

H-France Review Vol. 3 (April 2003), No. 30

Philip Conner, *Huguenot Heartland: Montauban and Southern French Calvinism during the Wars of Religion* (St. Andrews Studies in Reformation History). Aldershot, Hampshire and Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate, 2002. xiv + 257 pp. Maps, notes, bibliography, and index. \$84.95 U.S., £47.50 U.K. (cl). ISBN 0-7546-0762-3.

Review by Mack P. Holt, George Mason University.

This book, a revised PhD dissertation submitted at the University of St. Andrews, focuses on the Huguenot stronghold of Montauban during the French Wars of Religion. In the opening pages the author makes some striking claims about the uniqueness of southern France compared to the north, as well as about how different southern protestantism was from its northern French variant in the sixteenth century. And most curious of all, perhaps, Conner claims that historians of the French Reformation and civil wars have simply ignored southern France altogether, as they have tended to emphasize the court and the significant events of the wars in northern France.

"Reflecting upon the weight of the literature," he claims, "it would not be unfair to say that events in southern France have been treated as if they were of little consequence to the ultimate outcome of the wars. For this reason the French Wars of Religion in southern France is a largely untold story" (p. 2). This seems a bit bizarre, given that the "weight of the literature" includes the work of Natalie Davis and Timothy Watson on Lyon, Philip Hoffman on the Lyonnais, Mark Greengrass and Barbara Beckerman Davis on Toulouse, Ray Mentzer on Languedoc, Nancy Roelker and David Bryson on the southwest, Stéphane Gal on Grenoble, Wolfgang Kaiser on Marseille, Michel Cassan on the Limousin, Kevin Robbins and Judith Meyer on La Rochelle, Ann Guggenheim and Philippe Chareyre on Nîmes, Marc Vénard on Avignon, not to mention Janine Garrisson-Estèbe's general study of protestantism in the Midi, to cite just the most obvious examples.[1]

To be fair, Conner does cite much of this work in his book. But even though such exaggerated claims are doubtless an attempt to justify his study of Montauban during the Wars of Religion, he need not have resorted to such distortions since there is much of value in his book. Indeed, a new and detailed study of a previously unexamined French town controlled by protestants during the civil wars was his own justification.

There is no overt or explicit argument running throughout the book, unless one counts the already mentioned theme that southern French towns had a separate culture and identity from their northern counterparts. This seems to amount primarily to "the keen tradition of local independence that existed in southern towns" (p. 218), though I wonder how different this local particularism was compared to towns in other frontier provinces only recently incorporated into the French crown, such as Burgundy and Brittany.

There are a number of other broad themes, however, that do surface from time to time throughout the book. One of the most striking is that the Reformation in Montauban was a top-down process. The author focuses on the elites and states explicitly that it was "the sympathetic attitude of the political elite of Montauban" toward Calvinism as well as "their political influence" that was key in convincing the rest of the town to adopt the Reformation (p. 21). It is never made clear how this process worked, or whether the masses in Montauban actually needed much pressure from the elites to adopt protestantism.

On the contrary, Conner has found considerable evidence to suggest that much of the impetus for reform came from below. There was clearly "a vigorous grass-roots movement" for reform in Montauban that the authorities could not really control, despite repeated efforts to prohibit what they saw as "rabble-rousing assemblies" (p. 19). Moreover, there was a wave of popular iconoclasm in 1561 that removed all catholic images and altars from the town's churches. Conner himself suggests that the urban elites were frightened and put in an untenable position by all this, so it seems much more likely that the elites were led by the groundswell for reform from below to adopt the new religion simply to maintain their political authority in Montauban, rather than using their political influence to introduce Calvinism.

While Conner is certainly correct that reform was unlikely to succeed in Montauban without at least tacit acquiescence from the town council, this does not necessarily mean that the elites were the instigators of reform. One of the problems that the author acknowledges is that the town council records for this period no longer exist. Indeed, Conner has had to overcome the obvious difficulty that there are no surviving town council records before 1580 and no surviving consistory records for Montauban before 1595, making any assessment of the origins of the Reformation in Montauban that much more difficult.

Another broad theme in the book, though one that remains implicit rather than explicit until the conclusion, is that there are real limitations in trying to think about the Reformation on a national level (p. 220). Conner shows that Montauban's experience illustrates clearly that local issues, structures, and institutions, and above all political support on the local level, all helped shape the success and failure of reform everywhere. In this sense, there is really no such thing as *the* French Reformation, *the* German Reformation, or even *the* English Reformation before the reign of Elizabeth.

