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## Review of Hilary Bernstein, Historical Communities

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limits of the evidence; in this respect, he has perhaps been as meticulous as was de Foix in separating verifiable fact from rumour and speculation.

The documents edited here run from February 1562 to May 1566 and include de Foix's short discourses and correspondence with Mary Queen of Scots, Charles IX, Catherine de Medici, the King of Navarre, William Cecil, Robert Dudley and others. We find candid assessments of Queen Elizabeth, the state of religion in England (as well as France), Catherine de Medici's hostility to Anglo-Scottish rapprochement (especially considering Mary Queen of Scots and the succession), mercantile affairs and complaints, and wider European developments. These documents are of broad interest to a wide range of scholars—even those not explicitly focussing on French affairs. For example, de Foix's observations on the efforts for a marriage match between Elizabeth and Archduke Charles of Austria demonstrate the fact that much of Europe had its eyes on its most eligible bachelorette and knew the activities of the imperial ambassador, Adam von Zwetkovich.

Assembling this collection for a vital moment in Anglo-French relations, when both civil war broke out in France and France declared war on England, is a real triumph, especially considering the patchy nature of LAubespine's archive, so noting quibbles seems uncharitable. Nevertheless, for greater accessibility, some readers may have wished to see a brief abstract in English for each document, along with more frequent footnotes and a more thorough index, but this would have further elongated an already hefty volume; Germanists may have liked to see use made of Kurt Diemer's doctoral thesis, 'Die Heiratsverhandlungen zwischen Königin Elisabeth I. von England und Erzherzog Karl von Innerösterreich 1558–1570', but one cannot ask for everything. We can, however, look forward to whatever David Potter has in store next.

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*Historical Communities: Cities, Erudition, and National Identity in Early Modern France.* By Hilary Bernstein. Leiden: Brill. 2021. 436 pp. €149. ISBN 978 90 04 42646 7.

Urban histories written in early modern France have long received a bad press. Perceived by scholars as the work of antiquarian authors more interested in praising the monarchy than in carrying out meticulous research, they often have been dismissed as untrustworthy, or at best been used as footnote material. As Hilary Bernstein admits in the preface to her book, this was also her initial impression of the genre: 'I did not set out to write a book on French urban histories in the early modern period. To be frank, I originally found these local histories tedious'. Bernstein's wonderful study of these histories demonstrates, however, that her initial misgivings—and those of previous generations of historians—are entirely unfounded. Urban histories may not be the dazzling works of scholarship that we associate with savants such as Jacques-Auguste de Thou and Dom Mabillon, but Bernstein makes a convincing case to take these local works more seriously.

Her argument in *Historical Communities* is threefold. First, urban histories played a significant role in the development of local identities—what Bernstein calls 'historical communities'. They allowed local elites—in particular royal officials, lawyers, and

clerics—to define the importance of their city as rooted in the past and thus deserving of privileges in the present. Second, Bernstein argues that urban histories were ‘a significant site for the practice of erudite history’. Local historians were in fact deeply interested in documentary evidence and weighing facts, while prominent Parisian scholars in the Republic of Letters relied on local correspondents to supply them with information and primary sources, especially because public archives did not yet exist. In this sense, too, practitioners of urban history constituted ‘historical communities’: informal networks of correspondents exchanging information about the past. Bernstein’s third and final point is that these exchanges—and the local histories that were the result—fostered a wider understanding of France. Authors from all corners of the kingdom presented themselves as French by connecting local events to a shared past, whether Gallic, medieval or more recent. Given that early modern France was a conglomerate of territories that can hardly be defined a nation-state, Bernstein wisely avoids the term ‘nationalism’, opting instead for the emergence of ‘national sentiment’ and ‘national identity’.

A great example of this interaction between local history-writing and national imagination was the project initiated by the humanist scholar François de Belleforest, discussed in Chapter 3. To write his *Cosmographie universelle* (1571), a comprehensive history of all French towns, Belleforest solicited information from local city councils, scholars and clerics, many of which he knew personally or through the Republic of Letters. Responses soon poured in, while his call for papers stimulated local research and the publication of urban histories in subsequent decades. Belleforest’s main goal was to demonstrate that the French were a unified people who descended from the Gauls, but he required local histories to prove that cities were founded by the Gallic kings prior to the arrival of the Romans.

