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Jean-François Dubost, *Marie de Médicis, La reine dévoilée*. Paris: Éditions Payot, 2009. iv + 1039pp. Index, tables, and bibliography. €30 ISBN 2228903936.

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Historians have dismissed Marie de Médicis, wife of Henri IV, mother of Louis XIII, and regent of France from 1610-1614, as variously inept, irascible, stupid, politically backward, conniving, greedy, and shrill. She has been accused of complicity in her husband's death, stalling the development of state institutions, and being mindlessly devout. Jean-François Dubost's biography aims to refute this generally dim view.

In defending the need for another biography of Marie de Médicis [1], Dubost opens by pointing out that Marie's bad reputation was generated by efforts to associate her with Marie-Antoinette during the French Revolution. Nineteenth-century historians, led by Jules Michelet, continued to assert the connection between foreign queens with Hapsburg origins and political malfeasance. Misogyny, Dubost argues, blinded some historians and led them to count Marie's mistakes without considering the explanatory context.

Proceeding diachronically and synchronically, Dubost seeks to examine Marie's context in full. The first part considers Marie as an Italian princess. The second part takes the examination of her development through her marriage to Henri IV. The remaining sections correspond to Marie's major political shifts: the regency to her disgrace (1610-1617); Concini's death to her definitive exclusion from political power (1617-1631); and her final exile (1631-1642). Within this readily legible political periodization, Dubost treats topics as they emerge and follows them out as necessary. In each section, he takes on different aspects of what he calls the "vulgate" version of her life (p. 10), by which he means the mischaracterizations of Marie de Médicis.

Part I, "Une princesse Florentine (1573-1600)," takes up the issue of Marie's foreign origins. Much of the story of Marie's wedding, her encounters with Henri's mistresses, and the preliminary efforts to incorporate Marie into the Bourbon representational scheme is familiar. While some contemporaries expressed concern about Marie as an Italian, Dubost emphasizes that her interventions on behalf of Italian interests were limited, and she supported her husband's policies such as his practice of conciliating the nobility.

In Part II, "La Fabrication d'une reine (1601-1610)," Dubost rejects claims that Marie was obtuse about the mechanisms of power by documenting Marie establishing herself as a political player despite her status as a foreign woman. With Henri's approbation, Marie created patronage networks beyond her immediate entourage. Dubost points out that complaints about her Italian *serviteurs* were excessive, given the international character of the French court. Marie utilized the usual strategies—godparentage, marriage alliances, "friendship" with *financiers* and magistrates, and support for the clergy—to build her connections. Like most royalty, Marie suffered from a chronic shortage of funds, making

sustained patronage tricky. Criticism that Marie lived beyond her means and resistance to efforts by her to increase her revenues were routine, but Marie managed to establish a remarkably extensive network of clients during the ten years of her marriage (p. 251).

Rather than refute the charge that Marie's personality made her interpersonal relationships difficult, Dubost suggests that her vexed interactions with crown *officiers* and the *Grands* were a product of Marie's Hapsburg heritage. Marie de Médicis had a propensity to seem arrogant, which Dubost attributes to her pride regarding her lineage. Marie's haughtiness was aggravated by her dependence on Leonora Galigai, who many at the French court regarded as scandalously low-born. Dubost sees this attachment as Marie's desire to have a substitute for her deceased mother and absent sister (pp. 130-32). Whether or not the explanation convinces, Dubost does not excuse Marie's displays of bad grace so much as try to understand them.

Dubost is more determined to refute the accusations that Marie de Médicis was a bad mother. The birth of the dauphin on 27 September 1601, followed by two more sons and three daughters by 1609 shored up Marie's position in France. Dubost notes that only Marie gets blamed for being indifferent and absent, when in fact both Henri and Marie had busy lives and neither gave the children a great deal of attention. Dubost offers a double corrective to the usual picture, maintaining that Marie was solicitous regarding the health of her children while Henri brutalized his children and Louis especially (pp. 146-151). Despite Dubost's efforts, Marie still seems more detached from her children compared to other high status women. [2].