There are other more intermittent points made in various chapters of the book. Without the town council deliberations or consistory registers, Conner has made the most of the sources that he did have at his disposal, especially the notarial records and baptismal registers for the town. For example, he is able to demonstrate that 62 percent of the elders who served in the consistory also served at one time or another on the town council (p. 52). Unlike the experience in several other protestant towns, in Montauban the political elites worked closely with the reformed church and apparently came to eventually dominate (at least numerically) the consistory.

Thus, it is all the more curious why he challenges Janine Garrission-Estèbe's conclusion that the lower classes were under-represented in the consistories across the Midi.^[2] The experience of Montauban seems to resemble Garrission-Estèbe's model fairly closely. Those artisans who served on the consistory were always well-to-do masters, never journeymen, and there were never appointed any *vignerons* or other agricultural laborers, who lived in the towns in large numbers. And the wealthy merchants and other bourgeois who served on the consistory were much more closely aligned, both socially and politically, with the doctors, judges, and lawyers in the city than with the lower classes.

Thus, compared to their overall numbers in the population, the elites were over-represented and the lower classes were under-represented on the consistory. As Conner shows very convincingly, this partly explains why the consistory was so well-respected in Montauban. Those persons with wealth and

influence in Montauban served in positions of authority in both church and state. This made the consistory a vital part of the reformed community in Montauban, responsible as it was for social discipline, much like the model in Geneva.

Conner compares Montauban with several other French protestant towns, such as La Rochelle, where the consistory was both unreliable and disrespected by local authorities in the policing of social discipline.^[3] By contrast, Conner demonstrates that in Montauban the consistory was well-respected and efficacious, and in conjunction with the town council, it began to try to instill a program of moral reform as soon as the Huguenots took over the city in 1561.

Conner argues persuasively that social discipline and moral reform were not implemented harshly and continuously; there was always going to be some discrepancy between the goals of the most zealous and what could be achieved in practice. There is no question, however, that in Montauban everything from illicit sexual activity, drunkenness, and blasphemy to controls placed on popular entertainment—cards, dice, and other games of chance—came under the dual gaze of the consistory and town council. Conner is right to point out that efforts at instilling greater social and moral discipline were not exclusively protestant, as many catholic towns were doing the very same thing. But at Montauban, however, it appears that church and magistrates worked closely together to build a godly society.

The other major point that Conner makes in the book is that the idea of a Huguenot "state within the state" in southern France is a myth. He suggests that the so-called "United Provinces of the Midi" could not possibly have existed due to local particularism, the confessional diversity in Languedoc during the religious wars, and the lack of a common consciousness across the Midi, all of which would have prevented any such protestant state from ever emerging. Conner chides a number of prominent historians for perpetuating this myth: Philip Benedict, Jean Delumeau, Myriam Yardeni, John Salmon, Robert Knecht, Robert Kingdon, and above all, Janine Garrison-Estèbe. "How is it," he asks, "that present-day historians have become obsessed by the idea of a 'United Provinces' of the Midi?" (p. 136)

Conner attributes it to two principal causes: catholic propaganda during the religious wars fuelled by paranoia of Huguenot conspiracies to overthrow the French crown and several nineteenth-century historians, especially Jules Michelet, who linked Protestantism and republicanism in a larger liberal narrative of French history. While both of these factors are doubtless important, Conner overlooks the fact that much of the catholic paranoia of Huguenot conspiracies was based on what Huguenots themselves actually wrote and claimed to be doing at the time.

A Huguenot republican constitution was printed in Basel in 1574, together with the radical pamphlet *Reveille-matin François* written by someone calling himself Eusebe Philadelphie, but almost certainly Nicolas Barnaud. This constitution called on each Huguenot community to elect its own leader, who would then appoint twenty-four others to advise him in maintaining public order. These men would keep order in the towns, hear criminal cases, and in conjunction with the other elected leaders from other protestant towns, actually make treaties and collect taxes.^[4]

This certainly sounds like a "state within the state" to me, and even if this constitution was never implemented, for all the reasons that Conner suggests, the issue here is not about state formation but about protestant claims to resist the king after the St. Bartholomew's massacres. None of the historians the author chides has ever suggested that this radical monarchomach literature represented the feelings of most ordinary Huguenots, though it did fuel the fears of many ordinary catholics. Nevertheless, if the idea of "state within the state" is a myth, it is a myth of the Huguenots' own making and not "a historiographical fabrication" (p. 141).