Chapter 4 explores such origin stories in more detail. Bernstein shows that authors were keen to situate the foundation of their city in the Gallic period, even when it was apparent that such stories were based on myth and speculation. Lyon, for instance, was founded as a Roman colony in 43 BCE, but this did not prevent local historians such as Guillaume Paradin to claim it had been a vibrant Gallic city prior to the arrival of the Romans. As Chapter 6 argues, the Gauls proved useful to urban historians because they could be cast as forefathers of the French, while at the same time each Gallic people retained its local customs (as described by ancient authors), allowing authors to tie them to local cities of regions. In celebrating this imagined and shared Gallic past, urban histories thus contributed to broader notions of what it meant to be French.

However, as Bernstein reminds us in Chapters 8 and 9, the writing of urban history did not necessarily produce consensual historical communities. In 1624, for example, tensions arose when André Duchesne, a Parisian royal historiographer, was contracted to finish an urban history of Reims after the local historian Nicolas Bergier died before he could publish his notes. The city’s municipal council financed Duchesne’s work, hoping he would extoll their long-standing independence and condemn the attempts of the archbishops to enlarge their authority over the inhabitants of Reims. The cathedral chapter obviously took issue, and fearing an unfavourable history refused Duchesne access to its archives. He eventually abandoned the project, chafing at the city elders for pushing him to take sides in what he saw as an impartial historical endeavour.

Chapter 9, finally, surveys how historians struggled to discuss the Wars of Religion that had divided urban communities by faith after the Reformation. Many cities had also openly defied the crown, either under Protestant rule or during the period of the Catholic League. As Bernstein shows, some authors avoided the wars altogether,

often for personal reasons. Claude Rubys, for example, had been instrumental in the St Bartholomew's Day Massacre that occurred in Lyon, which explains why in his *Histoire véritable de la ville de Lyon* (1603) he barely mentioned this episode. Local historians who did broach the wars either condemned the violence or sought to reinterpret wartime events. François Le Maire's history of Orléans, first published in 1645, roundly condemned the massacre of 1572, but this earned him the reproach of two local historians, who criticized Le Maire for relying on Protestant sources, and for failing to understand that King Charles IX had authorized the killings (a dubious claim at best).

This review cannot do justice to the many urban histories discussed by Bernstein, so I can only hope that readers will pick up a copy of *Historical Communities* to discover the wealth of local history-writing that permeated the French kingdom. Bernstein has written a deeply erudite work that succeeds brilliantly in putting the undervalued genre of urban histories back on the map, and in drawing attention to the learned interactions that shaped both local and national identities in early modern France.

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*The Creation of the French Royal Mistress: From Agnès Sorel to Madame du Barry.* By Tracy Adams and Christine Adams. University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press. 2020. 248 pp. £13.95. ISBN 978-0-271-08598-2.

*The Creation of the French Royal Mistress: From Agnès Sorel to Madame du Barry* examines the development of the role of the French royal mistress in politics and court life from 1444 to 1774. Using an interdisciplinary approach, authors Tracy Adams and Christine Adams argue that while mistresses were certainly a feature of other realms, their role in diplomacy and court life was unique to France. While much has been written about queens and about individual mistresses, this study is overarching in both its theoretical arguments and in its ambitious examination of nine mistresses, including Agnès Sorel, Anne de Pisseleu d'Heilly, Diane de Poitiers, Gabrielle D'Estrées, Françoise Louise de La Baume Le Blanc, Françoise d'Aubigné, Jeanne-Antoinette Poisson and Jeanne Bécu. Using Fernand Braudel's theory concerning the role of long- and medium-term structures combined with short-term events in interpreting the past, the authors posit that the role of the royal mistress was distinct from, if tied to, the role of the queen regent. The preconditions or long-term structures that they posit include the broad assertion that women were considered intellectually equal but legally inferior to men, and the theatricalization of the royal court; the medium-term ('recurring but not fundamental') structure is the role of the typically male royal mignon, or court favourite. The French royal mistress, they argue, becomes possible at the intersection of these structures. While not all French courts in the early modern period included a royal mistress, those that did involved a charismatic mistress and a king who was willing to be advised by a woman.

In the brief introduction, the authors discuss the notion of men and women as complementary to one another. They explain, 'Political theoretician Christine de Pizan (1365–1431) gives the first self-conscious articulation of the principle, foregrounding the "natural" differences between men and women while insisting that women could perform as well as men in all things'. As early as the fourteenth century, France also