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Stuart Carroll, *Martyrs and Murderers: The Guise Family and the Making of Europe*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2009. xv + 345 pp. Maps, genealogical tables, further reading, notes, index. \$34.95 U.S.(cl). ISBN 978-0-19-922907-9.

Review by Kristen B. Neuschel, Duke University.

The Guise (to paraphrase historians of material culture) are good to think *with*. Stuart Carroll has built on his previous studies of the Guise affinity in Normandy and of war and feud in the sixteenth century to retell the political and religious narrative of France in the sixteenth century from the perspective of three generations of the Guise dynasty.[1] If we put the Guises at the center, what does sixteenth-century France look like? Are there any surprises?

Surprises? Perhaps not, but there is a worthwhile shift of perspective. From the vantage point of the Guise dynasty, their self-interest and their activities, the outcomes of the political and religious struggles of the sixteenth century look much more contingent. This is, of course, a by-product of any story told chronologically, with a strong biographical focus. We see the Guise family members making choices in difficult circumstances and we see the factors at play in their lives as well as the overriding fact that the end point of the story was not known to the actors and could have been different. Carroll focuses most intently, for good reason, on the two eldest brothers of the second generation, François, Duke of Guise, the great general assassinated at the end of the first religious war, and Charles, Cardinal of Lorraine, who lived until 1574. The dense narrative that tracks their careers argues, convincingly in my view, that neither man was a Catholic zealot, whatever later generations may have thought. Indeed, through their lives the reader can see that possibilities of religious accommodation, of toleration of private views, à la the Elizabethan settlement, persisted in France for far longer than is ordinarily assumed.

More contingent also are dynastic politics in Carroll's story. The Guise had a foothold on the international (to use an anachronistic term) stage because of their high status, anchored by a claimed descent from Charlemagne and by their geographical power base that straddled French and German territory—a potential new Burgundy. When François' and Charles' elder sister married the king of Scotland, the Guise dynasty's ambitions became tightly linked with English, French and Spanish royal interests as well. All of this is well known, as is the fate of the sister's child, Mary, Queen of Scots. However, Carroll deftly plays off cut and dried (even triumphalist) narratives of Elizabeth's reign to sketch out, in great detail, the Guise efforts to retain their foothold in Scotland even after Mary was shooed out by Presbyterians, and to keep their hand in the game by cooperating with Philip of Spain when it was in their interests.

Along the way, we glimpse the mechanisms by which families such as the Guise managed their property, particularly how ecclesiastical income was used to benefit the family as a whole. We also catch more than a glimpse of the vital role of aristocratic women in maintaining family solidarity and fortunes. Whether the Guises were *unusual* in their solidarity, especially in the ability of individual members to take some of their political cues from the family as a collectivity, as Carroll claims, is undecided in my view. He has, however, drawn a compelling portrait of a successful aristocratic family—that is, of a family that rose to the pinnacle of success in two short generations.

The book is a work of synthesis, in the main. Though there are one or two new archival discoveries, it rests on the solid foundation of the author's prior work on the family. The narrative brings in the work of many other scholars when necessary, concerning such well-researched events or entities as the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre or the Paris Sixteen. Carroll also makes rich use of contemporary narrative sources such as chronicles, and histories, as well as of editions of correspondence, and he is not afraid to make use of the first generations of historians who compiled narratives about these families (and in many cases first edited correspondence). Throughout, Carroll demonstrates formidable control of data and considerable narrative skill. There are portions of this work that constitute the best interpretive summary of an event or a period that I have found in the literature. For example, his outline of the Italian Wars is a model of clarity and his description of the political and religious circumstances towards the end of Henry II's life is both balanced and nuanced.

As rich as the narrative in this work is, given the foundation upon which it rests, it is also frustrating. The way Carroll has chosen to treat his sources is sometimes bothersome. One reads along and then finds a footnote referring one to article X or chapter Y of the author's other work where "full citations for this section are to be found" (p. 171, n.14). It is often necessary, of course, to cite one's own or someone else's work but there are conventions for that sort of thing (which should be honored even when a publisher wants to cut space for footnotes) and this reviewer grew tired of material--above all, direct quotations--that had no attribution. The reader should not be left to wonder, "How does he know that?"

More frustrating for this reviewer were the limits, the frame, Carroll chooses for his narrative. The story ends with a short epilogue about the last members of the male line of Guise--the very last a four-year old boy dead of smallpox in 1675. The days of the Guises at the apex of power were brief. Carroll ends the book arguing that the Guises don't deserve the maligning of which they have been victims. They "opposed the greatest dynasties of their age and, at great personal sacrifice," outlasted many of them in the sixteenth century and, for this reason, "the name of Guise deserves wider recognition" (p. 301).

I would argue that a work as rich as this one deserves a more ambitious frame than the rehabilitation of an aristocratic dynasty. Their personal sacrifice, like that of their peers, was in the cause of themselves and their own power. Their "fall" was no more tragic or precipitous than that of many other great families. I do not care whether Montmorency, Guise or Bourbon are known as individuals except insofar as any individual is known from that world.

I wish, instead, Carroll had spent more time using the Guises as an example of how history is made. He does briefly, in the epilogue, cite some of the literary and historical works of subsequent centuries that succeeded in freighting the Guises (especially François and Charles) with undeserved blame. These sixteenth-century actors, he demonstrates, have been placed in a box by the condescension and judgment of later generations. Elsewhere, Carroll argues that we can connect sixteenth-century events more directly to what came after them; for example, the Estates-General of 1576, of 1588, presage France in 1789 and England in 1640 or 1648. These slim strands could have been wound together to make a stronger argument, not for saving the name of Guise, but for saving ourselves from convenient labels that reduce the past to black and white, good guys and bad guys, revolutionaries and reactionaries, a lesson, it seems, we still need, particularly with regard to the sixteenth century. The Guises are good for doing this "thinking with." With them in clearer view, the sixteenth century is messier, it refuses to stay in a box, and that is a good thing.

## NOTES

[1] Stuart Carroll's previous work includes *Noble Power during the French Wars of Religion: the Guise Affinity and the Catholic Cause in Normandy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University press, 1998) and *Blood and Violence in Early Modern France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

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