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Arlette Jouanna, *The Saint Bartholomew's Day Massacre: The Mysteries of a Crime of State*. Trans. Joseph Bergin. Manchester, U.K. and New York, N.Y.: Manchester University Press, 2013. xiv + 271 pp. Glossary, appendix, bibliography, and index. \$100.00 U.S. (hb). ISBN 978-0719088315.

Review Essay by Mack P. Holt, George Mason University

Arlette Jouanna is one of the finest historians writing about early modern France today, but apart from academic specialists of the period, she is virtually unknown in the Anglophone world because virtually none of her work has previously been translated into English. Thus, the recent publication by the Manchester University Press of an English translation of her book, *The Saint Bartholomew's Day Massacre*, is a real cause for celebration. Not only will this book bring her scholarship to a much wider readership around the globe, but it will also help resolve one of the most difficult tasks for all historians of early modern France: how to explain satisfactorily the events that made up the St. Bartholomew's Day massacres in 1572.

The very first thing I ever read by Jouanna was an article on sixteenth-century notions of honor published in 1968 that I read as a graduate student about a decade later.[1] She clearly already was thinking about the social hierarchy of early modern France and especially that group of nobles perched at the top of it. This article was quickly followed by a book on social order in 1977 and the publication of her doctoral thesis in 1981 on the idea of race in sixteenth-century France, race not as defined by ethnicity but by social rank and estate inherited through blood.[2] While all of this early work was interesting and highly useful to me, causing me to reflect more deeply on what it meant to be a nobleman, it was the publication of yet another book with the intriguing title of *Le devoir de révolte* in 1989 that forced me to completely rethink the entire social category of the nobility.[3]

Having written my own doctoral dissertation on a particular nobleman who had, at times, rebelled against the French crown during the Wars of Religion, I thought I fully understood the category of noble malcontents. But Jouanna forced me to see things differently, not just through their eyes, but through the intellectual foundations of their social and cultural make-up. She demonstrated convincingly that those nobles in the upper nobility considered themselves just as much divinely appointed as the king and, as a result, that they also felt that they were entitled, and even required, to participate in the polity as a responsibility and duty of their social position. Moreover, they saw themselves as guardians and protectors whose job was to safeguard the polity whenever it came under threat, even from the actions of a divinely appointed king. Thus, to them, it was their "duty to revolt" against a king who threatened this polity. And while most of this rhetoric and political theory was well known, Jouanna's great accomplishment was to demonstrate convincingly that many aristocratic rebellions that historians had previously written off as motivated primarily by political or economic opportunism were in fact grounded much more subtly in an intellectual foundation built around duty rather than pure aggrandizement. It was a *tour de force*. Jouanna followed this work in 1996 with the very best one-volume history of the French Wars of Religion in any language. In fact, it is even more than that, as it covers the history of France from the reign of Charles VIII (1483-1498) to the Edict of Nantes (1598).[4] Moreover, she went on to co-author an extremely useful historical dictionary of the Wars of Religion, easily the most useful reference book I have ever consulted on the civil wars, which has constantly proved far faster and easier in finding all sorts of information than relying on Google or Wikipedia.[5] Finally, her most recent book is a study of French absolutism, *Le pouvoir absolu. Nasciance de l'imaginaire politique de la royauté*. [6] And these are only her most well-known books. So there is little

question that to bring an English translation of *The Saint Bartholomew's Day Massacre* to an English speaking audience is to introduce to Anglophone readers a historian of the highest caliber.

The purpose of Jouanna's book on the massacre—the French edition was first published in 2007—was to re-examine all the primary sources on the massacre and to see if it were possible to resolve the three principal enigmas raised by the massacre, something that, she maintains, no previous explanation of the massacre had managed to do successfully.[7] While most explanations managed to resolve one or two of these enigmas, in her opinion none had yet successfully resolved all three. So what were these unresolved enigmas? First and foremost, Jouanna asks, how do we explain the one hundred eighty degree shift from the joyous and unifying wedding celebrations of Henri de Navarre and Marguerite de Valois on 18 August 1572 to the grim and bloody reality of divisiveness and violence a week later on 24 August? Second, since King Charles IX and Catherine de' Medici had publicly claimed to be acting to preserve the peace edict of Saint Germain (1570), how do we possibly square this with the king's decision to order the murders of Admiral Coligny and his principal lieutenants on the night of 24 August? And finally, how did the elimination of the Protestant leaders on Saint Bartholomew's night degenerate into a general massacre of Protestants in the capital and a dozen other cities in the provinces over the next several weeks? I might add a fourth enigma that Jouanna hints at herself: Is it even possible to come up with a satisfactory explanation of these three problems given the paucity of eye witness accounts and the general unreliability of most of the primary sources? What is novel and absolutely striking about Jouanna's methodology is that she starts with these enigmas to see if they can be resolved from the surviving sources before trying to construct or advance a new thesis or narrative of the massacre. As she implies in her survey of the historiography of the massacre in the "Introduction," too many earlier historians offered ingenious explanations for the massacres, which raised more questions than they answered. But Jouanna does more than this, for she squarely places the massacre in the larger history of early modern France to demonstrate what a watershed this event was: "Saint Bartholomew's Day irrevocably defined the Catholic destiny of the kingdom of France; by dramatising the nature of the debate on the nature of royal institutions, it also accelerated their evolution towards absolute power" (p. 12).

