

**Romain Marchand, Henri de La Tour (1555-1623).
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Of all the Huguenot aristocratic grandees from the Wars of Religion, Henri de La Tour d'Auvergne is by far the most difficult to make sense of. For almost fifty years, from his début as a malcontent noble in 1574 through to his death in Sedan in 1623, he was never far from the major political, military and diplomatic events that shaped France. That longevity constitutes a major challenge when it comes to attempting a biographical study. The issue is how to understand his life choices in the tissue of the dynastic dynamics, the aristocratic culture, the protestant politics and the evolution of the French monarchy.

Romain Marchand has succeeded where many would have fallen by the wayside. His book is the product of a doctoral thesis at the Université de Paris 10-Nanterre in 2014. He scrupulously acknowledges other pioneers who have laid the groundwork – Henri Zuber in an unpublished thesis for the École des chartes on the diplomatic and political activity, and Jean-Luc Tulot, who has edited the correspondence, and the local historians in Sedan who have explored the duke's contribution there.

Inheritor of the viscounty of Turenne following the death of his father at the battle of St Quentin (1557), La Tour d'Auvergne went on to succeed, through his marriage to Charlotte de La Marck in October 1591, to the little sovereign principality of Sedan and the duchy of Bouillon. In 1592, Henri IV made him a *maréchal* of France. La Tour d'Auvergne, Turenne, Bouillon, three titles by which he was known at various times in his life, and Marchand's mammoth synthesis revolves around three equivalent turning-points in his career: 1574, 1591, and 1606.

They each involved personal choices that had far-reaching consequences, and that can only be explained by placing them in a broader context. Where he can, Marchand draws on a meticulous analysis of two types of sources that turn out to reveal more than one might have expected. The first is the *Mémoires* that he composed for his son, sometime beginning around 1609–1610, which have never been the object of a critical edition. The second is his substantial surviving correspondence – 835 letters addressed to him (over half hitherto unedited) and 859 letters from him (over 20% hitherto unedited).



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Both types of sources have to be understood in the right way, and that means, firstly, setting aside the enduring image of Bouillon as Achitophel, untrustworthy, ambitious, arrogant and self-serving. It was a polemical construct, as Marchand demonstrates. After 1606, Bouillon was a unique figure in France: a sovereign prince, a leader of the French protestant party, and a courtier with a colourful past. In the troubled domestic politics of the minority of Marie de Médicis and the tutelage of Louis XIII, and amidst the collapse of the Pax Hispanica internationally, his enemies were numerous and he could not hope to square the circle and neutralise them all. When, in the summer of 1615, he raised an army in revolt and received the prince of Condé in the newly fortified Sedan, it was not difficult for pamphleteers to portray him as a rebel and traitor. And when he mediated a settlement with the crown, he was criticised in turn by his protestant coreligionists for selling their security short. What is surprising is how little Bouillon sought to reply in kind to his critics. Not short of dedicated secretaries and a talented academy in Sedan, he chose not to mobilise a campaign of defence in print. That left the field open to Sully, in his own memoirs (that he began to write in the wake of his disgrace in 1611, which he attributed largely to Bouillon), then later those of Rohan, Richelieu, and Bassompierre.

Between them, they consolidated the hostile portrait of Bouillon that his first biographer, the plodding *abbé* Jacques Marsollier, writing in 1719 at the behest of the then Cardinal de Bouillon, tried to repudiate, but could not efface. The leitmotif of Marchand's study is how inadequately the optics of that last period of his life shed light on the rest of it. To understand La Tour d'Auvergne is to place him in a broader context. That context makes this a work that is much richer than simply a biographical study.

It begins with a good analysis (1st part) of the roots, and the landed and matrimonial strategies, of the La Tour d'Auvergne family in the Auvergne and the Limousin. Its political ascension in the military and diplomatic service of the later Valois is enshrined by the career of François III de La Tour d'Auvergne at the court of François I^{er} and Henri II. That laid the foundations for the sense of entitlement, the training in observation and evaluation at the court, and an umbilical link to the Montmorency clan, all of which dominated his own upbringing to the exclusion of any prolonged exposure to humanist education.

