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Mack P. Holt, *The Politics of Wine in Early Modern France: Religion and Popular Culture in Burgundy, 1477-1630*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018. xvi + 352 pp. Tables, figures, notes, bibliography, and index. (cl). ISBN 978-1-108-47188-6.

Review by James R. Farr, Purdue University.

It was worth the wait. While Mack Holt was publishing important articles on wine and religion, enlightening book chapters on the meaning of early modern elections, and what is now the standard work on the French Wars of Religion, he was painstakingly and doggedly researching in the Burgundian archives for three decades sources that would produce what has already been acclaimed as a prize-winning monograph (It won the Pinckney Prize recently bestowed by the Society for French Historical Studies).<sup>[1]</sup> This is an unusual professional trajectory, but one that rewards the reader of the book under review with years of accumulated knowledge and wisdom about politics, religion, and material life. Indeed, Holt melds the three together into what he discerns as a homogenous culture. After all, he asserts, contemporaries of the premodern world understood politics, religion, and material life as indissoluble, and so should we.

From this premise, Holt, like many other current historians, rejects the acculturation thesis as top down, and replaces it with an understanding of elite and popular culture as one of extended interaction that, at least for a time, produced the totality and integrated nature of political, social, and religious practices. He seeks to demonstrate through a close and thorough analysis of archival sources that the relationship between them was “symbiotic, with contributions made by those from above as well as below” (p. 5). He has no intention of making “some vague and ambiguous claim of agency for ordinary people, but simply to make their voices heard in places where they are not usually heard” (p. 5).

He finds the late fifteenth and the first seven decades of the sixteenth century in Burgundy a particularly fertile time to demonstrate his argument since it was between Burgundy’s incorporation into the kingdom of France in 1477 and the advent, challenge, and suppression of Protestantism in the sixteenth century that “opened up new avenues for participation in public life by ordinary Burgundians—especially by the vigneron and others of the popular classes in the period of the Wars of Religion” (pp. 5-6). He concludes his book with the story of the eventual exclusion of the popular classes from public life after the Wars of Religion and the encroachment of royal authority into local affairs. Holt thus divides his book into three chronological sections, part one stretching from 1477 to 1560, part two covering the Wars of Religion, c. 1560-1595, and part three spanning the end of the Wars of Religion to 1630.

Part one, “Burgundy after the Valois Dukes (1477 to ca. 1560),” runs 120 pages, and here Holt immediately engages with his argument about the melding of politics, religion, and material life, often in brilliant insightful analyses about elections, lay religious experiences, wine, vigneron, and material life. Chapter one, “Guarding the Gospels: Elections and Politics,” explains how Dijon’s elites forged an alliance and common trust with the popular classes in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. That Holt has spent a career in Dijon’s archives shows on every page, as he deftly mines sources from deliberations of the town council to tax rolls. He is able to show that the vigneron were a major cohort of Dijon’s population, comprising about a quarter of the lay heads of households across most of the sixteenth century, with individuals widely spread across the economic spectrum.

Holt’s analysis really gets going when he brings iconographic analysis into his explanation of the inseparable nature of religion and politics. This is a good, eye-opening interpretation. He emphasizes that the key public symbol of political authority in Dijon was an icon, the Book of the Gospels, a decorated hand-painted image of the first fourteen verses of the gospel of St. John, with the coat of arms of the commune of Dijon at the bottom of each of the two pages of sheepskin that were glued to two hinged pieces of chestnut wood. Significantly, the first six verses of John’s gospel invoke the “vine,” “vinegrower,” “branches,” and “fruit,” and so reinforce in the minds of anyone who looked at the icon that political and religious authority were enfolded together and, in Burgundy, that the material life of viticulture was central to it. Politics were always couched in religious terms and practiced and understood through religious rituals, as when this Book of the Gospels icon was carried in religious processions and, significantly, publicly displayed at the annual mayoral elections.