Jouanna begins her analysis with the way the peace of 1570—the Edict of Saint Germain—had been implemented, and in particular, how it was perceived in the capital of Paris, overwhelmingly dominated by Catholics. English readers will already be familiar with much of this thanks to the scholarship of Barbara Diefendorf.[8] Jouanna's principal point here is to show that while the marriage festivities and rituals of peace and union displayed at court during the wedding of Marguerite de Valois and Henri de Navarre were going on in the capital, the city's population was seething with anger about the recent peace edict and saw it as an injustice. Like Diefendorf, she shows how the radical sermons of Parisian preachers such as Simon Vigor, as well as celebrated incidents in the capital like the destruction and removal of the Gastines cross, reinforced the growing Catholic opposition to the peace, recognizing as it did the legality of the Huguenots in the kingdom. Moreover, many Catholic nobles gathered at court for the wedding agreed with them. This brings us to the first enigma Jouanna outlined in the introduction: How do we explain the contradiction between the religious harmony and union of the marriage celebrations on 18 August with the confessional division and violence on 24 August? Although Jouanna does not say so in so many words, it is clear that the image of harmony and union so desired by the king and Queen Mother with the marriage of the Marguerite de Valois to Henri of Navarre was just a mirage. The population of Paris never accepted the idea of peace with the Huguenots, and neither did most of the Catholic nobility at court, especially the Guise family. For them the royal wedding was a disaster. Thus, what Jouanna refers to as "the principal enigma of the massacre of Saint Bartholomew's Day" (p. 4) is not so much an enigma at all once we understand the tensions and hostilities underlying the mirage of harmony and union that the king and Queen Mother hoped to create with the royal wedding.

Jouanna resolves the second enigma in much the same way. Her full account of the failed assassination attempt on Admiral Coligny on 22 August—the most convincing account I have ever read—makes it

clear that the attempted murder of the Admiral by Charles de Louviers, seigneur de Maurevert, completely shattered the peace of 1570. Moreover, a “whole raft of presumptions seemed to point to the Guises as having commissioned the attack” (p. 75). Maurevert was a client of the Guises, the shot was fired from a house rented by another client of the Guises, and the safe house to which Maurevert fled after the failed murder attempt was that of yet another Guise client. But Jouanna’s main point here is to show that the perpetrators not only wanted to kill Coligny, but they also wanted to shatter the peace of 1570. And in this latter goal they fully succeeded, for as Jouanna shows, the attempt on Coligny’s life created immediate fear and dread in the minds of the king and Queen Mother, not to mention the king’s council, that a Huguenot military reprisal was imminent. They felt that the only way to save the peace was to implement a “surgical strike” against Coligny and his noble followers in Paris for the wedding, the very military leaders who would be expected to lead such a military assault. Thus, just like the first enigma, Jouanna dissolves the second, even if the king’s decision to order this strike was based more on conspiracy theory and mistaken assumptions than on truth or fact. And, Jouanna suggests, the king’s paranoia was almost infinite, even extending to the murder of a further 800 Huguenot soldiers—including several nobles—upon their release in Mons just a month later, an episode not only missing from all previous histories of the massacre but completely unknown to most other historians. Indeed, given the fact that Protestant sources do not confirm that this incident even happened, not to mention complain about it—the principal source being a letter from a Spanish agent in Paris, Diego de Zuniga, to Philip II—there remains a great deal of skepticism surrounding this incident.

