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Jonathan Spangler, *The Lorraine-Guise and the Conservation of Power and Wealth in Seventeenth-Century France*. Farnham: Ashgate, 2009. xi + 343 pp. Map, tables, figures, notes, bibliography, and index. £ 65 (cl). ISBN-978-0-7546-5860-3.

Review by Stuart Carroll, University of York.

Jonathan Spangler has performed an important service in rescuing the reputation of the seventeenth century House of Guise-Lorraine from the condescension of posterity. With extinction of the Mayenne and Aumale lines, the exile of their leading adult members and the break up of the Guise ecclesiastical empire, the traditional story of the Guise is one of terminal decline after 1630, culminating in the death of the last duke in 1675 and the dismemberment of the Guise patrimony following the death of the last duchess of Guise in 1688. In the absence of correspondence Spangler concentrates on legal and financial records in the period from 1630 to 1730 to show that this was not the whole story. The Guise-Lorraine cadet lines, in particular, were numerous and they benefitted from the desire of Louis XIV to re-establish the traditional hierarchy, in which princes were distinguished from ordinary aristocrats. The pedigree of the Guise-Lorraine was indisputable and Louis's concern to uphold their privileges ensured that they flocked to court: by 1688 there were a dozen of them at Versailles, an example of a deliberate policy to bind the princes closer to the king's person and to balance the power of the *princes étrangers* against the princes of the blood and the *princes légitimés*.

Before then, the continuing power of the Guise-Lorraine had relied on the career of one them, Henri, count of Harcourt (1601-66), the younger brother of the duke of Elbeuf, who was an able commander and ally of Richelieu. His loyalty was rewarded with the office of *Grand Ecuyer* and the vice-regency of Catalonia in 1645-6. It seems unlikely that he was, as Spangler claims, governor of Guyenne, but his branch of the family certainly held the governorship of Anjou from 1659 until 1789, turning it into a hereditary possession.[1] Henri's ill-fated involvement in the *Frondes* ended his career and he retired and died indebted. His sons however emerged as the most significant members of the House of Lorraine at Versailles. The career of his second son, Philippe, chevalier de Lorraine (1643-1702), lover and favourite of the king's brother is well known.[2] The career of Philippe's elder brother, Louis de Lorraine, count of Armagnac, (1639-1707), favourite of the king himself, is all the more interesting for being less well known. His reputation is resurrected in an excellent chapter (three) that details Armagnac's influence and the ways in which he exploited his position and the office of *Grand Ecuyer*, which he inherited from his father.

Spangler provides a wealth of detail on financial administration, foreign service, landholding and marriage culled from a formidable array of archival sources, which are supported by a clearly laid out set of appendices. Given the chaotic nature of the finances of the Guise and Elbeuf branches at mid-century and the problem of records survival, this is a formidable task and Spangler approaches the problem with skill and analytical precision. He highlights the legal ruses and strategies, in collusion with the crown, which were used to forestall creditors. The aura of the Guise-Lorraine continued to allow them to make some starry marriages which expanded their landholding base far beyond their traditional Northern and Eastern heartlands, and Spangler has much that is interesting and original to say about the nature of marriage contracts. Widows, in particular, are given extensive treatment both because of their skill in

administering the patrimony and because of the dangers that the dower of a long-lived widow could pose to an inheritance. This contributes to a more nuanced picture of family finances. The House of Elbeuf faced periodic crises, especially in the aftermath of the Wars of Religion and during the exile of the duke in the 1640s, and by the time of Frondes the duke's poverty was proverbial and the subject of lampoons. Spangler highlights the role of Marguerite Chabot (pp. 177-81), duchess of Elbeuf (1565-1652) in rescuing the House from financial meltdown, ensuring that they, like the elder Guise line, survived their mid-century travails and were able to achieve a measure of stability under Louis XIV. The recovery of the name of the ducal house under Charles V (1643-1690) and his descendants re-established them on the European stage, a reputation from which the French cadets were able to profit.

