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Introduction

Political society during the Wars of Religion

> L'historiographie contemporaine . . . a été contrainte, préjudiciellement, de tuer pour vivre: elle a condamné à une quasi-mort, voici quelques décennies, l'histoire événementielle et la biographie atomistique.[1]
>
> Contemporary historiography . . . has been forced, regrettably, to kill in order to live: in recent decades it has condemned to death narrative history and atomised biography.

Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie's frank admission exemplifies the *Annaliste* attitude to the study of political society at the height of its hegemony.[2] The *Annalistes* associated the study of politics and institutions with the nineteenth-century epistemological tradition they so despised. While their attack on narrow positivist 'event' history was long overdue, it failed to lead to a revaluation of what constituted the political in pre-modern society. Their interest in sociology and later anthropology was never systematically applied to political society and its institutions and, consequently, their conception of the political remained largely undeveloped. For decades the academic elite in France viewed early modern politics in conventional terms, and political history had pejorative connotations and was not considered a field for serious study. In the 1960s and 1970s the pre-eminence of *Annales* and its obsession with quantitative history, structures and conjunctures reinforced the orthodox view of the causes of the Wars of Religion as essentially the product of socio-economic trends. The rise of Calvinism and the religious conflict of the sixteenth century, for both Marxists and non-Marxists, were regarded largely as the manifestation of deeper socio-economic forces or class conflicts.[3] During the 1970s a number of works began to challenge the functionalist orthodoxy. Influenced by Durkheim and his successors, this new generation of historians examined the social function of religious ritual and the cultural values of early modern belief.[4]

[1] E. Le Roy Ladurie, *Le territoire de l'historien* (Paris, 1973), p. 169.

[2] For a brilliant critique of *Annaliste* discourse and methodology: P. Carrard, *Poetics of the new history: French historical discourse from Braudel to Chartier* (Baltimore, 1992).

[3] As Peter Burke has pointed out in *The French historical revolution* (Oxford, 1990), p. 63, Le Roy Ladurie was unique among his colleagues in discussing religious and cultural trends in his thesis *Les paysans de Languedoc* (2 vols., Paris, 1966). However, he was conventional in arguing that religious change and conflict were contingent on wider economic and demographic conjunctures.

[4] N. Z. Davis, *Society and culture in early modern France* (Stanford, 1975); J. Bossy, 'The counter-reformation and the people of catholic Europe', *Past and Present*, 46 (1970), 51–70; 'Some elementary forms of Durkheim', *Past and Present*, 95 (1982), 3–18.

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Few historians would now challenge the central and autonomous role played by religion as a motivating force during the Wars of Religion. Popular violence and deep confessional cleavages shaped the character of French society in the second half of the sixteenth century. The study of religious mentalities has led to the emergence of a new orthodoxy. The scholarly consensus now accords primacy to the role of popular religious mentalities in shaping the Wars of Religion. The best of these studies recognise the interaction between political and religious factors, but a number of influential works have rejected both the role of high politics and wider socio-economic forces in shaping the events of the later sixteenth-century in France.[5] Denis Crouzet's monumental thesis on the psychology of religious violence represents the culmination of the new orthodoxy. His phenomenological approach rejects both socio-economic and political factors as a means to explain the Wars of Religion and dismisses the claims of empirical archival research.[6]

During the past twenty-five years the study of *ancien régime* society has been profoundly influenced by the methodological innovations of social and cultural history. The debate among historians of eighteenth-century France concerning the nature and development of political culture has been particularly productive.[7] In contrast, the political history of the Wars of Religion is a poor relation, marginal and unfashionable. Only in studies of the high nobility has our knowledge advanced substantially in recent years. Admirable as many of these studies are, the focus on the upper strata of the nobility as the sole constituent of the political class has reflected the traditional view of politics as the preserve of a narrow group of elite families.[8] Historians of the French Wars of Religion often portray a society in which politics, by which they mean court faction, had little impact on and little relationship to popular confessional conflict. Factional high politics, in which aristocrats often displayed an opportunistic attitude to religion, is contrasted to a populace motivated by anxieties about salvation to fight in defence of the sacred. Although it is correct to highlight the crucial role played by popular forces, it is also necessary to reconsider some of the most cherished notions of the new orthodoxy.

