Introduction

The aim of this book is to examine the relationship that Henry IV cultivated with urban France in order to explore how he acquired power and strengthened the French state. The work continues the general effort made by revisionary historians to explain what the term ‘absolute’ meant in practice to rulers and subjects as opposed to what it meant in theory to jurists and dogmatists. This book is not a biographical assessment of Henry IV, but rather a case study of his interactions with selected towns. It attempts to discover how the balance between royal authority and urban autonomy was negotiated in the late sixteenth century. Henry IV mastered urban France with a policy of lenient pacification that emphasized his clemency. By easing internal strife after the religious wars, he re-opened lines of communication between the Crown and the towns. The re-establishment of communication strengthened the state by promoting cooperation between the king and his urban subjects and encouraging their compliance.

In the pages that follow two key concepts appear many times, legitimacy and clientage. In fact, the two terms are linked in explaining how Henry secured his realm and restored peace to France. The idea of a ‘legitimate’ king is one that appears often in the literature on early modern kingship, but legitimacy is a concept seldom defined by historians. This book relies on Orlando Patterson’s definition of legitimacy as a process that incorporates power relations into a moral order defining right and wrong. Legitimation, the action of establishing

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legitimacy, is an important part of all political processes and can be conceptualized in the early modern period as a dialogue between rulers and subjects. In the premodern context legitimacy was circumscribed by Christianity so that rulers were divinely sanctioned. As Johann Huizinga put it, monarchies were thought to be ordained by God as good and perverted by humans as bad, but people never contemplated ‘reforming’ what was divinely inspired. The Wars of Religion complicated this view of kingship when France first faced a series of weak kings and then an unacceptable Protestant one. The effects caused political thinkers to question divine right rule and introduce the idea of natural law; some even advocated the overthrow of tyrants and heretics. Legitimation was thus a key issue confronted by the last Valois and the first Bourbon.

Henry IV’s position in 1589 was uncertain. Under normal circumstances a king acquired his right to rule at the death of his predecessor. When Henry III lay dying, however, his last thoughts were on the unsure succession. He mumbled over and over to the circle of nobles around him to accept his cousin, Henry of Navarre, as the legitimate king of France. Legitimacy under the Salic law meant tracing a blood alliance through the male line back to the thirteenth century. Twenty-two degrees of cousinage separated Henry III and Henry IV. Yet this distant familial link would not have been an issue if Henry of Navarre had been Catholic. But Navarre claimed the throne as a Protestant and delegitimized himself to most of France. He faced not only a kingdom torn apart by religious warfare, but also one in which the majority of cities and towns refused to recognize his kingship.

The pivotal moment of Henry IV’s reign was his abjuration on 25 July 1593 when he formally took on his role as France’s ‘most Christian [Catholic] king’. Certainly this ‘perilous leap’ made Henry legitimus to many, but it also alienated him from his former Protestant allies and never really convinced his most zealous Catholic subjects of his sincerity.

The subtitle of this book, The Pursuit of Legitimacy, best describes the trajectory of Henry’s reign. The central point hinges on the distinction between Henry’s clear de jure legitimacy based on Salic law and his lifelong pursuit of political legitimation. Legitimation, Reinhard Bendix has explained, realizes what power alone

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8 Jean-Pierre Babelon, Henri IV (Paris: Fayard, 1982), 317–21. Henry III was descended from Saint Louis’s oldest son, Philip the Hardy, while Henry IV was descended from Louis’s youngest son, Robert of Clermont.
cannot because it promotes acceptance in the rightness of rule. My concept of legitimacy is based on Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s notion of a social contract in which people give their consent to be governed, an idea that Henry never would have recognized, although the belief that legitimacy was tied to popular support became increasingly prevalent during the sixteenth century. Henry secured his throne through battle, bribery, diplomacy, and negotiation. Eventually he won his people’s consent, although his assassination in 1610 proves his legitimacy as king was never universally accepted.

Ronald Cohen has argued that acquiring legitimacy involves ‘changing capabilities (i.e. power) into culturally sanctioned rights.’ In this context legitimacy and clientage can be linked. Clientage humanizes power by involving human agents in the struggle for consent. Clientage also provides the historical context in which to consider legitimacy. Clients sanction power by giving their consent to be ruled, thereby recognizing a ruler as legitimate. More importantly, clients often open the dialogue that brings together rulers and ruled.