Marchand's analysis of the origins of the Malcontent rebellion of 1572-1574, and Turenne's role within it, makes excellent use of the limited evidence available to demonstrate that there it was driven by more than noble opportunism. His *Mémoires* were written to instruct his son in right judgment – in religion, in the preservation of one's heritage, and in the upholding of political and moral virtue. His decision to flee the court in 1574, and what flowed from it, became a case-study to offer his son in how that meant sometimes playing the game for the highest stakes. The years that followed (2nd part) were an apprenticeship in warfare



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and politics, undertaken in the service of Henri of Navarre, and fought out within a south-west religion context.

His decision to convert to Protestantism was certainly not an act of opportunism (he never contemplated reconversion) but has to be interpreted in the sequence of ruptures that occurred in 1574-1576. Marchand does as much as one can with the fragmentary evidence to reconstruct the regional networks of Turenne's supporters, and to understand his role at the Navarre court, underscoring particularly his part in its cultural life and in the negotiations leading to the peace of Nérac (1579).

The second turning-point comes with the transformation of the viscount of Turenne into the duke of Bouillon in 1591 (3rd part). The principality of Sedan occupied a strategic position on the Meuse, a bulwark against the duchy of Lorraine and a gateway to the lower Rhineland. Once again, he played for the highest stakes. The inheritance was contested when Charlotte de La Marck died in 1594, and the affair had the makings of an international *cause célèbre*. His conflict with the duke of Lorraine began disastrously, and only gradually was it turned around. But, once more, things turned out well for him; Henri IV invested in him, entrusted him with sensitive military and diplomatic responsibilities, and he in turn invested in rebuilding Sedan's fortifications and expanding his international contacts. Marchand underscores La Tour d'Auvergne's achievements in creating one of the largest French landed fortunes in the early 17th century, and in setting about making Sedan into a shop window for a well-run Calvinist principality and a model for aristocratic enterprise, to be set alongside Charles de Nevers' Charleville-Mézières or Sully's Henrichemont.

No one seemed more secure in the first Bourbon's favour than Bouillon. How, then, to interpret spectacular reversal of fortune that began in the aftermath of Biron's revolt (1602) and ended with Henri IV's march on Sedan and Bouillon's submission in 1606? This, the third turning-point in La Tour d'Auvergne's career, is the most complex, and the one where things are least what they seem. The evidence of Bouillon's complicity in Biron's conspiracy was, at best, circumstantial. He already had enemies that were willing to make capital out of his unique standing and his connections abroad. Unwilling to accept the king's invitation to come to court to clear his name for fear of giving quarter to those who sought to bring him down was inevitably painted as proclaiming guilt by default.

Seeking protection in the Midi looked like mobilising his friends and clients in the Limousin and the Auvergne, and finding shelter in the Huguenot crescent. In reality, the Chamber of the edict in Castres would have been unlikely to find in his favour, and the peasants on his lands were in near-endemic revolt, but in part against the duke himself in the viscounty of Turenne because of the sums he demanded of them. Setting himself up in Sedan allowed for the eventuality of mediation, and there were plenty on hand to offer their services. Henri IV's march on Sedan, proclaimed as a Caesarean conquest, was mainly for the gallery, since the duke



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capitulated before the fighting began. Bouillon was content to march in the king's procession afterwards, his head high.

The years after 1606 (4th part) are where the complexities of La Tour d'Auvergne's role are most in evidence. Marchand demonstrates how they have to be understood in the light of his previous experience – in the field, around the negotiating table, and at court. His pre-eminence was symbolised by the construction of a lavish Paris *hôtel* on the rue de Seine (about which Marchand says nothing – the only point at which he leaves the reader wanting). It was in the academy at Sedan, and other such enterprises, that the »reformer-prince« in Bouillon sought to make his mark on posterity. In the politics of the Jülich-Cleves succession crisis, and in the minority of Marie de Médicis, he sought to carry his cup very level, acting as a moderating and mediating influence.

Sedan was close to the epicentre of the tensions underlying the Pax Hispanica, and Bouillon interpreted them in the light of the civil wars of the past, that were to be avoided. His own reputation became a target for both sides. It is the merit of his new study that we can now see through the shadows that these tensions have cast over our understanding of him, and begin to study him alongside his contemporaries.



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