[5] P. Benedict, *Rouen during the Wars of Religion* (Cambridge, 1980), p. xii explicitly sets out to integrate the social history of religion and the political narrative. The study of political events in their contemporary socio-economic context has been most evident in recent work on Paris: R. Descimon, 'La Ligue à Paris: une révision', *Annales ESC*, 37 (1982), 72–128; B. Diefendorf, *Beneath the cross: Catholics and Huguenots in sixteenth-century Paris* (Oxford, 1991). The new orthodoxy is judiciously summarised by M. Holt, 'Putting religion back into the Wars of Religion', *French Historical Studies*, 18 (1993), 524–51. See also H. Heller, 'A reply to Mack P. Holt' and Holt's rejoinder, in *French Historical Studies*, 19 (1996), 853–73.

[6] D. Crouzet, *Les guerriers de Dieu: la violence au temps des troubles de religion vers 1525 – vers 1610* (2 vols., Paris, 1990).

[7] For an overview of the debates and a discussion of the elements of *ancien régime* politics: P. R. Campbell, *Power and politics in old regime France, 1720–1745* (London, 1996), introduction.

[8] Some examples are: R. Harding, *Anatomy of a power elite: the provincial governors of early modern France* (New Haven and London. 1978); A. Jouanna, *Le devoir de révolte: la noblesse française et la gestation de l'Etat moderne, 1559–1661* (Paris, 1989); L. Bourquin, *Noblesse seconde et pouvoir en Champagne aux XVIe et XVIIe siècles* (Paris, 1994).

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The current understanding of the parameters of political society is too narrow and the distinction between 'elite' politics and 'popular' confessional conflict more ambiguous than generally recognised.

It is still common to perceive politics in Renaissance France as the preserve of a small elite of courtiers, aristocrats and royal officers. It is undeniable that the aristocracy played a preponderant role in political life, but Russell Major has shown how the power of the French monarchy in the sixteenth century in practice depended largely on the goodwill of representative institutions and the provincial elites. Power was diffuse and the towns and provinces remained largely autonomous of royal control. That the king should govern with the consent of and in consultation with his people had gained wide acceptance by the beginning of the Wars of Religion. The doctrine of popular sovereignty was developed by the protestant monarchomachs in the 1560s and 1570s and its principles were put into practice by the Catholic League in 1589.[9] The religious divisions of the sixteenth century permeated all levels of society and introduced an ideological element to politics. During the civil wars religion and politics, both at court and in the localities, became intertwined. During the 1560s and 1570s the essential instability of the polity was revealed by the breakdown of the traditional patronage structure of the Renaissance monarchy. The dynastic weakness of the Valois monarchy not only contributed to the transformation of the political climate but its critics taunted its failures in the language of religious morality. Stability was guaranteed if the king ruled in the interests of the majority of the various factions and corporate interest groups and produced a male heir. Government and administration involved the judicious distribution of patronage and the manipulation of networks of personal influence. Historians of the seventeenth century have been particularly adept at portraying the reasons for and the consequences of the collapse of monarchical authority. Stability was threatened in the first half of the century by the dynastic weakness of the Bourbons and by the fiscal innovations of Richelieu and Mazarin. Fissures within elite society exacerbated and fostered popular rebellion. Louis XIV's early disdain for administrative innovation and his desire to bolster hierarchy and authority earned him the admiration of the elites. His return to the traditional norms of government was aided by the 'contagion of loyalty' among the provincial elites, terrified by the disorder of the Frondes.[10]

In early modern France the boundaries of political activity are commonly defined by struggles among individuals and among corporate bodies. Nobles competed with each other for social status and over claims to honour, and institutions defended rights, privileges and prerogatives against rival claims. The chaotic

[9] Major's ideas are synthesised in *From renaissance monarchy to absolute monarchy* (Baltimore, 1994). On popular sovereignty, see R. Giesey, 'The monarchomach triumvirs: Hotman, Beza and Mornay, *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance*, 32 (1970), 41–56; R. Jackson, 'Elective kingship and *consensus populi* in sixteenth-century France', *Journal of Modern History*, 44 (1972), 155–71.