Holt then turns to a discussion of those elections, and he points out that in the sixteenth century, the popular classes, especially the vigneron, played a prominent and important role in them. These events, says Holt, were not some display of nascent democracy or representative government (the hierarchical structure of political authority and society was never questioned), but rather were events during which “the process of *participating*” was what mattered, for this “conferred honor” on whoever gave their “voice,” not vote, for a particular candidate. “The premodern election,” Holt emphasizes, “was just a metaphor for the ideal harmony that was supposed to exist between the elites, who produced the candidates, and the people...who gave their voices to them” (pp. 34-35). Elections were a ritual, a celebration of political, religious, and social cohesion and harmony.

Vigneron, Holt asserts, were keen to take part in these elections, to participate in a process that conferred honor upon them. And indeed, sources in the municipal archives recording the voices heard at the elections confirm that many were vigneron. Holt leaves unexplained, however, why only a minority of vigneron heads of household actually participated in these elections. He reports that the tax rolls show that there were consistently between five and seven hundred vigneron household heads in Dijon for most of the century, but in elections where he counts vigneron voices, never more than 107 participated, with an annual average of thirty-eight. Even in the religiously charged election of 1561 when a militant Catholic candidate squared off against a Protestant one, 203 vigneron voiced their preferences (188 for the Catholic), yet the tax rolls of that year record 541 vigneron heads of household. Where was the majority of vigneron on election day, and why didn’t they cast their voices? A correlation of names on the tax rolls and names on the election rolls would tell us the economic status of

the vigneron who participated in the election and where they lived. Did they concentrate in St. Michel parish?

In chapter two, “Protected by the Virgin Mary: Lay Religious Experience,” and chapter three, “Beasts in the Vines: Wine and Material Life,” Holt continues his insightful iconographical analysis as he attempts “to see what sixteenth-century Christians would have seen and to try to understand the range of meanings that they might have given to the various images they saw” (p. 55). Quoting Dominique Iogna-Prat, “God became stone” (p. 68) as ecclesiastical monuments were sanctified, and St. Michel parish church in Dijon is a visible testimony to this as well as, again, the intertwining of religion and material life. [2] Rebuilt in the early sixteenth century, the capitals of the columns surrounding the portals of the entry to the church are decorated with pinot noir vines, “a very visible motif anyone, especially a vigneron, would have noticed upon entering the church, placed at eye level” (71). For further evidence of the melding of religion and material life, Holt has discovered that foundations for masses at the parish church were funded by wine futures, paid after the wine harvest each year in wine from a specified parcel of vineyard. One was funded collectively by forty vigneron from one parish, St. Michel, and thirty-three of them lived in the same neighborhood! Holt concludes convincingly that it is “no exaggeration to say that wine sustained [the vigneron] in death as well as in life” (p. 76).

To further cement his argument, Holt points out that in the village of Saint-Romain situated on the slopes planted with vines south of Beaune, in 1619 a new limestone pulpit in their parish church was erected and it, again, visibly connected the faith of the parishioners—overwhelmingly vigneron—with their material life. The staircase of the pulpit was decorated with a grapevine that ran its entire length, and on the vines were depicted the principle beasts that threatened the villagers’ livelihoods. Caterpillars and snails gorged themselves in spring on young vine shoots, followed in June by insects locals called *ecrivains* because the trail they left on the plants resembled handwriting, and then in late summer the fruit fell prey to birds. All lurk on the vines of the pulpit, and their eradication cries out for divine intervention called for from prayers and sermons urged from this very pulpit. One can imagine the response from the vigneron parishioners whose very livelihood depended on such invocations.

