Booknotes

S. Annette Finley-Croswhite. *Henry IV and the Towns: The Pursuit of Legitimacy in French Urban Society, 1589–1610*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999. Pp. 219.

More than 30 years ago the American historian J. Russell Major argued that Henri IV, as he reestablished monarchical authority in a kingdom ravaged by 35 years of intermittent civil war, aimed not at absolutism but at the restoration of the “Renaissance monarchy” of Louis XII and François I^{er}. This relatively short, well-organised study by his last doctoral student reprises his thesis by looking specifically at Henri’s relations with the cities, whose councils in many instances had resisted his claim to the throne or in others had supported him as the leader of the Huguenot cause. His conversion in 1594 undercut the position of both, and Finley-Croswhite shows how he endeavoured to bring them into cooperative relations with him despite their suspicions. Moving chronologically and thematically, while employing a number of case studies of individual cities and their relationships with the Crown, Finley-Croswhite provides a great deal of evidence which demonstrates the king’s willingness to coopt the support of former opponents and his reluctance, in most instances, to alter traditional modes of governance. At times the book understates Henri’s intrusions and innovations; for example, his ending of the right of the town council of Poitiers to appoint its militia in order to give the privilege to Sully should have been presented as a clear example of royal authoritarianism. While the discussions of urban geography in Amiens and of city finances in Lyon might have been more clearly developed, in most instances the case studies provide substantial and convincing evidence of Henri’s unprogrammatic pragmatism. A number of unnecessary repetitions, grammatical and spelling errors (e.g. “sight” for “site”) and one major error of fact (Calvin was not from Poitiers) suggest that the editor could have been more attentive, but this situation seems only too regularly to be the case with many recent books.

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