



Hero or Tyrant? Henry III, King of France, 1574-89

By Robert J. Knecht

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King Henry III of France has not suffered well at the hands of posterity. Generally depicted as at best a self-indulgent, ineffectual ruler, and at worst a debauched tyrant responsible for a series of catastrophic political blunders, his reputation has long been a poor one. Yet recent scholarship has begun to question the validity of this judgment and look for a more rounded assessment of the man and his reign. For, as this new biography of Henry demonstrates, there is far more to this fascinating monarch than the pantomime villain depicted by previous generations of historians and novelists. Based upon a rich and diverse range of primary sources, this book traces Henry's life from his birth in 1551, the sixth child of Henri II and Catherine de' Medici. It follows his upbringing as the Wars of Religion began to tear France apart, his election as king of Poland in 1573, and his assumption of the French crown a year later following the death of his brother Charles IX. The first English-language biography of Henry for over 150 years, this study thoroughly and dispassionately reassesses his life in light of recent scholarship and in the context of broader European diplomatic, political and religious history. In so doing the book not only provides a more nuanced portrait of the monarch himself, but also helps us better understand the history of France during this traumatic time.

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Review

A Yankee Book Peddler US Core Title for 2014 Classified as 'Research Essential' by Baker & Taylor YBP Library Services 'This book, the first English-language biography of Henry III (b. 1551, r. 1574-1589) in 150 years, is a balanced assessment of the man who was probably the French king most reviled by his contemporaries and historians ... Well-written and persuasive ... Highly recommended. Most suitable for graduate students and researchers.' Choice 'Robert Knecht's biography is exceptionally well-written as well as an engaging and fascinating read. In concluding his work with the legacy of the Valois king as well as making comparisons between Henry's style of monarchy with that of his heir, Henry IV, Knecht is able to re-evaluate Henry III's reputation as a bad king and a tyrant, to offer a more complex and complete portrayal of the Valois king. The life and reign of Henry III of France can-not be fully understood without recourse to all the details, accounts and nuances provided by this biography.' Royal Studies Journal 'The avowed aim of Professor Knecht's book ... is to present to English-speaking readers a new biography of this fascinating ruler, taking into account the more specialized research that has shaped historians' understanding of the period and the man. ... This is a political biography in the classic style.' H-France 'For those seeking to acquaint themselves with Henry and his reign, Knecht's biography provides a detailed, comprehensive and well-balanced introduction. Non-academic readers will also find much to enjoy. The narrative of Henry's life and reign is interspersed with anecdotes from court life and detail descriptions of the many theatrical displays put on in Henry's honour. This makes it an enjoyable as well as informative read.' French History 'Robert Knecht's thoughtful and up-to-date study is very welcome.' Renaissance Quarterly 'Knecht's study comes at an opportune moment. The edition of the king's substantial correspondence (collected and transcribed over half a century ago by Pierre Champion) is nearing completion, and a clutch of magisterial studies over the past decade have illuminated the king's administration, court and entourage. Knecht's reflection of these studies establishes a more coherent picture of the last Valois and his reign, whose decor the excellent illustrations to this volume bring to light.' English Historical Review 'Not only has Robert J. Knecht written the first biography of Henry in English since 1858, but he has also made an excellent contribution to international understanding of the king. He takes account both of original sources and of recent scholarship to provide a fair and understanding portrait.' French Studies

About the Author

Robert Jean Knecht is Emeritus Professor of French History at the University of Birmingham. A former Chairman of the Society of Renaissance Studies and of the Society for the Study of French History, he is the author of several works on sixteenth and seventeenth century France, including, Richelieu (1991), Renaissance Warrior and Patron: the Reign of Francis I (1994), Catherine de' Medici (1998), The French Civil Wars (2000), The Rise and Fall of Renaissance France (revised edn. 2001), The Valois (2004) and The French Renaissance Court (London & New Haven, 2008).

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