In part two, “The Wars of Religion in Burgundy (ca. 1560 to 1595)” (104 pages), Holt shifts his focus more toward political elites and away from material life (although the vigneron continue to make intermittent appearances in his narrative), and his methodology moves away from iconography. In chapter four, “The Reformation in Burgundy,” he asks how Dijon’s mayor, city council, and other municipal elites, along with help from the city’s vigneron, managed to suppress the growth of Protestantism by 1572 and to enforce religious uniformity without significant violence or bloodshed. Vigneron were appalled at the desecration of heretics “swilling down their sacred wine” (p. 143), a direct assault on the eucharist and the community it signified for Catholics and vigneron. They were unsurprisingly drawn to the Confraternity of the Holy Ghost, created by the Lieutenant-General Gaspard de Saulx-Tavanes in 1567 as a militant arm of Catholicism whose express goal was the eradication of Protestantism. Gaspard’s appeal to the vigneron is explicit, made clear in the oath binding its members where God is referred to as “being the vine, vine-shoots, and branches” and by the brotherhood’s pledge to defend “the high and wonderful sacrament of the altar” (pp. 158-59).

Chapter five, “Origins of the Catholic League in Burgundy,” and chapter six “The Collapse of

the League in Burgundy,” provide a close analysis of these topics, but, given Holt’s magisterial book on the Wars of Religion, they hold few surprises to specialists in the field. Of course, when dealing with the League in Burgundy, Holt must confront the ghost of Henri Drouot and his *Mayenne et la Bourgogne*, until now taken to be the authoritative account of the League in Burgundy.[3] Drouot promoted the thesis that avenues of political advancement for the second-tier legal class, whom Drouot dubbed the *bourgeoisie seconde*, suddenly shut down during the Wars of Religion, spurring serious class tension. Joining the League was not a religious decision for them, but rather a way for them to voice their opposition to royal officers in the Parlement, the *bourgeoisie première*, who blocked their upward advancement and who supposedly unanimously backed the crown. The *bourgeoisie seconde*’s seizure of power in and domination of the town council, Drouot asserted, was supposedly their base of leaguer operations. The problem, as Holt demonstrates, is that there is no evidence to support this argument.

In fact, Holt proves that the officers in the Parlement were split between League and king, with even a majority breaking with the king to support Mayenne and the Hotel de Ville. Moreover, it can be proven archivally that men trained in the law did not dominate the city council at the time of the League. Drouot is simply mistaken to draw a sharp distinction between Leaguers and royalists that really was much more ambiguous at the time. Many families, Holt proves, may have split during the League, but many leaguer and royal families were linked by marriage and clientage and remained in contact and even attempted to help one another, notably in defense of property. “What all this shows,” Holt forcefully concludes, “is that the split between Leaguers and royalists in Dijon was neither the greedy social-climbing struggle that Drouot claimed it was, nor even the stark ideological and religious confrontation that many liberal historians of the nineteenth century made it out to be....[T]he situation in Dijon shows that a large group of moderates on both sides actually had quite a lot in common and strived to maintain various means of interaction and communication between the two groups. It is also clear that families that were divided during the League with members in both groups tended to make up the leadership of these moderate factions” (p. 233).

In part three, “From *Foy de Bourgogne* to Absolute Monarchy (1595-1630)” (seventy-four pages), and the two chapters that fall within it (chapter seven, “The Contraction of Popular Politics and Catholic Reform,” and chapter eight, “The Crown, The Magistrates, and The People: The Lanturelu Riot of 1630”) the focus remains largely on high politics (the relationship between municipal elites and the crown), but the vigneron, who were victims of a contraction of popular politics during this period, make one final, dramatic appearance in Holt’s narrative. Holt’s primary objective in this part is to gain a better understanding of how absolute monarchy worked in practice. He contrasts the propaganda of unfettered royal power with the practice of negotiation and collaboration between king and ruling provincial elites in defense of mutual interests, and in the process, he supports James Collins’ thesis that the idea of the state as a commonwealth defending the public interest was jettisoned in favor of a state with the king’s interest at the center.[4]

