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Stéphane Gal, *Lesdiguières. Prince des Alpes et connétable de France*. Grenoble: Presses universitaires de Grenoble, 2007. 429 pp. Notes, bibliography, map, illustrations, chronology, and index. €35.00 (pb). ISBN 978-2-7061-1419-9.

Review by Brian Sandberg, Northern Illinois University.

François de Bonne, duc de Lesdiguières (1543-1626), is a fascinating and enigmatic figure who has finally attracted a modern biographer. This provincial noble from southeastern France became a lieutenant general of the province of Dauphiné, a maréchal de France, and finally connétable de France. The duc de Lesdiguières was an important Huguenot leader in Dauphiné and the adjacent the Alps region, supporting Calvinist Geneva and opposing the Catholic League and their Savoyard allies. He managed to survive the chaos of the sixteenth-century religious wars, then, late in life publicly abjured Calvinism and embraced Catholicism in 1622, shocking many of his contemporaries. Gal concludes that François de Bonne was defined by contradictions, but stresses above all his prudent, pragmatic, and stoic nature—calling him “un homme de raison avant tout,” and “cartésien avant la lettre” (p. 347).

Lesdiguières. Prince des Alpes et connétable de France offers a fine example of the revival of historical biography after the “biographical turn,” and should contribute to ongoing discussions of the craft of historical writing.[1] Stéphane Gal provides a thematic approach to François de Bonne’s life and military career, focusing on his fortune, territory, diplomacy, clientage, and power. Gal employs a brisk writing style spiced with enthusiastic, even exclamatory, remarks on his subject: “...et encore!”, “Calomnies!”, “Bien au contraire!” The duc de Lesdiguières’s fortune amounts to “trois millions de livres... au moins!” When a source describes how Lesdiguières’s doctor introduced him to the beautiful young woman who soon became his mistress, Gal exclaims that “On connaît pire médicament!” (pp. 16, 89, 213-214, 230). The author integrates elements of social history to examine François de Bonne’s finances and household structures, while mixing in some cultural history to explore the duc’s extensive clientele and his modes of self-representation. The book goes well beyond the individual subject to examine Lesdiguières’s place within early modern French society.

The book’s main sources are Louis Videl’s *Histoire du Connestable de Lesdiguières*, a memoir of François de Bonne written by his principal secretary, and the *Actes et correspondance du connétable de Lesdiguières*, a massive collection of correspondence and writings of the duc de Lesdiguières that was published in the late nineteenth century.[2] Stéphane Gal delves into archival documents, particularly at the Archives départementales de l’Isère and the Archives municipales de Grenoble, in order to investigate François de Bonne’s kinship and clientele relations, household finances, and official roles. The author supplements these sources with contemporary polemical pamphlets, memoirs, treatises, and local histories that shed light on the period of the religious wars.

The duc de Lesdiguières undoubtedly represents an important subject in late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century French history due to his prominent role in political, religious, and military affairs during the reigns of Henri IV and Louis XIII. This welcome biography significantly contributes to the history of the European nobility. Stéphane Gal frequently repeats largely propagandistic descriptions of Lesdiguières as “prince des Alps,” “le roy Dauphin,” a “roi absolu,” and a “demi-dieu,” that incorporate

common tropes of early seventeenth-century panegyrics (pp. 8, 279, 280, 327). This language furthers a problematic tendency of the historiography on early modern elites that treats powerful nobles such as the duc d'Épernon, the ducs de Guise, the duc de Mayenne, and the ducs de Montmorency as demi-kings dominating provinces rather than as complex political actors within a royal state and composite society. Gal does usefully point out that the duc de Lesdiguières may have intimidated the consuls of Grenoble at times, but he often had to collaborate with the parlementaires in the city. François de Bonne's experiences accord well with those of other powerful regional nobles who were his contemporaries, but more comparative research is needed to discern what aspects of the duc de Lesdiguières's experiences may have been atypical or unique within the political culture of the religious wars. [3]

Only late in the book does Gal explore François de Bonne's religious beliefs and practices, centering on his public conversion in 1622, which has often been seen as self-serving and purely political. Surviving letters, testaments, and sermons suggest that Lesdiguières long had doubts about Calvinism and gradually embraced the growing Catholic revival prior to his official conversion. Gal describes "la conversion lente et souterraine de Lesdiguières," but only hints at the broader context of a profound spiritual renewal in the city of Grenoble, where Pierre Coton and François de Sales both preached and where Counter-Reformation religious orders progressively installed themselves (pp. 314-316). Probing religion more carefully throughout the book might have revealed further religious motivations for the duc de Lesdiguières's actions and more complex relationships with other actors involved in the religious wars.