Despite these few areas of disagreement with the author, this is a useful first book. It is especially good on analyzing the elite families who lived in and dominated Montauban during the religious wars, as well as their activities and interests as derived from the notarial records. One also gets a fine sense of how important the town was to other struggling Calvinist communities in neighboring areas, given the pressure coming from the catholic magistrates in nearby Toulouse. Thus, Huguenot Heartland adds to the growing number of urban studies we now have of individual towns during the French civil wars, and it shows us once again that local dynamics mattered as much as court politics and national concerns in the success and failure of the Reformation.

NOTES

[1] Natalie Zemon Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1975); Mark Greengrass, "The Sainte Union in the Provinces: The Case of Toulouse," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 14 (1983): 469-496; Barbara Beckerman Davis, "Reconstructing the Poor in Early Sixteenth-Century Toulouse," *French History* 7 (September 1993): 249-285; Raymond A. Mentzer, *Heresy Proceedings in Languedoc, 1500-1560* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1984) and *Blood and Belief: Family Survival and Confessional Identity among the Provincial Huguenot Nobility* (West Lafayette, Ind.: Purdue University Press, 1993), as well as his articles, among others, "Disciplina nervus ecclesiae: The Calvinist Reform of Morals at Nîmes," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 18 (1987): 89-115 and "Ecclesiastical Discipline and Communal Reorganization among the Protestants of Southern France," *European History Quarterly* 21 (1991): 165-185; Nancy Lyman Roelker, *Queen of Navarre: Jeanne d'Albret, 1528-1572* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1968); David M. Bryson, *Queen Jeanne and the Promised Land: Dynasty, Homeland, Religion and Violence in Sixteenth-Century France* (Leiden: Brill, 1999); Stéphane Gal, *Grenoble au temps de la Ligue: étude politique, sociale et religieuse d'une cite en crise, vers 1562-vers 1598* (Grenoble: Presses Universitaires de Grenoble, 2000); Wolfgang Kaiser, *Marseille au temps des troubles, 1559-1596* (Paris: École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, 1991); Michel Cassan, *Le temps des guerres de religion: le cas du Limousin, vers 1530-vers 1630* (Paris: Publisud, 1996); Kevin C. Robbins, *City on the Ocean Sea: La Rochelle, 1530-1650, Urban Society, Religion, and Politics on the French Atlantic Frontier* (Leiden: Brill, 1997); Judith Pugh Meyer, *Reformation in la Rochelle: Tradition and Change in Early Modern Europe, 1500-1560* (Geneva: Droz, 1996); Ann H. Guggenheim, "Calvinism and the Political Elite of Sixteenth-Century Nîmes," (PhD thesis, New York University, 1968), as well as her article, "Beza, Viret, and the Church of Nîmes: National Leadership and Local Initiative in the Outbreak of the Religious Wars," *Bibliothèque d'humanisme et renaissance* 37 (1975): 33-48; Philippe Chareyre, "Le consistoire de Nîmes, 1561-1685," 4 vols. (Thèse de doctorat, Université Paul Valéry, Montpellier, 1987); Marc Vénard, *Réforme protestante, réforme catholique dans la province d'Avignon, XVIe siècle* (Paris: Cerf, 1993); and Janine Garrison-Estèbe, *Protestants du Midi, 1559-1598* (Toulouse: Privat, 1980).

[2] Janine-Garrison-Estèbe, *Protestants du Midi, 1559-1598* (Toulouse: Privat, 1980), p. 94.

[3] Kevin C. Robbins, *City on the Ocean Sea: La Rochelle, 1530-1650: Urban Society, Religion, and Politics on the French Atlantic Frontier* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), pp. 145, 183, and 238, n. 98.

[4] This constitution is located in the Bibliothèque nationale, Fonds nouvelles acquisitions françaises 7191; portions of it are printed (in French) in Gordon Griffiths, ed., *Representative Government in Western Europe in the Sixteenth Century* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), pp. 276-79. Also, see Donald R. Kelley, *The Beginning of Ideology: Consciousness and Society in the French Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 301-6 for more on *La Reveille matin* and the Catholic response it provoked.

Mack P. Holt
George Mason University
mholt@gmu.edu

Copyright © 2003 by the Society for French Historical Studies, all rights reserved. The Society for French Historical Studies permits the electronic distribution of individual reviews for nonprofit educational purposes, provided that full and accurate credit is given to the author, the date of publication, and the location of the review on the H-France website. The Society for French Historical Studies reserves the right to withdraw the license for redistribution/republication of individual reviews at any time and for any specific case. Neither bulk redistribution/republication in electronic form of more than five percent of the contents of H-France Review nor re-publication of any amount in print form will be permitted without permission. For any other proposed uses, contact the Editor-in-Chief of H-France. The views posted on H-France Review are not necessarily the views of the Society for French Historical Studies. ISSN 1553-9172