[10] W. Beik, *Absolutism and society in seventeenth-century France: state power and provincial aristocracy in Languedoc* (Cambridge, 1985); R. Mettam, *Power and faction in Louis XIV's France* (Oxford, 1988).

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nature of the Wars of Religion is best grasped if it is understood that politics was conducted in the context of a culture of feud. Anthropologists have argued for the complexities of feuding and recognised it as an organised institution. Feud did not always entail violence and could be pursued in a number of ways, usually through the law courts or by publicly dishonouring a rival.[11] The feud with the Montmorency dominated Guise family strategy and exacerbated the breakdown of order in the 1560s, but it is only the most notorious example of a more widespread phenomenon.

Political action cannot simply be confined to an aristocratic elite, since magnate affinities were not only composed of sword nobles. Aristocratic influence was extensive among urban oligarchies before the Wars of Religion, and during the civil wars magnates attempted to expand their urban power bases. Politics consisted partly of the struggle between magnate affinities or shifting factions based around confessional solidarity. However, there is plenty of evidence to suggest the vitality of the public sphere in the sixteenth century. Political ideology was articulated in terms of religious morality, the defence of traditional rights and Aristotelean ideas of the 'bien publique', but new ideas were also developed to justify the political objectives of the Calvinists and later the Catholic League. Propaganda in the form of pamphlets, tracts and *affiches* had an unprecedented circulation and reached a wide audience in urban areas. During the Wars of Religion the provincial estates, assemblies of notables and the Estates-General were arenas for public debate which on a number of occasions resulted in open criticism of the king. At a lower level of society fraternities and youth groups were aware of the tremendous religious and political upheavals and used more traditional methods to comment on political events. In 1536 the Abbaye de Conards, a Rouennais confraternity, proclaimed that any man under the age of 101 could take two wives – a clear reference to François I's recent alliance with the Turk. Critiques often went beyond harmless mockery, and the Abbaye was banned during the hegemony of the Catholic League for its scandalous attacks on the Guise.[12]

The boundary between elite and popular culture is less distinct than it seemed to historians twenty years ago. Even during the upsurge of penitential piety in the 1580s the reformation of popular manners and belief was still only the aspiration of a godly minority. An unconventionally devout man like Henri III who, according to

[11] The classic anthropological approach is J. Black-Michaud, *Cohesive force: feud in the Mediterranean and the Middle East* (Oxford, 1975). I am in the process of beginning a project on noble feud in early modern France. For some preliminary considerations, see M. Greenshields, *An economy of violence in early modern France: crime and justice in the Haute Auvergne, 1587–1664* (Philadelphia, 1995); F. Billaçois, *Le duel dans la société française des XVIe–XVIIe siècles: essai de psychosociologie historique* (Paris, 1986). For sixteenth-century comparisons: K. Brown, *Bloodfeud in Scotland, 1573–1625: violence, justice and politics in early modern society* (Edinburgh, 1986); E. Muir, *Mad blood stirring: vendetta and factions in Friuli during the Renaissance* (Baltimore, 1993).

[12] A. Corvisier, 'Une société ludique au XVIe siècle: l'Abbaye de Conards de Rouen', *Annales de Normandie*, 22 (1977), p. 183, 191. See also E. Le Roy Ladurie, *Carnaval de Romans* (Paris, 1979).