Finally, Jouanna addresses the last enigma to explain how the “surgical strike” against Coligny and his lieutenants turned into a general massacre in the capital and in a dozen cities in the provinces. She starts by returning to some of the themes sounded by the most militant Catholic preachers in the capital such as Simon Vigor, who exclaimed that the Huguenots were dangerous heretics who wanted to kill all the Catholics in the city. Moreover, Vigor assured his listeners, God not only supported but would reward those faithful Catholics who helped rid the city of this dangerous enemy within their midst. At the same time, many Parisian Catholics also came to believe early in the morning hours of 24 August—mistakenly, as Jouanna points out—that it was also the king’s will to rid the city of the heretics. This began perhaps with a miss-hearing or misunderstanding of some of the shouts and voices of those involved in the “surgical strike” against Coligny and his lieutenants. But this notion was certainly reinforced by actions of the personal guards of Charles IX and his brother, the Duke of Anjou, who disobeyed royal orders and continued to seek out Huguenot targets even after they had killed Coligny and his lieutenants as ordered. At the same time, many of the most militant officers in the city’s bourgeois militia, who were instructed to barricade the streets of the capital to prevent any further violence after the “surgical strike,” also disobeyed orders and began randomly looking for Huguenots to kill. Thus, the last enigma dissolves as easily as the first two. Many Parisian Catholics felt threatened and feared for their lives, and they mistakenly believed that it was both God’s and the king’s will that all heretics should be eliminated. So, for Jouanna the “Catholic furies” following on from the murder of Coligny and his lieutenants are no longer an enigma. And while none of these ideas are entirely new—Diefendorf’s *Beneath the Cross* published more than twenty years ago contains a similar narrative—what makes Jouanna’s account so useful is how much more detailed and richer it is than Diefendorf’s short chapter on Saint Bartholomew’s Day, which was not really her main focus. Above all, Jouanna’s account examines all the available primary sources for the reader in a systematic way. And this, in my view, is her primary contribution. Anyone wishing to continue further research on Saint Bartholomew’s Day now can start here and find all the primary and principal secondary sources in one place.

Joe Bergin’s marvelous English translation also deserves praise for bringing this fine book to an Anglophone audience. It doggedly sticks to the meaning of the original French, without dogmatically clinging to a word for word translation. It is to his credit that Bergin did what every translator must do to be successful: he made sure that his translation was in clear and colloquial English, even if it required changes in sentence structure, wording, punctuation, and phrasing. If there is the occasional awkward sounding phrase in English—the translation of two verses of Guy de Faur de Pibrac’s quatrain (p. 165)

being a case in point—in every instance I was unable to come up with anything better than Bergin’s translation. To be sure, Jouanna’s very clear prose is much easier to translate than Pibrac’s verse. Nevertheless, the translation is clearly a success and well worth whatever effort and expense it took to produce it. In fact, the only real quibble I have about the book is the index. It is just a series of undifferentiated page numbers with no help to the reader at all to distinguish what is on those pages. Typical are the entries for Catherine de’ Medici (55 page references), Charles IX (81 page references), and Admiral Coligny (74 page references). It appears that Manchester University Press decided simply to copy verbatim the index in the original French edition and just to change the page numbers, rather than to pay someone to create a new index with sub-headings and cross-references.

This is a minor complaint, however, and I wish to congratulate Arlette Jouanna, Joseph Bergin, and Manchester University Press for making this book available to an English-speaking audience. And if the press could issue a paperback edition, or better yet, an electronic edition, it would attract infinitely more readers.

NOTES

[1] Arlette Jouanna, “La notion d’honneur au XVIe siècle,” *Revue d’histoire moderne et contemporaine* 15 (1968): 595-623.

[2] Arlette Jouanna, *Ordre social, mythes et hiérarchies dans la France du XVIe siècle* (Paris: Hachette, 1977); and idem., *L’Idée de race en France au XVIe siècle et au début du XVIIe*, 2 vols. (Montpellier: Presses de l’Université Paul-Valéry, 1986).

[3] Arlette Jouanna, *Le devoir de révolte. La noblesse française et la gestation de l’État moderne, 1559-1661* (Paris: Fayard, 1989).

[4] Arlette Jouanna, *La France de XVIe siècle, 1483-1598* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1996).

[5] Arlette Jouanna, Jacqueline Boucher, Dominique Biloghi, and Guy Le Thiec, *Histoire et dictionnaire des guerres de religion, 1559-1598* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1998).

[6] Arlette Jouanna, *Le pouvoir absolu. Naissance de l’imaginaire politique de la royauté* (Paris: Gallimard, 2013).

[7] Arlette Jouanna, *La Saint-Barthélemy. Les mystères d’un crime d’État, 24 août 1572* (Paris: Gallimard, 2007).

[8] Barbara B. Diefendorf, “Prologue to a Massacre: Popular Unrest in Paris, 1557-1572,” *American Historical Review* 90 (1985): 1067-1091; as well as her book, *Beneath the Cross: Catholics and Huguenots in Sixteenth-Century Paris* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).

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