H-Net Reviews
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Daniele Thomas. *Henri IV: images d'un roi entre realite et mythe.* Pau: Heracles, 1996. 578 pp. 225 FF (paper), ISBN 978-2-909156-17-0.

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Published on H-France (February, 1997)

The Fabrication of Henry IV

The four hundredth anniversary of the beginning of the Bourbon dynasty, which was celebrated in 1989, turned a trickle of new works about the first Bourbon king into a flood in both French and English. Even if we limit our attention only to academic works, the result is striking. Books by Mark Greengrass, David Buisseret, Michael Wolfe, Jeannine Garrisson, Jean-Pierre Babelon, Yves Cazaux, Francois Bayrou, and Christian Desplatare are only the most well known. Moreover, there is no end in sight. I am aware of at least four doctoral dissertations (by Annette Finley-Croswhite, Michel de Waele, Thierry Wanegffelen, and Ronald Love) and two further monographs (by Mark Greengrass and Nicola Sutherland) in preparation for publication, and surely there are others.

What are the attractions for historians of Henry IV, about whom more books have been written than any other individual in French history, save Napoleon? Part of the reason surely is that Henry had to remake and refashion himself, from a Huguenot prince and warrior into a Catholic king, and that his success in doing so brought about a temporary but desperately needed peace to a country decimated by civil war for the previous thirty-five years. How he managed to achieve this is still not fully resolved, as the many recent works attest. But Henry's success in refashioning his image and his ability to get both his Calvinist and Catholic subjects to accept it provided the foundation for his reign.

Daniele Thomas has written a book that takes off from this theme: to move beyond Henry's ability to refashion his own image to the ways historians have done so ever since. A revised version of her doctoral thesis from the Universite de Pau, the book is an attempt to analyze the changing images of Henry IV from 1589 to 1914. The author has eschewed painting and sculpture (without any extended or convincing explanation why, even though some of her prints are clearly based on paintings) to focus on printed images. And though she makes no claim to have investigated every image ever made of Henry IV during this period, she has nevertheless ferreted out a very substantial database of more than 1,100 different printed images (of which 170 are reproduced in the book) from 461 different works. The result is a look at the changing image of Henry IV through more than three centuries.

The organization of the book is infuriating, being neither chronological nor strictly thematic. It is a little bit of both, and the book suffers from lack of a tight structure. Nevertheless, Thomas shows from a chronological look at her database of images that Henry's popularity was high during his lifetime and immediately following his assassination: 123 different images were produced from 1589 to 1612. For the next century until 1738 Henry's image was "in long eclipse," as he had to compete with other royal images and symbols of the reigns of his son and grandson. After 1738, largely influenced by the publication of Voltaire's *Henriciade*, Henry enjoyed a renaissance, which peaked around 1775. Even during the Revolution, when royalty itself was under attack, more images of Henry IV were being produced than in the period from 1612 to 1738. After the restoration, and even more so in the second half of the nineteenth century, there was

an "explosion" of images, when Henry IV made his way from historical and literary works into the popular press and even children's books. It is in this period in the second half of the nineteenth century that the "myths" of Henry IV were finally canonized in the form of printed images. As an example, Henry's image as a friend of the poor had long been part of the oral tradition of his reign. Though historians had made his alleged goal of a chicken in every pot on every peasant's Sunday table a staple in their allegorical depictions of the king throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, this theme did not become part of the myth, so Thomas argues, until it made its way into printed images in the late nineteenth century. By the 1890s even children's books showed pictures of Henry smiling broadly as he watched peasants devouring *pouleau pot* for Sunday dinner. This is a rich and fascinating discussion and tells us much about how historians refashioned and reshaped the image of Henry IV to suit their own purposes.

The reader has to work hard, however, as the changing historiography of Henry IV is not always the focus of discussion. Dividing the chapters into separate discussions on different themes–Henry as rebuilder of France after the civil wars, Henry as founder of the Bourbon dynasty, Henry as military warrior, Henry as gourmand, Henry as womanizer, Henry as *bearnais*, etc.–has strengths, but also weaknesses. For one thing, there is no coherent or base-line image of Henry to work with; every image is always "Henry as something." This makes it almost impossible to evaluate the very themes that the author is trying to illustrate. This approach also oversimplifies the images to a degree: how does one decide in which of these categories to place a particular image, when it might easily go better elsewhere? It also makes it impossible to assess the influence any one of these categories might have had on another. For example, how did Henry's image as a warrior influence his image as a peacemaker? How did his image as a gourmand help shape his image as a womanizer? Moreover, Thomas sometimes gets easily distracted in cataloguing the differences in the images themselves: in how many portraits was Henry wearing a hat, a crown, a scarf, a collar, a sword, a cloak, etc.? There are thus a number of quantitative tables describing various variables of her large database in which the relevance to her themes and arguments is not always as explicit as it could be. Finally, in several places it is not always clear whether the author is arguing that the images themselves caused the changes in historiographical perspective of the king or whether they were the result of them, a flaw that occasionally weakens her argument. A more strictly chronological analysis might have overcome some of these problems, as well as better delineated which particular images of the king were popular when, and why.

I do not want to end on a negative note, however, because the author has done an invaluable service in demonstrating how images can help us better understand how historians reshape and refashion the past. And the images themselves are really the stars of this book. Even if one regrets that many of the images discussed in the text are not always included, and some that are included are not always reproduced well (for example, the image of the abjuration of Henry IV on p. 191 is reproduced backwards), one can only admire a publisher willing to include 170 illustrations to accompany a very long text. Many of these images are not well known to specialists of Henry IV, and some contrast sharply with the stolid contemporary portraits and portrayals of Henry on horseback that we are used to seeing. For example, I had never seen images of Henry playing tennis, riding, and swimming as a small boy or playing with peasant children (pp. 84, 318), the image of "*le bon roy Henri*" giving money to peasants outside of a citadel he was besieging (p. 357), Henry playing cards with some of his captains (p. 370), Henry entering a peasant kitchen as the husband tips his beret while his wife serves *poule au pot* (p. 382), or "*Henri le meilleur des peres*," down on all fours as the young prince Louis and one of the royal bastards ride on his back as though he were a horse (pp. 399, 403).

Daniele Thomas shows very convincingly how historians' attempts to personalize Henry, to remake and reshape him in their own images, have necessarily reshaped popular perceptions of the king. It is a process worth paying close attention to, not the least because politicians of the late twentieth century, like Henry IV in the sixteenth, see refashioning their image and public persona as a political necessity. Richard Nixon and Francois Mitterand, to cite only two examples, spring immediately to mind. But we scholars should also pay close attention. While we may be successfully exploding a number of legends and myths of earlier generations, we cannot afford the luxury of assuming that we are not creating new ones of our own.

Citation: Mack P. Holt. Review of Thomas, Daniele, *Henri IV: images d'un roi entre realite et mythe.* H-France, H-Net Reviews. February, 1997.

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