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Martin Kitchen, *The Dominici Affair: Murder and Mystery in Provence* (Lincoln, NE: Potomac Books, 2017). xix + 322 pp. Notes, bibliography, and index. \$34.95 U.S. (hb). ISBN 9781612349459.

Review by Aaron Freundsuh, The City University of New York, Queens College.

The Dominici Affair is an informative microhistory. Martin Kitchen, a prolific historian of modern Germany and Professor Emeritus at Simon Fraser University, provides an intimate view of a provincial family whose name became synonymous with an enigmatic triple homicide in postwar France. One does not envy Kitchen the task of sifting through all the conflicting testimony and hypotheses that were assembled to explain the deaths of Sir Jack Drummond, his wife, Anne, and their young daughter, Elizabeth. The bodies were found near the Dominici residence outside of the town of Lurs (located in the region known today as the Alpes-de-Hautes-Provence) in August 1952. Kitchen retraces the investigative steps that kept this tragedy in the headlines for many months. Targeting a readership beyond the academy, this is the first authoritative account of the Dominici case written in English. Although the prose can be laborious and repetitive, those in search of an exhaustive factual accounting of the Dominici dossier need look no further.

At the heart of the case stood Gaston Dominici, an aging goatherd and throwback to the *fin des terroirs* chronicled by Eugen Weber. Dominici's grasp of the French language was approximative. At home, he spoke the local patois and ruled over a large and acrimonious clan. His family's descent commenced soon after the Drummonds, British tourists fatigued by a long drive, parked their car on the shoulder of a road situated within earshot of the Dominci home. The Drummonds had hoped to sleep through the night and recommence their summer holiday in the morning. Jack and Anne were gunned down at close range and Elizabeth bludgeoned to death. There was no obvious motive for the crime. Gaston Dominici was betrayed by his own brood, and a protracted family crisis began to unfold in the public eye. Dominici admitted to having killed the Drummonds (though he would subsequently change his mind). The press styled him the "Monster of Lurs."

The Dominici Affair never quite gains an interpretive purchase on the case in question. The introductory chapter asserts that in the years following Gaston Dominici's conviction, the peasant murderer was "nostalgically transformed into the dignified patriarch of a bygone era." The author asks how this "extraordinary metamorphosis from fiend to innocent peasant" occurred (pp. xiv-xv). There are subsequent allusions to this transformation, as when Kitchen supposes that a public "rehabilitation" (p. 265) of Dominici took place as "attitudes began to change" (p. 264) by the early 1970s. But there is not enough evidence here to show that such a

transformation ever occurred. Kitchen cites a pair of unremarkable films (one of them made for TV in 2003); some occasional, conspiracy-minded reporting; the barely audible claptrap of small-time crooks and amateur publicity seekers; and the protestations of certain members of the Dominici clan. A shared notion of Gaston Dominici as “innocent” in this case, whether one means this either literally or figuratively, has never really taken hold in France.

Dominici was granted early release from prison in old age and he died in 1965, still very much a social outcast and a murderer in the eyes of the law. (His conviction has never withstood a serious challenge in court.) To be fair, investigative sloppiness and irregularities did mar the case against him. Kitchen does a good job of cataloguing the missteps and oversights, including the careless treatment of the crime scene. Incompetence in matters of procedure erode the public’s faith in the justice system, leaving it vulnerable to charges of a miscarriage of justice. All the same, Kitchen himself is on the mark in his uniform dismissal of the occasional conspiracy theory trumpeting Dominici’s innocence.

The author makes a problematic claim relative to Dominici’s supposed makeover, suggesting that it occurred “largely due to the transformation of postwar France from an essentially rural to a postindustrial society and the gradual romanticization of rural life” (p.xix). The period did usher in another wave of French modernization (Kitchen mentions mass consumption, immigration, colonial collapse, and industrialization) that accelerated the decline of subsistence farmers like Dominici: agribusiness took over for the smallholder. The defeat of the peasantry had as an effect the alteration of negative stereotypes of peasants, making all but inevitable the stark revision of Gaston Dominici’s reputation as a “brute” (p. xvi). Writes the author: “In such an atmosphere it is hardly surprising that there was nostalgia for a past when many imagined life was simpler and less stressful, values were secure, and people were authentic” (p.xviii). But the nostalgic cultural imagery of French peasants might not have so neatly applied to a highly unrepresentative matter like Dominici’s. Unfortunately, little traction has been gained by the time this observation reappears, almost verbatim, near the end of the book: “In such an atmosphere, it is hardly surprising that there was a widespread hankering after the good old days when it appeared that life was simpler, values more secure, and people more honest and authentic” (p. 272).

Given all that is made of Dominici’s metamorphosis at the outset, it is striking that the intervening twelve chapters of *The Dominici Affair* have so little to say about the years that followed Dominici’s conviction, that is, the period during which the French public would have reassessed its view of the man. The bulk of the book rehearses the halting official investigation of the murders, the public uproar, and the trial. Along the way, the author gets mired in officials’ efforts to make sense of the Dominici clan’s inconsistencies, lapses, contradictions, prevarications, confessions, retractions, and sundry circumlocutions.

Published by Potomac Books, the University of Nebraska’s commercial imprint, *The Dominici Affair* is labeled “History” and “True Crime” and bears a blurb from Sarah Maza, another senior historian who came recently to true crime. The book musters little in the way of narrative momentum, yet it is to be commended for the space it grants to the murder victims, who are sometimes treated in too cursory a fashion in true-crime histories. Several books have been published on the Dominici case, but this is the first to present a complete picture of the Drummonds, an admirable family whose attraction to France renders this story all the more disturbing.

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