As a Huguenot military leader, the duc de Lesdiguières was embroiled in the sectarian violence of the French Wars of Religion. Stéphane Gal challenges Denis Crouzet's argument that an intense mysticism motivated religious violence, suggesting that François de Bonne, "loin d'être un de ces 'guerriers de Dieu'... il avait au contraire toujours incarné une forme de rébellion rationalisée" (p. 317). Instead of examining the sacral nature of violence, this book focuses on Lesdiguières's military campaigns and his treatise on the art of war, written for the instruction of Louis XIII (pp. 47-70). In the early seventeenth century, Lesdiguières acted to represent Calvinist interests, but also to enforce the provisions of the compromise Edict of Nantes. Here, the duc de Lesdiguières's confessional identification and religious politics would presumably have been crucial to the development of Catholic reform and maintenance of Calvinist community in Dauphiné, but, unfortunately, Gal fails to develop these themes fully. Gal does hint at Lesdiguières's role in dealing with the complaints of the Huguenots in Grenoble in the early seventeenth century, pointing out that "l'application de l'édit [de Nantes] restera toujours imparfaite" (pp. 330-331).

The duc de Lesdiguières clearly played a significant role in early seventeenth-century state development patterns, and the book suggests that his authority in Dauphiné affirmed the power of a centralizing state. Stéphane Gal uses contemporary notions of mirrors to portray Lesdiguières as reflecting the greatness of the king (p. 325). He employs Norbert Elias's model of a "civilizing process" overtly, claiming that the duc de Lesdiguières represents an agent of the transmission of new elite values outside of the royal court. [4] Historians of early modern noble culture and state development may have trouble accepting the author's Elias-inspired conclusion that Lesdiguières's ultimate legacy was to produce "dociles serviteurs de l'État... Désormais le pouvoir était aux mains des administrateurs" (pp. 348-349). Indeed, the rich evidence that Gal unearths on the duc de Lesdiguières suggests that he had a much more ambiguous and elusive relationship with the early modern royal state.

This book offers an important new perspective on early modern French noble culture, setting François de Bonne into the incredibly complex provincial context of Dauphiné. Bonne's landholdings in the Dauphiné countryside, his localized connections with regional nobles, and his social relationships with urban residents of Grenoble emerge as crucial to his political and military activities in the Alps. The duc de Lesdiguières's actions ultimately helped determine the fates of Calvinism, Catholicism, and Savoyard ambitions in this region during a turbulent period of religious conflict.

NOTES

[1] Hans Erich Bödeker, “Biographie: Annäherungen an den gegenwärtigen Forschungs- und Disjussionsstand,” and Jacques Revel, “La biographie comme problème historiographique,” both in *Biographie schreiben*, ed. Hans Erich Bödeker (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2003), 9-65, 327-348; Ian Kershaw, “Biography and the Historian: Opportunities and Constraints,” in *Biography between Structure and Agency: Central European Lives in International Historiography*, ed. Volker Rolf Berghahn and Simone Lässig (New York: Berghahn Books, 2008), 27-39; Brian Roberts, *Biographical Research* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2002).

[2] Louis Vidé, *Histoire du Connestable de Lesdiguières*, rev. edition (Grenoble: Jean Nicolas, 1649); Douglas and Roman, eds., *Actes et correspondance du connétable de Lesgiuères*, 3 vols. (Grenoble: Allier, 1878).

[3] For recent research on French nobles and political culture, see: Ariane Boltanski, *Les ducs de Nevers et l'état royal. Genèse d'un compromis (ca 1550 – ca 1600)* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 2006); Xavier Le Person, “Pratiques” et “Practiqueurs”. *La vie politique à la fin du règne de Henri III (1584-1589)* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 2002); Nicolas Le Roux, *La faveur du roi. Mignons et courtisans au temps des derniers Valois (vers 1547 - vers 1589)* (Seysse: Champ Vallon, 2000); Stuart Carroll, *Noble Power during the French Wars of Religion: The Guise Affinity and the Catholic Cause in Normandy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

[4] Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), originally published as *Über den Prozess der Zivilisation*, 2 vols. (Basel: Haus zum Falken, 1939); Norbert Elias, *The Court Society*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983), originally published as *Die höfische Gesellschaft* (Darmstadt: Hermann Luchterhand Verlag, 1969).

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