

Valérie Leclerc Lafage. *Montpellier au temps des troubles de Religion: Pratiques testamentaires et confessionnalisation (1554–1622)*.

Vie des Huguenots 52. Paris: Honoré Champion Éditeur, 2010. 512 pp. index. append. tpls. map. bibl. €122.88. ISBN: 978-2-7453-1877-0.

Montpellier au temps des troubles de Religion: Pratiques testamentaires et confessionnalisation (1554–1622), as its subtitle indicates, is a study of wills, in the style made famous by Michel Vovelle, here used to study confessionalization. The book, although based on one city and a single kind of source, is remarkably rich and elegantly written. It merits a wide readership among scholars of early modern France and scholars of religion and identity formation more generally.

The first chapter gives a fine historiographical overview, while the second is largely methodological, explaining the database that undergirds the book and how it was constructed. It also gives some necessary background information about Montpellier's history. The next two chapters describe the social structure of Montpellier and of the two confessions as revealed in the database of wills, and discuss a number of special topics such as naming practices and literacy. The last three chapters treat the clauses of the wills in the order that they appear in a typical will of the period: the invocation and supplication, where the testator addresses God and (usually) asks to be received into Heaven; instructions on the funeral and burial; and requests for masses and charitable bequests.

The overall goal of the study is to understand how and to what extent Catholics and Protestants came to adopt different identities, comportments, and theologies. Nonetheless, the summary of the book's contents shows that the author also attempts to exploit the database to uncover information relevant to several other issues. The form of the book is thus somewhat descriptive: it is not a linear argument that builds from chapter to chapter.

Montpellier is an interesting city to study because, although Protestants were in the majority and both politically and socially dominant, Catholics were also numerous. Catholic wills constitute at least 36 percent of the 1,556 wills in Lafage's database, comprised of wills from 1554 and at five-year intervals between 1557 and 1622. Although Montpellier's Catholic churches were largely destroyed during the Wars of Religion, the community's size ensured that it could only be partially repressed. There were also both Catholic and Protestant notaries. Both Catholics and Protestants, at different times, were prepared to patronize notaries of the other confession, although when one side (or both) felt under threat, they used their own notaries almost exclusively.

The principal defect of this admirable book is statistical. Lafage sometimes attributes meaning to quite slight statistical differences: there are no significance tests. (See for example her discussion of gender differences [304].) Lafage also does not always give properly cross-tabulated statistics so that readers can make reasonable comparisons. For example, she notes (180–81) that 44 percent of Protestant artisans and 14 percent of Protestant farmers (*laboureurs*) were able to sign their names, but never gives the equivalent figures for Catholics. (When analyzing Catholic references to the Virgin Mary [254], Lafage does give a helpful comparison: she notes that Catholics employing Catholic notaries behave no differently than Catholics using Protestant notaries.) This is particularly problematic in a few cases where Catholics are compared to Protestants without taking into account the different social profile of each confession.

Lafage's strongest suit is her sensitive ear. She is consistently successful at teasing out the implicit meanings of testamentary language. I particularly recommend her analysis of pious bequests (371–99). She argues that Protestants, who beginning in the 1560s almost universally left money to the poor, did so in an attempt to vindicate the superiority of their religion. Catholics eventually responded by increasing their own charitable giving.

Despite my reservations about some of Lafage's statistics, her overall conclusions seem both plausible and important. She argues that differences within each religion were sometimes almost as sharp as those between them. Protestants adopted some practices of their new faith quite slowly, if they contradicted long-standing popular beliefs: they were reluctant to accept the notion of a free-will gift, for example, as opposed to gifts which anticipated reciprocity. Catholics were influenced by their Protestant neighbors, and were therefore rather reluctant to invoke the Virgin in their wills, even after 1598. They also tended to avoid elaborate funeral processions, for fear of provoking their Protestant neighbors. Their religion became highly Christ-centered. In the end, Lafage concludes that she is more impressed by the similarities, and the similar evolution, of the two faiths, than the differences between them. Such sharp differences as there were tended to be in the most public aspects of their religious identity, while more private expressions of religiosity tended to converge.

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