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Donald A. Bailey, transcriber and editor of Nicolas Lefèvre, sieur de Lezeau, *La vie de Michel de Marillac (1560-1632)*, *Garde des Sceaux de France sous Louis XIII*. Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 2007. 724 pp. Illustrations, maps, tables, appendices, notes, bibliography, and index. \$69.95 CAN. ISBN 978-2-7637-8313-0.

Review by Sharon Kettering, Montgomery College in Maryland.

Surprisingly, there has never been a good critical biography of Michel de Marillac, who was a major political figure during the 1620s, and whose long service to the crown stretched back into the 1580s. We might expect to find heaps of source material on a significant political and administrative career of forty years, but there are only a few scattered sources on Marillac that do not really illuminate or explain the man at all. Marillac remains an historical enigma about whom very little is known. Donald Bailey's transcription of a previously unpublished contemporary life of Marillac, written by his friend and colleague Nicolas Lefèvre de Lezeau, is most welcome for this reason. Bailey has made an important historical source readily available. He writes, "...my life's work became presenting this one manuscript to the public rather than attempting the archival work that the originally intended critical biography of Marillac would have required. This work is dedicated in particular to assist whoever will assume that major undertaking" (p. lxvii). Probably the best critical biography of Marillac currently available is Bailey's introduction to Lezeau's work, and his transcription of the *Vie de Marillac* is one of several recent studies on the little known years of Louis XIII's reign before Richelieu came to power.[1]

Almost certainly Richelieu is the reason for the scarcity of sources on Marillac. Richelieu strongly believed in the need for an official history of France reflecting his own view of issues and events, and so he arranged for his personal papers to become the nucleus of the collection of political and administrative documents now conserved at the Archives des Affaires Étrangères. Gathering and preserving documents he considered necessary to substantiate his views and opinions, Richelieu added numerous other sources, while simultaneously purging and destroying those documents he considered erroneous or misleading, including the papers of his political enemies. Richelieu heartily despised Louis XIII's first favorite, the duc de Luynes, so the only letters of Luynes conserved at the Archives des Affaires Étrangères are those to or from Richelieu, and there are few sources of any kind available there or elsewhere on Marillac. Richelieu's selection of sources dominated the historical literature of his time, and so came to influence later historiography, and his well-developed propaganda machine was able in this way to blacken the historical reputations of the duc de Luynes, Marie de Médicis, and Michel de Marillac, among others.[2] Now, why did Richelieu dislike Marillac so much?

Born into a robe family, Marillac followed his father into the Parlement of Paris to become a councilor in 1586, and a master of requests in 1595. An ardent supporter of the League and a

devout Catholic, he became an early member of Mme Acarie's religious circle at Paris. He soon attracted the attention of Marie de Médicis whose client he became, and his half-brother Louis married a relative of hers, later becoming a marshal and serving with the army in Italy. Marillac worked amicably and closely with Richelieu, another client of the queen mother, on political and administrative affairs for more than ten years. In 1619, Marillac joined the council on financial affairs, and he became a superintendent of finance in 1624. Two years later, he resigned to become Keeper of the Seals. Marillac and Richelieu disagreed on foreign policy in 1628. Marillac opposed French intervention in Italy in the War of the Mantuan Succession, which Richelieu favored, and Marillac wanted peace with Spain, which Richelieu opposed. Marillac was a leading member of the Catholic party at court, whose members were pro-Spanish and included Marie de Médicis. The day after November 11, 1630, the Day of Dupes when Richelieu won his ongoing struggle with the queen mother for control over the king, he removed Marillac from office, sent him first to the fortified château at Caen, and then put him under house arrest at Châteaudun where he died two years later. Richelieu placed Marie de Médicis under house arrest at Compiègne, and she soon fled France for the Spanish Low Countries, while Marillac's half-brother Louis was executed in 1631 for publicly challenging Richelieu's policies. No one contradicted, thwarted, or obstructed Richelieu without suffering penalties and reprisals.