Beginning in Part II and recurring throughout, Dubost addresses Marie's contributions to the representational schemes of the monarchy. Royal image makers extolled Marie's procreative service to the realm and deployed her as a supporting player in the heroic mythologies created for Henri IV. Marie as Peace, Justice, Juno, or Astrea made her part of the reconstruction of France after the Wars of Religion. The coronation of the queen the day before Henri IV's assassination was meant to complete her naturalization as a French queen and the *entrée* that was to follow, although never held, emphasized the association of the queen with peace and prosperity. Until her death, Marie encouraged representations that featured her contributions to piety and peace. As scholars before Dubost have noted, the selection of the name "Louis" for the dauphin was meant to recall Saint Louis, and Marie encouraged the analogy of herself with Saint Louis's mother, Blanche of Castille [3]. *La Vie de Marie de Médicis* by Peter Paul Rubens features Marie's desire for peace during her regency. Dubost does not offer a new interpretive frame for the Marie de Médicis cycle, but he does emphasize the need to read the fictional/mythological and the real/historical claims simultaneously in order to understand the narrative intentions of the painter and his patron (p. 657). Dubost does not challenge the criticism that some of the images of Marie were excessive. Marie's claims for female sovereignty, for instance, were very much at odds with contemporary gender norms.

In general, Marie's artistic patronage was more successful than other aspects of her career [4]. Few have disputed that Marie de Médicis was a sophisticated patron. Dubost reaches back to Marie's formative years in Florence and the tradition of Medici art patronage. Poetry, painting, literature, theatre, music, tapestry, embroidery, architecture and building—all received attention from the queen, whose Italian preferences broadened over time to include French ballet and an array of pictorial artists.

Marie's reputation with respect to the arts is generally good; her reputation in religious matters is quite the opposite. Historians have castigated the queen as a *dévo*t too attached to Tridentine Catholicism. Dubost challenges this perception on multiple grounds. Marie remained a convinced Catholic, which was of considerable use to the relapsed and reconverted Henri IV. Marie's performance of Catholic devotions—attendance at mass, local pilgrimages, support for religious orders, promoting candidates for canonization, supporting charities and hospitals, overseeing the dauphin's religious education—marked her daily routine and that was exactly what Henri wanted from his second wife. Marie intervened in

political matters associated with religious matters, such as support for the Jesuits after their expulsion in 1601, only rarely during Henri's lifetime. She accepted Henri's strategy of largely leaving the Protestants alone, only departing from that position when Louis XIII and Richelieu decided to attack the Huguenot stronghold at La Rochelle. Other evidence of her savvy in religious matters comes from her skillful negotiation of politically charged religious statements by the Estates-General in 1614-15. In short, Dubost contends that Marie understood the specificities of French Catholicism far better than she is usually credited.

Furthermore, Dubost emphasizes that Marie's religious views changed over time. Marie became more prudish and inflexible when Pierre de Bérulle emerged as her advisor. His ideas about the obedience that children owed their parents and his proclivity to compare Marie de Médicis and the Virgin Mary encouraged the queen in a dogmatic and rigid direction. (pp. 712, 717, 719). In the 1620s, apologists and artists increasingly foregrounded Marie's piety, enabling zealous Catholics to claim Marie as their own. The queen gradually inhabited the cause, especially when she presented herself in opposition to Cardinal Richelieu.

Dubost makes Marie's political reputation the focus beginning in Part III, "Le Septennat d'une reine (1610-1617)." Dubost narrates the familiar story of Henri's death and Marie's accession as regent, refuting the rumors that Marie was complicit in her husband's murder (pp. 304-8). Dubost dismisses the bad press Marie has received over the duc de Sully's resignation as largely coming from Sully (p. 323). Dubost argues instead that Sully's unprecedented power over royal finances was uncomfortably innovative. Marie regarded her position as conservative in the sense of conserving the resources of the realm for her son, and her ministers, especially Nicolas de Neufville, seigneur de Villeroy, supported this policy. The main threat to Marie's position was the prince de Condé, and here, Marie chose the far less expensive route of printed polemics and negotiated settlement over the costs of war. Marie's decision to pursue the Spanish marriages (Louis XIII to Anne d'Autriche and Elisabeth to the Prince of Asturias) should be regarded as an attempt to cement the peace, Dubost argues, rather than Marie blindly following Spanish diplomatic initiatives [5]. As for charges that Marie wasted the treasure Sully built up, Dubost counters that Marie used those reserves and the comparative buoyancy of the economy to avoid undue tax burdens. Expenses did not get out of hand until the agitation by Condé turned into open warfare in 1616.