Sharon Kettering has studied the complex realities of the patron–client system in early modern France and defined key words like patron, client, broker, clientelism, and fidelity. I use her definition of clientage as ‘a voluntary relationship based on a reciprocal exchange between participants who are unequal in status’ and accept her scepticism of Roland Mousnier’s argument defining patron–client relations as maître-fidèle relationships denoted by absolute loyalty in the man-to-man tie. Like Stuart Carroll, I believe such a model exaggerates the strength of vertical links uniting nobles and their clients. Like Robert Harding I see many different kinds of clientage relationships, some motivated by self-interest, most more fragile than ties of complete devotion, and more easily severed. Finally, I agree with

9 Bendix, *Kings or People* 17.
10 Ibid., 8–9.
13 On ‘consent’ see Schabert, ‘Power, Legitimacy and Truth’.
Sharon Kettering that the word ‘affinity’, preferred by Mark Greengrass and Stuart Carroll in describing client networks, is too ambiguous. 18 ‘Affinity’ perhaps better denotes the wide range of personal relationships that included clientele. Client, clientage, and clientelism give a more precise indication of the patron–client system to the English speaker. 19

An objective of this study is to explore the ways in which the patron–client system operated in an urban setting. The extent to which vertical ties reaching down from the Crown penetrated into French cities and towns is unknown because no serious study of Crown–town patronage has been made. 20 Accumulating the documentation to pursue such research has been an obstacle for historians because no tidy set of documents exists in one location, and constant travel between national and local archives is necessary. Municipal magistrates, unlike robe and sword nobles, rarely left memoirs, and almost none of their personal correspondence has survived. The historian, therefore, must painstakingly sift through state papers, municipal documents, deputy–to–court letters, wills, marriage registers, godparen- tage records, property transfers, notarial acts, inventories after death, appointments to offices, and the occasional rare memoir in a frustrating and often abortive attempt to reconstruct kinship networks and clienteles. Not surprisingly, there is very little literature on Henry IV and the towns, and when the issue is addressed the same examples are used over and over.

One essential argument of this book asserts that Henry IV’s pursuit of legitimacy among his urban subjects involved the effective use of the patron–client system. In short, clientage was one means Henry employed to increase his legitimacy as king of France. In dealing with the towns, Henry sought their loyalty and secured peace by placing his clients in municipal office. Royal clients were rewarded with favour, gifts, and increased status, and their reciprocal duty was to provide the king with peaceful, cooperative, and well-administered towns. Kettering believes that patrons disseminated their ideas to their clients. ‘A patron’s personal and political goals become the collective goals of his clientele.’ 21 Since municipal elites were patrons who had their own clientele networks, Henry’s use of patronage helped to ensure the acceptance of his legitimacy among nameless subjects he never saw. His employment of the patron–client system refutes Robert Harding’s belief that there was a failure of patronage during the religious wars. In fact, Henry’s pursuit of legitimacy made the patron–client system all the more relevant. 22

19 See Kettering’s excellent discussion of the terminology of clientelism in ‘Patronage in Early Modern France’, 839–71, see especially, 850–1.
20 Kettering points out the problem of the scarcity of evidence in ‘Patronage in Early Modern Europe’, 842. 21 Kettering, Patrons, Brokers, and Clients, 69.
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It is in relation to power that the symbiosis of legitimacy, clientage, and absolutism was achieved during Henry’s reign. Power is embedded within society. A community of people achieves power by acting in concert; their power reflects a coalescence of opinions and beliefs. Power has no independent justification. It takes its justification from the community, and it is the community that endows rulers and institutions with political legitimacy. Rulers possess legitimacy when they adopt and promote the common beliefs of the group. The success of rulers in projecting acceptance of shared beliefs reinforces their legitimacy. Belief in their legitimacy also enhances their authority while the possession of authority, legitimizes their power. The distribution of power also involves the circulation of knowledge. Henry used clientage to promote his legitimacy and urge townspeople to accept his rule. It was Henry’s clients in the towns who spoke out for his clemency and re-incorporated him into the spiritual and moral order of the day by voicing their consent to his authority through the cry, *Vive le Roi!* If power in its most rudimentary form incorporates the ability of someone to get someone else to do what he or she wants, the king’s clients were crucial in re-establishing stability in France. The process was not simple because clienteles were not easily controlled. Power was fragmented among competing clienteles, and loyalties changed over time. Even so, clients aided the king by serving as avenues of human access to the towns. Legitimacy is a quality of power, and clientage served Henry to buttress his legitimacy.

In the context of legitimacy my statement on absolutism is a simple one. Henry pursued legitimacy and in the process strengthened Bourbon rule, although he never envisioned becoming an ‘absolute’ king. Looking at the way he acquired legitimacy and hence power allows us to reassess the political achievements of his reign. Frederic Baumgartner states, ‘His contribution to absolutism was restoring the efficiency of the government so that it was again responsive to the king’s will.’ He also restored legitimacy to the monarchy as a force able to exert its will and bring about the desired response. Consent is seldom universal in any political setting, and in Henry’s case it was never complete, but he won the active support of his people so that his government proved effective. Re-establishing the alliance and dialogue between the Crown and the towns enjoyed by earlier kings was one of Henry’s successes.

