

H-France Review Vol. 7 (May 2007), No. 52

Mark W. Konnert, *Local Politics in the French Wars of Religion. The Towns of Champagne, the Duc de Guise, and the Catholic League, 1560-95*. Aldershot and Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate, 2006. 300 pp. Maps, acknowledgements, bibliography, and index. n.p. ISBN 0-0-7546-5593-8.

Review by Mark Greengrass, University of Sheffield.

Mark Konnert's first book examined how the city councilors of Châlons-sur-Marne, one of the smaller walled towns of Champagne, did their best to protect the city from the ravages of the civil wars that beset France in the second half of the sixteenth century. Far from dancing to the tune of the aristocratic factional leaders of the time, they sought to protect their locality (including the Huguenots within their community) from persecution imposed from without and division from within, to preserve themselves and their citizens from military incursion or depredatory garrisons, and defend their privileges against the demands for higher royal taxation. Konnert defined this as a "civic agenda" and placed it in the longer traditions of the *bonnes villes* of the later Middle Ages, as expounded by Bernard Chevalier. In the second book, Konnert's objective is to see to what degree this analysis holds good for other towns in Champagne in a similar period.

Ten towns (besides Châlons itself) provided the basis for the comparison. The surviving records of their town deliberations or correspondence is patchy, and one senses Konnert's frustration as he tries to analyze the comparative political trajectories of these communities when for some of them (St-Dizier, for example) there is so little to go on. Konnert does not attempt a complete reconstitution of the social and economic fabric of each of the locations in question, but he does provide (chapter one) a coherent comparative framework of the landscape, communications and political geography of the region in which they are situated, supported by six very well-prepared and carefully drawn maps of Champagne. He investigates (chapter two) the particularities of each town's constitution and privileges—although one is left on one's own to surmise that the overall size of Champagne's urban notability was rather small—in the low hundreds—and perhaps lacked the institutional and even social means to act as a *bloc*.

Only implicitly, too, does Konnert sketch out one of the building blocks of his analysis—a distinction between what he sees as the "rigidity" of the municipal structure of Troyes as compared with the "flexibility" of Châlons, with Reims somewhere in between. The point here seems to be that the civic constitution of Troyes required there to be regular elections to about 120 notables of the city, whereas elsewhere elections were something of a rarity. Elections opened the door to dissension, religious and otherwise, and risked dividing the city's notables. Lack of elections, on the other hand, made the selection of urban notables more open to aristocratic influence from without (and Konnert's analysis on the growing strength of Guise influence in Champagne is one of the strength of this work). Either way, the coherent pursuit of a "civic agenda" in the circumstances of civil war was fraught with difficulty.

In the remainder of the book, Konnert traces the political actions and reactions of these urban communities through the civil wars. How well does his initial analysis of the "civic agenda" of Châlons stand up to comparative scrutiny? Although he does not say so in the conclusion, the reality seems to be that it does not. There are good examples, it is true, of urban notables dodging and diving, attempting to protect their communities from religious divisions, from the worst of depredations of troop movements across Champagne, and from the consequences of ending up wrong-footed in the period of the League. But there are even stronger examples of aristocratic Guise influence, holding Reims (an

ecclesiastical and civic Guise fiefdom in all but name), determining affairs in St-Dizier and Chaumont, attempting to do so (albeit with less success) at Mézières and Epernay. And, throughout the book, Konnert struggles to come to terms with Troyes, a larger and more complex political entity altogether.

Here is where the weaknesses of this study emerge most clearly. They emerge partly because the term "local politics" is never examined critically and, by default, is interpreted over-narrowly. Indeed, rather disarmingly, in the conclusion, Konnert distances himself from the whole concept, the distinction between local and national politics being "in many ways artificial and potentially misleading" (p. 266). To examine local politics in Troyes, for example, would have meant much closer attention to the "sub-political" groups and influences in the town. The evidence exists here in profusion—for example the large collection of *doléances* from the city's guilds for the estates general of Blois in 1576-7. But even the classic article by Jean-Marie Constant, analyzing this material, is not in Konnert's bibliography.[1] It would also have meant scrutinizing the public life of these urban communities more carefully—their civic militias, civic culture, festivals, commemorations, processions and sermons. "Local politics" is conceived here as aristocratic, factional politics, as the relationship of one community's notables upwards to the crown's representatives in the province, and most notably, the Guises. Konnert therefore only tangentially refers to, and does not interrogate the evidence for, the relationships *between* these towns, how they keep one another regularly informed of what is happening widely, but also (when it is politic to do so) of their own decisions. In short there is a *lateral* politics as well as *sub-politics* which is missing from this volume.

At a technical level, this is a volume not without its flaws, too. There are several recent editions of documents which Konnert fails to cite or use.[2] The author has not been well-served by his sub-editor and proof-reader either. Terms in French were inaccurately rendered or accentuated curiously (*bailliage* (p. 58); *élection* (p. 63); *receveur* (p. 88); into the bibliography. But the latter is a sign of how much material Konnert has found, and absorbed, on these diverse Champagne communities. We now understand, thanks to Konnert's work, much more clearly, in what sort of urban environments aristocratic clienteles functioned best in the tangled circumstances of civil war in later sixteenth century France.

NOTES

[1] J.-M. Constant, "Le langage politique paysan en 1576: les cahiers de doléances des bailliages de Chartres et de Troyes", in *Représentation et vouloir politique autour des États-Généraux de 1614*, eds., Roger Chartier and Denis Richet (Paris: Éditions de l'École des Hautes Études, 1982).

[2] E.g. P.-E. Leroy, ed. *Chronique de Troyes et de la Champagne (1524-1594) par Nicolas Pithou, sieur de Chamgobert*, 2 vols., *Centre troyen de recherches et d'études: Sources d'histoire (I)* (Reims: Presses Universitaires de Reims, 1998); L. Bourquin, ed. *Mémoires de Claude Haton*, 2 vols., in prog., *Collection de document inédits sur l'histoire de France (Histoire Moderne)* (Paris: Éditions du Comité des Travaux historiques et scientifiques, 2001-3).

Mark Greengrass University of Sheffield M.Greengrass@sheffield.ac.uk

Copyright © 2007 by the Society for French Historical Studies, all rights reserved. The Society for French Historical Studies permits the electronic distribution for nonprofit educational purposes, provided that full and accurate credit is given to the author, the date of publication, and its location on the H-France website. No republication or distribution by print media will be permitted without

permission. For any other proposed uses, contact the Editor-in-Chief of H-France.

H-France Review Vol. 7 (May 2007), No. 52

ISSN 1553-9172