However, I have two reservations about Spangler's thesis. The power of the Guise-Lorraine under Louis XIV rested largely on the favouritism displayed to the cadet House of Armagnac. In contrast, the senior line of Elbeuf did not emerge from their financial troubles completely unscathed and were politically damaged by their *frondeur* associations. Although they occupied the key governorship of Picardy and Artois from 1643-1717, they were never significant figures at court under Louis XIV. The Armagnac were significantly less wealthy than their more illustrious cousins: at the best they were worth one seventh of the Guise in 1688 (pp. 49, 289). The count of Armagnac's household amounted to a modest thirty persons. But the fact that he, the cadet of a cadet, had superseded his seniors as nominal head of House of Lorraine in France should not surprise us. Divide and rule was a traditional and consistent monarchical policy, as the fortunes of the cadet Bourbon (Vendôme, Montpensier, Conti and Soissons) in the sixteenth century show. As a policy towards the Guise it was first used by Henri III in the 1580s, as he tried to split Mayenne from his elder brother, Guise. This was only partially successful, and as usual with Henri III it was his successor who reaped the benefits of his policies. Mayenne's ambitions had been stimulated and the family fell out seriously over the royal succession in 1593, enabling Henri de Navarre to take full advantage. This policy was reprised when Charles II duke of Elbeuf (1596-1657) was promoted, first by his marriage to Louis XIII's half-sister in 1619 and then to the governorship of Picardy in 1627. When Elbeuf proved to be unreliable, his opposition was offset by the promotion of his younger brother, Harcourt. As Spangler makes clear, the princes were treated differently (p. 252) from other rebels. There was no question of treating them like the Duke of Montmorency, who was executed in 1632. The promotion of cadets maintained channels of communication and allowed for eventual rehabilitation. There are instances where different members of the family lined up in opposing political sides and even armies (pp. 37-8). But the evidence for a deliberate policy of bet-hedging is lacking, and such claims surely overestimate the level of co-operation and harmony that exists in any family.

In foregrounding the prosperity of the cadets, Spangler runs the risk of glossing over the financial vicissitudes of the elder and wealthier branches, which points towards their dependency on royal favour. Sales of land are referred to in passing and need to be placed in context. The sale of the county of Eu in 1660 is an example. This was a *comté pairie* (unlike the *vicomtés* of Brionne and Lillebonne which were *comtés* only by assumption), comprising 270 fiefs and worth almost as much as the principality of Joinville and the duchy of Guise combined, but which were sacrosanct for historical reasons. Eu was also the site of the family's largest and newest residence. It was a core property and along with the sale of Meudon, with its château and pleasure gardens, and the duchy of Chevreuse in 1654, represented a severe blow to the family's prestige.

Elsewhere, the force of Spangler's overall argument is undermined by over-egging his pudding. We are told that the Lorraine-Guise overcame their financial problems and spread from their northern power base across France and this is supported by a map (p. 162), which shows the extent of landholding c.1688. Even if one accepts that being important in the Vivarais is as important as having a significant presence in the Ile de France (where the demand for real estate and prices were at their highest), the idea that their landholding was increasing and not contracting is misleading. Many of the properties indicated (e.g., Chevreuse) were sold long before 1688, some of the benefices (e.g., Bayeux) were not

acquired until much later, and the greater part of the inheritance was broken up and passed out of the family the following year. The possessions of the dynasty as a whole were more widely spread, but (the Vivarais aside) that did not necessarily translate into greater provincial power. Brittany is a good example. The House of Elbeuf should have been major political players there when they picked up the rest of the Laval-Rieux inheritance in 1605. But they had already sold a part of this inheritance, the barony of Ancenis, in 1599 for 200,000 *écus*. The county of Rieux followed in 1662 and the county of Rochefort was dismembered at the same time, effectively putting an end to the residual power of the Elbeuf in the province. Spangler even suggests that there was a revival of the Guise in the church. But the benefices he identifies (p. 111) were small-fry. The conferral of the bishopric Bayeux in 1718 on François-Armand, son of the count of Armagnac, is twice mentioned (pp. 82, 119) because “it was one of the wealthiest sees in northern France.” True, its revenues were above average, but so were those of most Norman sees. Bayeux’s revenues were in the same range as neighbouring Coutances and (less than) Lisieux. It lacked the significance of a see like Reims (whose archbishop was first peer of the realm), or the wealth and prestige of the greatest abbeys or bishoprics, such as Metz (which was about twice as wealthy as Bayeux).

