguières' famous siege of Grenoble in 1590.

The fascination of this article is that it in some way manages to encompass, both my criticisms of this entire book and my conclusion that, whatever its deficiencies, this work, and particularly this article, is a welcome contribution to contemporary scholarship. Let me explain why.

In my call for a more extensive presentation of the source materials, I consciously skipped over the apparently irrelevant detail that the article on the holdings of the Archives départementales de l'Isère did contain a brief footnote, accompanied by an *op. cit.* (p. 28,3 3), to the »Actes et correspondance du connétable de Lesdiguières«. However, it now becomes extremely relevant for me to point out that this classic work in three volumes, published in Grenoble between 1878 and 1884, is never cited again, as far as I can see, in the remainder of this book, because if one wishes to consult this compendium one discovers that it contains a treasury of documents, which are



Herausgegeben vom Deutschen
Historischen Institut Paris |
publiée par l'Institut historique
allemand



Publiziert unter | publiée sous
[CC BY 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

indispensable if we wish to dig more deeply into the provenance of »La Diguéréade«.

One such document in Volume I is a treaty with François de Bonne signed by a Sieur de Saint Jullien, who on August 24, 1589, »comprenant que la Ligue était morte en Dauphiné« surrendered with his troops and pledged his loyalty to Henry IV². In this same volume we also find the same Saint-Jullien in 1591, now commanding in the cities of Crémieu, Quirieu, and Morestel, attempting to discipline his unruly son, whose family name was »Basset«³. If this is not enough, in Volume III we find a »Premier Testament« of François de Bonne made on July 31, 1613 (9 years before his conversion) witnessed by »Felix Basset, conseiller du Roy, garde des sceaux en sa chancellerie de Dauphiné et Monsieur maistre André Basset, conseiller du Roy en la cour de parlement«⁴. It looks very much, therefore, as if François de Bonne was cordially collaborating not with »Politiques«, but with former adherents of the Catholic League who had shrewdly decided to befriend him while waiting for a Louis XIII or a Louis XIV to revoke the Edict of Nantes. Nor is it any longer surprising that a Catholic clan which combined soldiers, lawyers, and judges might possess the interdisciplinary insights to sponsor an epic poem that contained technical knowledge on the attack and defense of strongholds.

But there is more. Within the »Actes et correspondance«, there are a number of documents that bear directly on the motives for François de Bonne's conversion which the contributors of this compendium have neglected to plumb while concentrating on his material possessions. For example, we have letters from a certain De La Corbière to the celebrated Philippe Du Plessis-Mornay describing the attempts of a local synod to get Lesdiguières to renounce his mistress, by whom he already had two daughters, which he flippantly forestalled by a request for a national synod.

Here was a man who thumbed his nose to his co-religionists, went on, once he became a widower, to marry his mistress in a Catholic ceremony, and ended up by deciding that the constablership of France was worth a mass. Amazingly, however, there is virtually no consideration of the irregularity of his sex life in the present book. We have to wait until page 183 to learn incidentally that since two of his daughters had been products of a »double adultère« he had to get them legitimized in the hope of keeping the dynasty from extinction. Even this procedure, however, did not produce the indispensable heirs, and the Créquys eventually had to resort to legal skullduggery in order to confirm their own direct descent from the first duke's first wife. There is much more evidence in the »Actes« of his squalid behavior and that of the Créquys in salvaging their dynasty, but it is in no way followed up in this panegyric work.

² Actes I, p. 161, drawn from the Manuscrits de Briançon, Livre du Roy.

³ Actes I, p. 157–158. See also AD Isère Ms. 3996 for 1602-3 »Octave Edmé de Saint-Jullien, président de la cour du parlement de Grenoble«.

⁴ Actes III, Lettre de monsieur de La Colombière à Monsieur du Plessis-Mornay, 1^{er} janvier 1614, first published in: Mémoires et Correspondance de Duplessis-Mornay, Paris 1824, XII, p. 483–486.



Herausgegeben vom Deutschen
Historischen Institut Paris |
publiée par l'Institut historique
allemand



Publiziert unter | publiée sous
[CC BY 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

There is much to learn, nevertheless, from the apparent obsession of the contributors with the material vanities of the Lesdiguières dynasty. Take for example the first duke's funerary statue, whose color photographs in this book are worth a thousand words. This statue portrays him stretched out leisurely on his left side, clad in his armor, his head resting on his left hand, as if to tell the visitors to his mausoleum that he was equally insouciant whether in life or in death. What other evidence can we need about his motives for participating in the religious wars? Obviously, he did not believe either in a heaven or a hell. He had participated in the religious wars as a sport, to prove his military prowess and to live as grandiosely as he could. And if he had bothered to perpetuate his dynasty and commission a mortuary statue, it must have been because he needed some descendants in order to keep his cynicism on display.

How different from the mausoleum of Cardinal Richelieu, currently in the chapel of the Sorbonne in Paris! The cardinal is looking toward heaven, his hand outstretched, under the comforting gaze of a pious woman. Here, as opposed to the duke, was a man who did not have the slightest doubt that there was a God, dying in holy terror that Saint Peter might not understand why it should have been so necessary to brutalize the subjects of Louis XIII in order to carry out a war against fellow Catholics in alliance with Protestants. Possessions, paintings, and statues, can reveal a great deal, if one sees them in context.

Thus the individual articles in this book do amount to something, if one has the patience to weave through them. The indifference of some nobles to death, the primacy of their honor, comes through. The contrast between the first two dukes and the later Créquys displays the adaptation of two real life musketeers to the absolutism of Louis XIV. Even the personal differences between the ambassador and the second marshal reflect a distinction between two similar forms of adjustment. Finally there was Alphonse, the third of these two brothers, who took refuge with the libertines of Restoration England, was indifferent to money and glory, and ended up, despite himself, as the last Duke de Lesdiguières. Adjustments to life are like DNA. No two are exactly the same.



Herausgegeben vom Deutschen
Historischen Institut Paris |
publiée par l'Institut historique
allemand



Publiziert unter | publiée sous
[CC BY 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)