If Marie was so adept, why was she summarily dismissed in April of 1617, when Louis XIII and his favorite, the duc de Luynes, engineered a coup against her? Dubost allows that Marie made some mistakes, but he also nuances the received story. Instead of Marie blinded by devotion to Leonora Galigaï and her husband, Concino Concini, Dubost argues that Concini had built up his position skillfully and then used it to effect a break in Marie's political policies as signaled by the arrest of Condé on 1 September 1616. Marie knew about the unpopularity of her favorites, but she allowed Concini to take control. When Marie moved away from her policy preferences, discontent coalesced and enabled the emergence of Louis XIII outside his mother's purview.

The narrative in Part IV, "Le Temps des combats (1617-1630)," reveals something of a pattern in Marie's career: Dubost opens with Marie reconstituting her political position and ends with her defeat. Her difficulties throughout are caused by others. First, Luynes inserted surveillance into her household at Blois and moved Louis XIII's government emphatically away from Marie's policies, especially in ratcheting up pressure on the Protestants (pp. 589, 592-93). Marie responded by putting herself at the head of noble discontent. Brief armed conflicts in 1619 and 1620 altered the political situation: Marie was officially reconciled with Louis and restored to the king's council (albeit to a lesser position and with visibly diminished influence). The key change was the emergence of Richelieu, who, through Marie's efforts, obtained his cardinal's hat. Richelieu encouraged the development of Marie's *dévo*t position, as did Michel de Marillac and his family. Marie appeared ascendant because her *créature*, Richelieu, looked like a reforming minister devoted to fiscal responsibility and developing maritime

commerce. But the differences between Marillac's attempts at reform and Richelieu's are revealing. Marillac envisioned uniformity as part of a *dévo*t program premised on the fundamental corruption of mankind. Marillac insisted on the need for moral reform and obedience to the "natural" hierarchy ordained by God. On these grounds, Marie—long an opponent of military aggression to the Protestants—supported the siege of La Rochelle (p. 738). Richelieu believed in civil obedience, but Marie's *dévo*t reformist position otherwise put her at odds with Richelieu. No matter how much Marie's polemicists reminded Louis XIII that he owed filial devotion to his mother, her efforts to rebuild her position collapsed when she demanded that the king chose between her and Richelieu.

While others—Luynes, Richelieu, Louis XIII—can be blamed to a point, in the end Marie de Médicis did not understand that her political priorities had been replaced for good. Part V, "La Défaite (1630-1642)," opens with the triumph of Richelieu's plans for an aggressive international politics at the expense of internal reform that was confirmed by the Day of Dupes (10-11 November 1630). Unable to change the king's mind, Marie went into exile and tried to arouse the powers of Europe against Richelieu. Her own history complicated her efforts. After Richelieu turned the machinery of state against her clients, Marie encouraged the king's younger brother, Gaston, to rebel. Richelieu countered with propaganda, dismissing Marie as a woman meddling in politics. The monarchy backed up its printed campaign with troops led by Louis XIII, and Marie's military hopes collapsed (pp. 802-3, 811). Richelieu depicted Marie as not merely incompetent, but evil. He blamed her for alleged assassination attempts in 1633, 1634, and 1635. Dubost emphasizes the evidence is extremely scarce to support these charges, while Richelieu's systematic efforts to blacken Marie and all women are obvious (pp. 845-47). Nonetheless, Richelieu succeeded in making sure that Marie's actions—fleeing the realm, consorting with its enemies, and plotting against the king's ministers—were condemned as unforgivable. Conversely, Marie's Spanish and Dutch hosts suspected her of being too attached to France. Marie did not help her cause by running up considerable debts and insisting loudly on notions of fidelity and obedience due to princes. Her ideas ran up against Dutch and English republican sentiments, leading to considerable "reciprocal incomprehension" (p. 839).