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L'Estoile 'vivait plus en capucin qu'en roi', revelled in the disorderly and profane activities of carnival in Paris.[13] Similarly, it is erroneous to make a clear distinction between noble and popular motivation during the Wars of Religion. Many of the worst perpetrators of religious violence were nobles and many of those non-nobles engaged in urban religious conflict were much wealthier, better educated and of higher social status than the rural gentry. It has long been recognised that religious riots and rites of violent purification, far from being spontaneous and undirected outbursts of popular anger, were highly organised and structured. In 'Rites of violence' Natalie Davis seeks to explain 'popular' religious violence, but many of her examples involve the leadership and organisational abilities of noblemen and elements of the city elites.[14] In Toulouse in May 1562 the confessional conflict resembled a bitter local civil war in which all social orders were involved. As Mark Greengrass has pointed out, this conflict was more about *rights* than *rites.* The Huguenot uprising in Toulouse was a defensive response to the imminent suppression of their right to worship, which had been guaranteed by law. The catholic elite crushed the revolt brutally when its authority was challenged.[15] During the catholic religious revival of the 1580s the interplay between aristocratic factional politics and popular confessional anxiety is even clearer. The huge penitential processions of 1583 and 1584 in the north-east took place in the dioceses of reforming bishops sympathetic to the Catholic League. At Reims the cardinal de Guise exploited the devotional upsurge by printing and distributing small books to the faithful, containing prayers which sought the intercession of the Almighty for the birth of a catholic heir to the throne.[16]

Urban historians of sixteenth-century France are beginning to study the competing networks of influence which struggled for power in towns and cities in much the same way as neighbourhood, kinship and clientage loyalties mapped the boundaries of factional support in Italian cities during the Renaissance.[17] City militias were a significant factor in urban politics and in the perpetration of violence. The axes of solidarity in militia companies were formed by both horizontal and vertical ties. In the two largest cities in northern France, Rouen and Paris, militia units increasingly fell under the influence of catholic zealots, men drawn

[13] Pierre de L'Estoile, *Journal du règne de Henri III*, L.-R. Lefèvre, ed. (Paris, 1943), pp. 350, 446.
[14] *Society and culture in early modern France*, pp. 185. Drawing a distinction between spontaneous and organised violence is problematic as the current debate on the origins of the Saint Bartholomew's Day massacre shows.
[15] M. Greengrass, 'The anatomy of a religious riot in Toulouse in May 1562', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 34 (1983), 367–91.
[16] A. Ramsey 'Piety in Paris during the League, 1585–90: an urban community in transition', unpub. Ph.D. thesis (University of Columbia, 1991), p. 133.
[17] W. Kaiser, *Marseille im Bürgerkrieg, Sozialgefüge, Religionskonflikt und Faktionskämpfe* (Göttingen, 1991); K. Robbins, 'The social mechanisms of urban rebellion: a case study of leadership of the 1614 revolt at La Rochelle', *French Historical Studies*, 19 (1995), 559–90. On Florence: D. Kent and F. W. Kent, *Neighbours and neighbourhood in Renaissance Florence: the district of the Red Lion in the fifteenth century* (New York, 1982).

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from high-status trades and professions. In urban areas, high literacy rates ensured wide participation in political and theological discourse. In Paris and Rouen the large legal community, the *basoche*, was at the core of catholic militancy in the 1580s. To what extent were the *basochien* a 'popular' force? Most of the *gens de loi* attached to the sovereign courts, though not part of the ruling oligarchy, were both intellectually and aspirationally part of the elite, possessing networks of influence among the lesser ranks of ushers and clerks.[18] The categories traditionally employed by historians to analyse the political and religious upheavals of the civil wars are imprecise and need modification. This study reconsiders the parameters of politics by analysing the composition and growth of an aristocratic following during the Wars of Religion.