The same goes for great office under Louis XIV: the *Grand Ecurie* and the governorship of Picardy aside, the cupboard was otherwise bare. Henri II duke of Guise, we are assured, spent his final years until his death in 1662 managing great affairs of royal ceremonial. But this cannot have been as *Grand Chambellan* (p. 68) because the functions of that office had long since fallen into abeyance and, even if they had been revived, his financial problems forced him to sell it in 1658. Most significantly of all, when the Guise line died out in 1688 Louis did not lift a finger to support the will of the last duchess, which attempted to maintain the integrity of the patrimony for the Lorraine dynasty.

My second reservation concerns the changes and continuities with the pre-1630 period. Spangler identifies changes in Guise fortunes with a change in mentality. Their survival was based no longer on “brute strength”, but on the “very modern idea of the rule of law. Rather than dictating to, or claiming to be above the law, the Guise were using it to their advantage (p. 5)”. Guise power in the earlier period was “feudal” and based on “traditional Guise popularity”. Changes in mentalities are notoriously difficult to trace. In any case, the rise of the Guise in the first half of the sixteenth century was, like their survival at the end of the seventeenth century, due to their ability to exploit both the law and royal favour. Their relationship with François I and Henri II does not look very different from what Spangler identifies as a “new” means of survival under Louis XIV, “one based on mutual respect between the *grands* and the monarchy” (p. 10). Louis’s cultivation of the Lorraine, in order to balance the other princes, was a return to the sensible policies adopted by his Valois predecessors following the revolt of Duke Charles de Bourbon in 1523. The delicate relationship between the princes and the crown was shattered by religious war and dynastic instability, the aftershocks of which continued well into the seventeenth century. The Guise did not enjoy “virtual hegemony” (p. 9) from the 1560s; their fortunes fluctuating according to political and religious factors largely beyond their control. Their opposition was not to the monarchy, but to the principle of permitting a heretic to become king.

Spangler constantly refers to them as a “clan” in the seventeenth century, but does not explain what this means. There are instances of the various branches coming together at odd moments for the common good, but he admits that the idea of clan solidarity “assumes a degree of intra-familial participation that was not always present (p. 48) and that “inter-dynastic squabbles remained” (p. 116). Litigation is a continuation of enmity, and the fact that the Elbeuf and Armagnac (p. 172) do not seem to have been able to settle their differences through arbitration is instructive. But until the surviving dispersed correspondence is painstakingly reconstructed (Henri II duke of Guise left a large correspondence relating to the years 1655-62) the nature of their affective relations remains speculation. The evidence suggests that, though there was a sense of belonging to a wider family, there was no common strategy and no deference to the elder line. This is in contrast to the sixteenth century, where the survival of a large corpus of correspondence reveals how a clan mentality was developed and propagated. Deference

of the cadets was symbolised in the ritual of the duke of Guise's *lever*. Affective ties remained close after the first generation because the cadet lines sent their wives to live and had their children brought up at Joinville. It seems that this practice came to an end in 1583 with the death of Antoinette de Bourbon, dowager duchess of Guise, and the break up of her household. Guise solidarity was highly unusual, perhaps even unique, during the sixteenth century. It was reinforced by the sense of paranoia following the assassination of Duke François and the attempts by their enemies to exclude them from power. Blood ties weakened in the seventeenth century. Also significant was the reduction of religious tensions which had forced the family to maintain a united front and keep its divisions private.

It would be churlish to end on a discordant note. These reservations are points of emphasis and do not detract from what is overall a convincing thesis. The contrast between 1588 and 1688 is clear: the family which had so much threatened the equilibrium of the Valois Monarchy had become one of the strongest pillars of the regime of the later Bourbons. Spangler is to be congratulated for setting out in detail the story of the rapprochement between the crown and one of the great princely houses, which did so much to maintain the stability of the Bourbon dynasty down to 1789.

NOTES

[1] Spangler's claim rests on Père Anselme. Robert Harding, who has consulted the local archives, thinks that Harcourt was not governor, but lieutenant-general in Guyenne, an important distinction: *Anatomy of Power Elite: the Provincial Governors of Early Modern France* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1979) pp. 130, 289 note 12.

[2] Nancy Nichols Barker, *Brother to the Sun King: Philippe, Duke of Orléans* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989).

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