

*Voir Gaston de Foix (1512–2012): Métamorphoses européennes d'un héros paradoxal.* Joana Barreto, Gabriele Quaranta, and Colette Nativel, eds. *Histoire de l'art* 22. Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2015. 256 pp. €23.

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One of the more elusive characters in early modern French history is Gaston de Foix, Duke of Nemours (1489–1512). The son of King Louis XII's sister, Marie d'Orléans, and a descendant of Gaston Phébus, Count of Foix, celebrated in Froissart's *Chronicles*, Gaston was brought up at the French court and became a protégé of Louis XII, who brought him along on his Italian campaigns, made him governor of Dauphiné, and then

put him in charge of the Duchy of Milan in 1511. Despite being someone who, as the Italian commentator Guicciardini put it, was “a general before he was a soldier,” Gaston proved a dynamic leader, sorting out problems along the Swiss frontier late in 1511. Then in the space of a few weeks in early 1512 he raised the siege of Bologna, stormed Brescia, and defeated a Spanish army at Ravenna, only to get himself killed while pursuing the defeated enemy. As dramatic as his public career was, it was also poorly documented, leaving it to commentators and artists to assess and depict him in an assortment of ways that have to do as much with their own agendas as with any sort of verifiable reality. As such, he makes an excellent subject for the study of historical memory. The essays in this volume, which grew out of a Franco-Italian colloquium inspired by the 500th anniversary of his death, examine memories of Gaston de Foix from literary, national, and artistic perspectives.

Contemporary accounts of Gaston’s career are few and far between. He did not leave much of a paper trail himself beyond a few official communications, and he died so quickly that most of the oldest surviving descriptions and accounts of him are from poems lamenting his death. Laurent Vissière, author of an essay in this volume on this poetry, focuses heavily on a long, unpublished anonymous poem that is included as an appendix to the book. The poem, he concludes, has less to do with Gaston as with preparing the way for France’s new king and military hero, François, who took the throne shortly after Gaston’s death. Collectively, the poems and the few prose accounts from contemporary French and Italian authors who had met Gaston or had knowledge of his campaigns created ambivalent impressions of the young prince. While he had been undeniably successful, his successes had come at great cost, especially at Brescia, where his soldiers massacred civilians after the town surrendered, and at Ravenna, where he had broken the Spanish position by charging and capturing their artillery at the cost of many French knights and noblemen. The Spanish and their Italian allies, while defeated, had enough military resources to renew the campaign and chase the French out, erasing most of whatever glory Gaston had won.

The ambivalence in the early sources carried over into later depictions of Gaston in French historical works. Here Gaston seems to have moved in and out of the French national memory, at times appearing as a great hero who met a tragic end, and at others as a bloodthirsty warrior with little concern for the consequences of his actions. Among nineteenth-century historians, for instance, Michelet lionized him, and Sismondi presented him as the epitome of the arrogant aristocrat. In periods when Louis XII was presented as a model king due to his reputed concern for the welfare of his people, Gaston tended to appear positively, if mostly as an adjunct to his uncle. In other periods, he received little attention at all, or was overshadowed by contemporaries like Bayard, a noble hero from the same era with a longer track record to write about.

On the artistic side, it is not clear that anyone ever painted Gaston’s portrait, and physical descriptions of him from contemporaries offer little detail, leaving it largely to artists’ imaginations to determine what he looked like. Laure Fagnart’s essay focuses on the portrait traditionally associated with Gaston, by the Italian painter Giovanni

Girolamo Savoldo; demonstrates that the association developed relatively late; and finds no indication that the portrait was of Gaston at all. Gabriele Quarante examines a number of other portraits and likewise finds no direct connections to Gaston, despite stories that he somehow found time to sit for Giorgione in the midst of his campaign. In the final essay in the volume, Joana Barreto argues that the very lack of information on Gaston's appearance made it that much easier to adapt him to whatever purposes artists chose to employ him.

Collectively, the essays in this volume sum up most of what there is to know about Gaston de Foix, which in the end is not all that much. Despite the fact that the authors seem to have read each others' works and sometimes draw on their colleagues' findings effectively, the sources on Gaston are so few that there is a good deal of repetition from one essay to the next. Students of historical memory will likely find this volume to be an interesting case study, but those more interested in Gaston's actual life and career will get much less out of it.

James R. Smither, *Grand Valley State University*