Many facets of sixteenth-century political society remain poorly researched. At the apex much has still to be written about court politics and in the localities we remain ignorant of the attitudes of the lesser nobility. The succeeding chapters shed new light on the relationship between politics at the court and the localities. In contrast, the subject of clientage and patron–client relations has produced a plethora of publications. The literature is vast and it is not intended to exhume the familiar debates. Traditionally the patron–client relationship was regarded as a static and exclusive bond. It was a mutual relationship in which the lord could call on the unconditional support of clients who were rewarded by patronage. The patron–client model of structuring political society was supported by the theories of functional sociologists. As Kristen Neuschel has shown, the traditional patron–client model does not reflect the realities of sixteenth-century lordship and service. Clients usually had a number of patrons and followed independent strategies conditioned largely by the honour code. Neuschel's critique of the existing literature is welcome, but her methodology is flawed since she concentrates largely on the correspondence of the elite of Picard society who were the social equals of the prince de Condé, being allies rather than clients. Analysis of the formulaic nature of contemporary correspondence elucidates only partially the nature of noble relations, and her polemic against the patron–client model blinds her to the factors which fostered group solidarity.[19] Neuschel has provided a valuable corrective to the existing literature but the originality of her conclusions is open to doubt. A study of sixteenth-century 'warrior culture' needs to be placed in the context of medieval chivalric mores.

Historians of late-medieval England have long recognised the fluctuating ties and diverse bonds which comprised a noble following. Research has increasingly focused on the strategies and the mentalities of the gentry. In the expression of

[18] A. Fabre, *Etudes historiques sur les clercs de la basoche* (Paris, 1875). For evidence of *basochien* piety: Ramsey, 'Piety in Paris during the League', pp. 13, 402–513.

[19] K. Neuschel, *Word of Honor: interpreting noble culture in sixteenth-century France* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1989). The literature is summarised in S. Kettering, 'Patronage in early modern France', *French Historical Studies*, 17 (1992), 872–81.

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Colin Richmond, the lesser nobility were not 'Pavlovian dogs'.[20] Movement and change are inherent in all social relations. The relationships among individuals in a following were multiplex. An affinity was not a monolithic entity but the ties of affinity were potential communication channels. Individuals were not free agents unconstrained by socio-economic or cultural factors. The network of personal bonds that constituted an affinity was 'a social environment' which exerted influence to pressure behaviour. Bonds of kinship, sociability and amity – as important to affinal solidarity as the vertical ties of patronage and clientage – placed obligations on the individual and constrained his or her behaviour. The strength of relations in the network depended on a number of variables and varied over time and according to circumstance. The structure of an affinity is best explained as a motif of concentric circles, which denote differing types of bond and strengths of relationship. At the core of an affinity – the household and council – were to be found the intimates and kin in whom a great deal of emotional and material resources were invested. Lords clearly had less dialogue with clients on the periphery of their following, they invested fewer resources in maintaining the channel of communications and could expect less obligation.[21]

This study elucidates patterns of noble affiliation and networks of urban support during the Wars of Religion. Its purpose is not to reclaim a place for the vanished epistemological tradition which lauded the deeds of 'great men' and accepted unquestionably the primacy of high politics. Rather, it reinterprets the political narrative by paying careful attention both to the contemporary social context and to the structure of factions and followings. This is imperative because the contours of political and religious conflict cannot be followed without a clear understanding of the dynamics, morphology and atrophy of power networks. As political and religious cleavages tore apart the body politic, social groups usually considered outside political society were summoned to enter the political arena. As early as May 1562 the catholic authorities of Toulouse called on the support of the religiously conservative peasantry in their suppression of the Huguenot uprising. The role played by peasants and petty nobles in the defence of orthodoxy was echoed in Normandy, where religious anxieties and anti-tax sentiment combined to facilitate the mobilisation of large areas of the province in support of the catholic princes in the 1580s.[22] The term 'affinity' has been adopted because it best expresses the range of ties in noble followings, of which the patron–client relationship was but one aspect. While recognising that the bonds in political society were multifarious, non-exclusive and fluctuated over time, I have concentrated on the factors which reinforced the solidarity of a following.

[20] C. Richmond, 'After Macfarlane', *History*, 68 (1983), p. 57. Current research on late-medieval and early modern England, which has gone much further in its consideration of the power and autonomy of the lesser nobility, is summarised in M. Hicks, *Bastard feudalism* (London, 1995).
[21] J. Boissevain, *Friends of friends: networks, manipulators and coalitions* (Oxford, 1974).
[22] See below pp. 222–32.