Marie never gave up, and in a way, she did return to France. Always expecting that she would be restored, Marie hoped that the Cinq-Mars conspiracy would lead to Richelieu's eclipse, but Cinq-Mars was arrested on 14 June 1642 and Marie died shortly thereafter (3 July). Contemporaries indicated that the ambivalence about Marie de Médicis was a product of own lifetime: Her body was repatriated and buried, as she wished, at Saint Denis, but without the customary solemn service. Casting her as the new Virgin Mary, Mathieu de Morgues made one last pitch to present Marie as more sinned against than sinning, but the extravagance of the conceit undercut his central claim that Marie was humble and sought to serve only her son.

In the end, Dubost's refutation of the charges against Marie must be moderated, and Dubost himself does this. He observes that Marie espoused contradictory ideas in her political beliefs. She insisted on both an absolutist view of the king's authority and a familial model of rule. She expected obedience to the king except when her own circumstances required her to repudiate his authority. Indeed, her repeated efforts to head noble resistance to Richelieu ran smack into the structures and ideologies she had put into place to prevent the eventuality of noble rebellion. With respect to her son, Marie bought into her own propaganda and refused to realize that she and her son had opposing views about the way the monarchy ought to work. With Richelieu, she developed a kind of reaction-formation politics against his when he pulled away from her in 1626. She lost in 1630, Dubost contends, because she could not offer a plausible alternative to Richelieu (p. 872). She was politically reactive, while Richelieu was proactive. Dubost sees the difference as an epistemological break with the Renaissance, a shift from reading the world to analyzing it. But maybe, in a structure of deference and obedience, she just lost sight of the changing political landscape. She was not the first to think some success made success perpetual and a matter of personal will.

## NOTES

[1] The standard biography is Michel Carmona, *Marie de Médicis* (Paris: Fayard, 1981). The collective biography by Simone Berthière, *Les reines de France au temps des Bourbons*, 4 vols. (Paris: Éditions de Fallois, 1996-2000) also includes an extensive account of Marie's life.

[2] See for instance *Medieval Queenship*, ed. John Carmi Parsons (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993) for affective behavior associated with queens across Europe. For early modern France in particular, see Katherine Crawford, *Perilous Performances: Gender and Regency in Early Modern France* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 2004).

[3] Louis Batiffol, *La vie intime d'une reine de France au XVIIIe siècle: Marie de Médicis*, 2 vols. (Paris: Calmann-Lévi, 1931), 1: 56-57 noted the imagery and pronounced it a failure.

[4] Among those with positive assessments of Marie's artistic patronage, see Jacques Thuillier and Jacques Foucart, *Rubens' Life of Marie de' Medici*, trans. Robert Wolf (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1969); Françoise Heilbrun, *Galerie Médicis du Louvre* (Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux, 1977); Susan Saward, *The Golden Age of Marie de' Medici*, Studies in Baroque Art History (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1982); Deborah Marrow, *The Art Patronage of Maria de' Medici* Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research, 1982); and Ronald Forsyth Millen and Robert Erich Wolf, *Heroic Deeds and Mystic Figures: A New Reading of Rubens' Life of Maria de' Medici* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989). Dubost seems to have omitted much English-language scholarship, including Elizabeth McCartney, "A Widow's Tears, A Queen's Ambition: The Variable History of Marie de Médicis's Bereavement," in *Widowhood and Visual Culture in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Allison Levy (Burlington, VT.: Ashgate, 2003), 93-107.

[5] J. Michael Hayden, "Continuity in the France of Henri IV and Louis XIII: French Foreign Policy, 1598-1615," *Journal of Modern History* 45 (1973): 1-23 made the case earlier for Marie de Médicis following distinctively French policy directions during the regency.

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