As the “absolute” state gained ground, vigneron in particular and the popular classes in Dijon in general ceased to play any meaningful part in it. The first nail in the popular coffin was the crown’s order in 1611 that there be a property qualification to vote in the mayoral election, which excluded most vigneron and artisans and “terminat[ed] the idealized fiction of elections functioning as a ritual of binding the community together as a whole” (p. 251). The crowning

blows came in 1629 and 1630. First, during the Royal visit to Dijon in 1629, Louis XIII broke with custom and the idea of the “monarchie republicaine” and France as a commonwealth when he refused to pledge “to maintain the city and its citizens in all their traditional privileges, liberties, and franchises” (p. 289). This was followed by Louis’ attempt to convert Burgundy into a *pays d’élection* from the current *pays d’état* in an effort to centralize taxation. Then a rumor spread in town that the tax on wine brought into Dijon for sale would be increased. All of this occurred just as the economic fortunes of the vigneron were declining (as Holt demonstrates again with a fine bit of archival analysis into economic factors like wildly fluctuating wholesale prices recorded regularly by the town council), setting off rioting known as Lanturelu in February 1630.

The city militia was slow to suppress the riot, giving the impression the elites of the city were sympathetic to the rioters, who were mostly vigneron and some artisans. Holt shares the opinion of William Beik that the riot in fact was most likely planned by elites opposed to royal encroachments into local politics, and who probably encouraged its outbreak.[5] If this is so, the elites must have had some kind of connections and influence with the popular classes, a further demonstration of the homogenous culture Holt is confident existed between high and low. Louis thought so, too, and in the aftermath of the riot he threatened to punish the city by depriving it of all of its traditional privileges and even razing its walls. Ultimately, however, Louis abandoned his plan to convert Burgundy into a *pays d’élection*, and no new taxes on wine were imposed. In this sense it might seem that the vigneron won, but in fact Holt concludes that they “were...the biggest losers...[for they were] forbidden from participating at all in the mayoral elections” (p. 316) This was the final nail in the coffin of vigneron participation in the public affairs of the city, so that “by 1630 the heyday of the vigneron was in the past” (p. 317).

One might quibble that the promise of the book’s title that it will be about the “politics of wine” may be a bit misleading, but regardless, Holt’s book is a remarkable study in so many ways. He brings the popular classes into the political narrative of early modern politics in unprecedented fashion, and, as promised, melds politics, religion, and material life in ways many of us have sensed but never proved so convincingly. His insights into the meaning of images and their connection to material life are penetrating, illuminating, and innovative, and he constantly demonstrates a deep familiarity with the archives and the monumental remains of the sixteenth century in the twenty-first. His knowledge of current historiography in all the areas he covers is unrivalled, and he deftly integrates his narrative into it. No one knows sixteenth-century France better than Mack Holt, and this prize-winning book is ample testimony to that.

## NOTES

[1] “Wine, Community and Reformation in Sixteenth-Century Burgundy,” *Past and Present* 138 (February 1993): 58-93; “Wine, Life and Death in Early Modern Burgundy,” *Food and Foodways: Explorations in the History and Culture of Human Nourishment* 8 (Fall 1999), 73-98; “Popular Political Culture and Mayoral Elections in Sixteenth-Century Dijon,” in Mack P. Holt, ed., *Society and Institutions in Early Modern France* (Athens, Ga: University of Georgia Press, 1991): 98-116; and *The French Wars of Religion, 1562-1629* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn., 2005).

[2] *Maison Dieu: Une histoire monumentale de l’Eglise au Moyen Age* (Paris: Seuil, 206), p. 443.

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[3] Henri Drouot, *Mayenne et la Bourgogne: Etude sur la Ligue (1587-1596)*, 2 vols. (Dijon: Bernigaud et Privat, 1937).

[4] James B. Collins, *The State in Early Modern France*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn., 2009); and *La Monarchie republicaine: Etat et société dans la France moderne* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 2016).

[5] William Beik, *Urban Protest in Seventeenth-Century France: The Culture of Retribution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 126-133.

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