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THE GUISE IN HISTORY: PROBLEMS AND SOURCES

Le feu roy devina ce point
Que ceux de la maison de Guyse
Mettroyent ses enfants en pourpoint
Et son pauvre peuple en chemise.[23]

The debate in the 1980s about the origins of the Catholic League and the recent vituperative exchanges over the causes and course of the massacre of Saint Bartholomew testify to the revival of interest in human agency in explaining the causation of events, as well as the contemporary representation of historical events. Several *Annalistes*, who had once proclaimed the death of 'event' history have, in recent years, disinterred its corpse and committed themselves to traditional biography and textbooks on political history.[24] This revival has yet to engender a return to the archival sources for high politics and many old prejudices and stale orthodoxies remain. A comprehensive modern study of the political history of the Wars of Religion does not exist and the works of Romier and Mariéjol, written earlier this century, remain unsurpassed.

An examination of the relationship between the Guise, the most powerful magnate lineage in sixteenth-century France, and their followers in the localities is long overdue. Despite its enormous influence on political life during the Wars of Religion, the family has attracted little serious scholarship this century, and our knowledge of the Guise affinity and its relation to popular support for ultracatholicism is limited.[25] Analysis of the Guise affinity also elucidates the relationship between court faction and conflict in the provinces.

Mastering the sources for political society at the level of both local society and the court is a major undertaking, compounded by the gaps in our knowledge and the obsolescence of much of the existing secondary literature. The range of Guise interests was vast and the longevity and complexity of the Wars of Religion defy attempts to write comprehensive accounts of events at both centre and periphery. Striking a balance between maintaining a lucid narrative and analysing the structures of patronage is demanding.[26] It has been necessary to schematise the political narrative and concentrate on events which illuminate the strategy of the Guise and the activities of their clients, recognising that future detailed studies may modify conclusions derived largely from a study of a single magnate family.

This study concentrates on the expansion of the Guise power base in Normandy. Anyone familiar with the history of the Wars of Religion might question the merits

[23] Attributed to François I by protestant propagandist Regnier de La Planche.
[24] See, for example, E. Le Roy Ladurie, *L'état royal, 1460–1610* (Paris, 1987), and my review of the English translation in *French History*, 8 (1994), 474–5.
[25] The most recent work by J.-M. Constant, *Les Guises* (Paris, 1984), is a conventional biography based largely on the printed sources.
[26] Appendix G provides a summary of clients' careers.

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of such an undertaking. The Guise are commonly seen as an eastern lineage whose lands and power were largely concentrated in Champagne. The seat of the family at Joinville reflects its historic identification with eastern France, but in most other respects the common assumptions concerning the Guise power base are misguided. This study originated as a Ph.D. thesis on Norman political society in the sixteenth century. As the research progressed it soon became apparent that the landed power and influence of the Guise in Normandy had been overlooked. This oversight contributed not only to the misinterpretation of Norman society during the Wars of Religion, but it seemed emblematic of the general neglect both of the study of political society and of the role played by aristocratic lineages in local confessional conflict. The neglect of the Guise has been partly due to the dispersal of the family archives following the extinction of the senior line in the late seventeenth century, in contrast to the abundant sources surviving for the Montmorency, the Bourbon and the Nevers. The best work, and unlikely to be surpassed for narrative detail, is Bouillé du Chariol's *Histoire des ducs de Guise*. A fine example of nineteenth-century positivist history, Bouillé leans heavily on seventeenth-century manuscript histories written decades after the events they purport to describe.[27]

