

Reviews

ROUEN DURING THE WARS OF RELIGION by Philip Benedict. Cambridge University Press, 1981 pp xx + 297 £24.00.

Cambridge Studies in Early Modern History is an important and relatively new series, which has not only published works by established authors such as J H Elliott and Geoffrey Parker but has also given writers of doctoral dissertations the opportunity to get their work within hard covers without sacrificing scholarly apparatus. Philip Benedict is a case in point, for although, in order not to encumber his text, he has published much of the statistical and other technical work in articles, this is his first book, and the thirteen tables, eight figures and four appendices are a reflection of its origin in a doctoral thesis. Research by American postgraduate students into French sixteenth-century history seems to be something of a growth industry, but in the meantime Dr Benedict has given us the first modern, and probably definitive study of France's second city in the period 1560-1600. He starts with the capture of the city by the Protestants in 1562 and the violent decade that followed, continues with the brief interlude of peace in the late 1570s and ends with the troubles caused by the Catholic League from the 1580s. The book is not just an examination of how religious change and political events interacted in this period – valuable enough in itself – but a study of the whole community, its economy, social structure and institutions. It ends with an attempt to place Rouen in the context of what was happening elsewhere in sixteenth-century France and concludes that the city was in many ways typical of similar communities and their fate in this period. His main contention is that the emphasis at the time and subsequently in the history books about the dominance of the political elite on events and ideologies was wrong. Local politics and religion acted independently from events at the court and in Paris, so that ambassadorial reports, on which writers of national histories have had to depend so much, give a false impression.

Local history has often been derided, for example by Lawrence Stone, as “anti-quarian fact-grubbing”, and indeed much parish-pump history is literally parochial, unless the attempt is made to see it in a wider context. On the other hand, without the disinterested spade work of those grubbers after the pure fact, the task of the historian as such would be impossible. More-

over, historians are becoming increasingly aware of the problem of writing national history before the history of each province has been mapped out. Reports or memoirs by writers who claim to have witnessed events at the centre either do not mention their sources or, if the source can be checked, as, for example, in Gregorio Panzani's diary of his mission to England in the 1630s, it is usually found to be based on little more than court gossip. I am not sure that I share Dr Benedict's optimistic belief in the ability of the local historian to make useful comparisons with other areas, as I hope to indicate below, but in the negative and valuable task of testing the generalisations of the national historians, he has succeeded admirably. As in Miriam Chrisman's *Strasbourg and the Reform*, which for me was a seminal book, *Rouen During the Wars of Religion* affords numerous insights into the curious mixture of municipal vested interests and genuine religious motivation that caused the complex events in Rouen during this period.

A general point about the author's method ought to be made. Following the work of the pioneer of modern critical history, Leopold von Ranke, with his apparently modest ambition to establish “exactly what happened”, the writing of history has been dominated by a narrative approach, with an emphasis on politics, for roughly the past century and a half. Since the last war, a group of French historians, known as the *Annales* school, writing under the remote inspiration of Karl Marx, have reacted against this approach in favour of the study of social structures and the mass of the population. Lately, however, there have been signs of narrative history coming back into fashion, and Philip Benedict has had the good sense to try to combine the virtues of both approaches. He thus begins with a social analysis of the city in 1562; avoids those statistical *pieces justificatives*, which make the reading of much social history so tedious, by referring to his technical articles; and reminds us of the St Bartholomew's Day massacre as one political event among many which forced religious changes.

In this otherwise admirable book, the conclusion, in which the author makes comparisons with other communities in sixteenth-century France, may be the section that will receive the most criticism.

In trying to avoid parochialism, Dr Benedict has made comparisons on shaky evidence. Unlike the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the sixteenth century in France has not been well studied at a local level, mainly because of a relative lack of records; apart from good modern work on Lyons, Toulouse and a few other places, Dr Benedict has had to have recourse to nineteenth-century antiquarians and to a selection from other town's archives. To give one example, of the kind of rash generalisation that he attacks in his Preface, Dr Benedict cites the "many" English

Catholics in Rouen, without anywhere giving a figure or making a comparison with any other Catholic refugee centre in this period. I doubt if anyone knows how many English Catholics resided at Douai in, say, 1588, let alone at Rheims or Rouen. I prefer to trust the author's negative conclusions, such as the fact that Rouen belies the Hauser thesis that "the workingman's cause and the cause of the reform were one and the same". It is for insights such as this that *Rouen During the Wars of Religion* will be read by students of the Reformation.

DAVID LUNN

JUDGES by J. Alberto Soggin, (English translation by John Bowden, SCM Press, London 1981). pp xx + 305. £8.50.

Professor Soggin's name is now well known to English speaking students of the Old Testament through his admirable commentary on Joshua (1970) and *Introduction to the Old Testament* (2nd edition 1980). To these is now added this commentary on Judges which, as we have come to expect of Professor Soggin, is characterised by its learning, lucidity, and judiciousness, not to mention its delightful humour. The introduction is kept to a minimum, but without loss of essential information, fuller discussion being given, where necessary, in the body of the commentary. The theory that the Former Prophets constitute a 'Deuteronomistic history', as argued some forty years ago by Noth, is accepted as now established, with the additional refinements argued in recent studies by Smend, Dietrich, and Veijola concerning its stages of composition: a historical work (DtrH), a stratum influenced by the preaching of the prophets (DtrP), and a legalistic ('nomistic') revision (DtrN). In the commentary proper attention is carefully drawn to the prob-

lems which arise from passage to passage, and the method is to suggest lines of approach to them rather than doggedly insisting on a particular solution. Textual problems are succinctly but comprehensively treated at the beginning of each section.

The volume is written as a companion to the commentary on Joshua, with frequent references to the latter. Whilst this is on the whole satisfactory, there are some instances where it would have been more convenient, at the expense of some additional space, to deal briefly with problems instead of referring to the other commentary. There is a translational error on p 287 where the inhabitants of Gibeah are incorrectly referred to as Gibeonites, and again on p 296 where 'At Gibeah the roads for Bethel and Gibeah parted' should read 'At Gibeah the roads for Bethel and Gibeon parted'. It is regrettable that the binding of the book is likely to fall apart in one's hands.

This is altogether an excellent commentary and is to be warmly welcomed.

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