Marillac's biographer Lezeau also came from a robe family, and became a councilor in the Parlement of Paris and a master of requests like his friend. Lezeau was twenty-one years younger than Marillac, whom he admired greatly and whom he praised often. From internal evidence, he wrote his biography during the 1640s, moving chronologically through Marillac's life in twenty-four chapters. The first chapter is entitled, "Of his genealogy," and the second, "Of his offices and commissions." Chapters five through nine are entitled respectively, "Of the little interest he had in riches;" "Of how he spurned vainglory;" "That he found no consolation in earthly things;" "Of his dependence on and confidence in God;" "Of his piety and devoutness." A similar series of chapters describe his government career, and the last seven chapters are on his disgrace, imprisonment, and death. Bailey's introduction explores in detail the religious aspects of Marillac's life, showing how his piety influenced his political career, and he gives a good account of Marillac's famous translation of *The Imitation of Christ* by Thomas à Kempis,

Bailey's transcription of Lezeau's work is based on seven manuscripts in three Paris libraries, and he tells us, "After the initial transcription, we compared the first and last line of every paragraph to ensure that the same text generally obtained, and to note the variants. We more thoroughly explored all versions to verify and complete names of person and places and their spelling" (p. lxiv). Bailey has done a painstakingly careful and thorough transcription, and he explains in some detail the problems and peculiarities of each manuscript. He also correctly describes the stylistic flaws in Lezeau's work as follows, "Granted it is discursive, loosely organized, repetitious, and in the drawn out approach to death, tedious. For the most part, the prose is neither engaging nor translucent..."(p. xxvi). Bailey notes, however, that the biography is a vital source of information on the period as well as on Marillac, and he expresses astonishment that it has not been published before, perhaps in one of the great nineteenth-century collections of published sources. The University of Laval Press deserves praise for publishing the *Vie de Marillac* and making it available at an affordable price.

Bailey provides six useful appendices including a chronology, a Marillac family genealogy, an account of Marillac's travels and sojourns, a list of his extant letters, a list of works by and

about Michel de Marillac, and biographies of nine key personages in his life. Bailey has also provided extensive footnotes, both in numbers, there are hundreds of them, and in length, many are a half-page or longer. He acknowledges their length when he writes, “We hope that some of the following relatively extensive identification will be found helpful by students and scholars alike....More economical footnotes would satisfy many scholars, but we preferred ampler footnotes, which offered interrelated points that will make some persons’ work easier...”(pp. lxviii-lxix). Bailey has, in fact, provided explanations and information about most of the references in Lezeau’s work. He concludes his introduction by observing, “We expect (and hope) that the readership of Lezeau’s *Vie de Marillac* will be both lay and professional, and that a significant number of the professionals will not be historians” (p. lxviii). I am not sure that Bailey’s expectation will be met because this is not a book for everyone, and not everyone will want to read it. It is, however, an invaluable research tool, and Professor Bailey is to be congratulated for having made Lezeau’s *Vie de Marillac* available to all research scholars and others who may want to use it.

NOTES

[1] See Michel Cassan, *La grande peur de 1610* (Paris, 2010); Jean-François Dubost, *Marie de Médicis. La reine dévoilée* (Paris, 2009); Sharon Kettering, *Power and Reputation at the Court of Louis XIII. The Career of Charles d’Albert, duc de Luynes(1578-1621)* (Manchester, 2008); Caroline Bitsch, *Vie et carrière d’Henri II de Bourbon, prince de Condé (1588-1646)* (Paris, 2008); Hélène Duccini, *Faire Voir, Faire Croire. L’Opinion publique sous Louis XIII* (Paris; 2003); *ibid*, *Concini. Grandeur et misère du favori de Marie de Médicis* (Paris, 1991); Joseph Bergin, *The Rise of Richelieu* (New Haven, 1991).

[2] Roland Mousnier, *L’Homme rouge ou la vie du Cardinal de Richelieu* (Paris, 1992), pp. 443-85, “La propagande de Richelieu;” Kettering, *Power and Reputation*, pp. 217-42; Dubost, *Marie de Médicis*, pp. 9-27.

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