The research for this book included the traditional sources of political history, such as letters, memoirs and the official records left by institutions. But these sources alone are insufficient to reveal the operation of informal power networks, since the surviving corpus of documents pertains largely to the activities of the aristocratic elite. A large number of Guise letters survive from the 1540s and 1550s, but the correspondence which survives for the period of the Wars of Religion is modest. Correspondence alone is inadequate for reconstructing the profile of an affinity and its functioning. During the turmoil of the civil wars it was safer to communicate orally and the stylised nature of letters reveals more about exchanges of honour than patterns of allegiance. The justificatory memoirs left by protaganists of the civil wars should be treated with circumspection, particularly those which correlate closely with Bourbon hagiography. This study is founded on a range of contemporary manuscript sources in Paris, Chantilly and Normandy unexploited either by Bouillé or by more recent scholars. It supplements the traditional sources of political history by mining the rich notarial archives in Rouen, Paris and elsewhere to reconstruct the mundane activities of clients and servants acting on behalf of their lords. Notarial archives also reveal patterns of sociability, kinship and, when read in conjunction with other sources, political activity. Notaries served all social ranks and the archives they left furnish information about groups normally excluded from the traditional narrative. The research for this project owes much to the labours of the often maligned nineteenth-century antiquarians and local genealogists; they understood the context of local power and this study attempts to rescue the lesser nobility and gentry from neglect. The nineteenth-century tradition

[27] According to the Bibliothèque Nationale catalogue, Oudin's manuscript is dated 1647.

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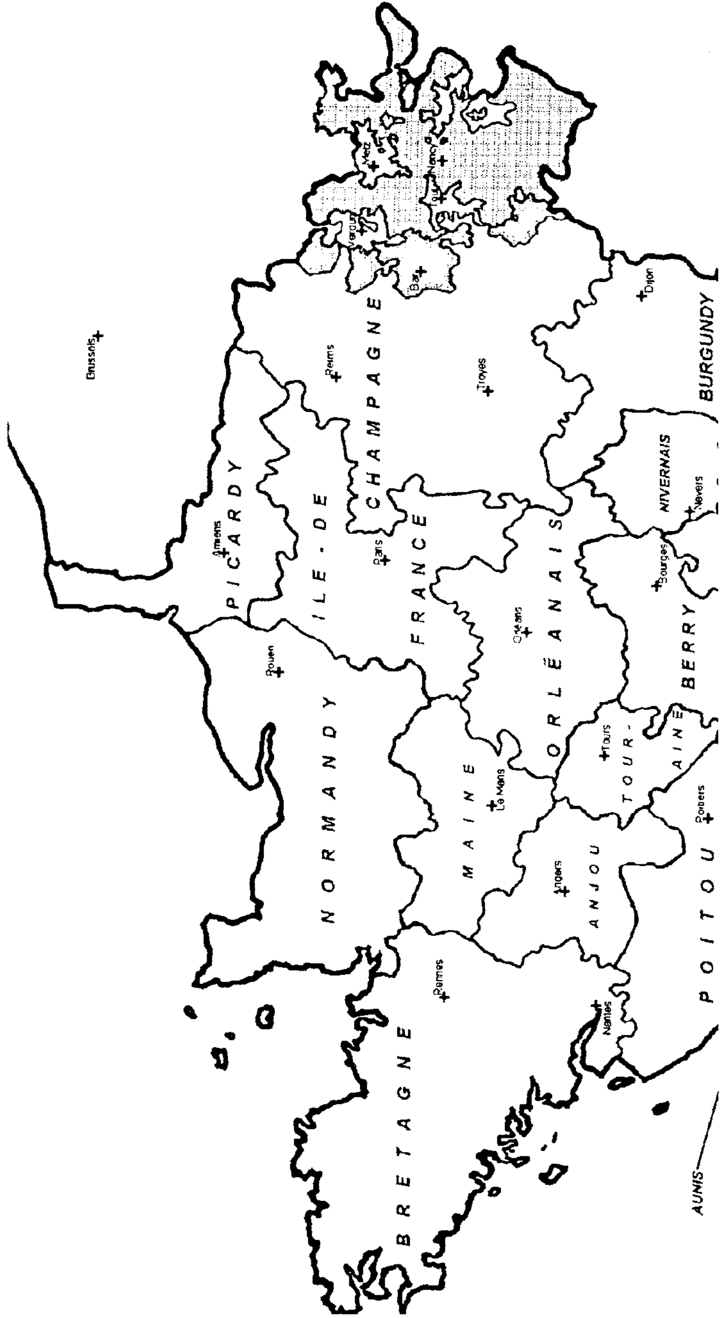

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