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48 Baumgartner, *France*, 234.
Henry IV has attracted many biographers and historians. Scholars before the 1970s who studied his reign interpreted his actions using a top-down model in which the king forced his will on the towns and imposed royal directives from above. Henry’s intervention in municipal politics caused many historians to decide that he had intended to destroy municipal privileges. Jean Mariejol and Gabriel Hanotaux, for example, argued in the early twentieth century that Henry perceived town privileges as threats to his authority and wanted to discontinue their use. Jean Mariejol called Henry an ‘enemy of the franchises of the towns’. Paul Robiquet likewise argued that when the king re-established order after the religious wars, he destroyed municipal privileges to punish the Catholic League. Georges Pagès, however, disagreed with his contemporaries. Rather than threatening urban autonomy, Pagès believed Henry IV simply accommodated himself to existing municipal institutions.

In the late 1940s scholars began incorporating Henry IV into the growing literature on absolutism. Gaston Zeller and Roger Doucet, for example, saw Henry as a founder of absolutism. Zeller placed Henry at the head of municipal reform and contended that no other king intervened more often in municipal affairs. Doucet saw Henry as an innovator and wrote that ‘the absolutist reaction [that had] begun with the reign of Henry IV’ contributed to ‘the ruin of the [municipal] institutions’. For some historians, the real issue was the growing trend toward centralization of government. Robert Trullinger investigated Henry’s attempts to oversee financial matters in the towns of Brittany. He concluded that Henry succeeded in extending Crown control over matters formally handled by municipalities. ‘By the end of the reign’, he states, ‘the king and his government had established an organized and centralized structure for the control of the financial administration of the towns.’ Henry’s determination to weaken the towns and end municipal independence was also the interpretation emphasized by two biographers of the king, Jean-Pierre Babelon and Janine Garrisson, who published works in the early 1980s. Babelon went so far as to subtitle his discussion of Henry’s municipal policy, ‘La mainmise sur les villes’.

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61 Mariejol, Histoire de France, 34.
By the 1980s, however, several historians began to advise caution in judging Henry’s relationship with the towns. J. Russell Major saw Henry as a founder of absolutism but recognized that it was easy to exaggerate his ability to control the towns. He wrote, ‘As a whole they [the towns] remained quite capable of thwarting the royal will by their delaying tactics and in some instances of putting up stout defenses against the royal army, as the following reign was to prove.’ This sentiment was echoed by David Buisseret who felt Henry’s intervention in the towns was sporadic. He emphasized that the king interfered in town politics only when the requirements of military necessity, civil order, and fiscal needs forced his hand. ‘Outside these limits’, Buisseret observed, ‘his intervention was rare.’

Finally, Robert Descimon in 1988 published an intensive study of Henry’s interference in Parisian elections. He argued that the king and the municipal magistrates reached a compromise designed to maintain the appearance of free elections while ensuring the king’s participation in the events. Henry frequently nominated the city’s prévôt des marchands, but Descimon found that he rarely interfered in the election of échevins. When the king did recommend a royal candidate for senior office, he generally confirmed a choice the electors had already made. Henry thus rubber-stamped the popular voice as kings had often done before him and sealed the collusion between the state and the municipal oligarchy. Descimon asserted, ‘To sum up, the attitude of Henry IV referred to the most archaic possible political framework, far from all centralizing, modernizing, or absolutist will.’

William Beik has made scholars aware in recent years of the shortcomings of traditional political history by uncovering an alliance in seventeenth-century Languedoc between provincial elites and the Crown that was profitable to both. Micro-histories of towns, published with increasing frequency since the 1960s, have also underscored the complexities of urban life and revealed the wide diversity of the urban experience in early modern France. Recent monographs on towns during the Wars of Religion, for instance, those by Philip Benedict, Robert Descimon, and Penny Roberts, have exposed the complex rivalries that existed...
inside urban power structures. The following pages examine the interplay between urban elites and the Crown, and several chapters use a micro-history approach by focusing on a few urban examples. Substantial case studies are made of Amiens, Abbeville, Limoges, and Lyons. Other chapters, specifically four and five, consider Henry’s interaction with the towns more broadly. By using these two approaches, both in-depth and comparative analyses and top-down and bottom-up models are developed of Henry IV’s relationship with his towns. Finally, while this book makes no attempt to engage in the current debate among scholars about the place of religion in the Wars of Religion, the importance of religion in the lives of sixteenth-century people is endorsed completely as part of the backdrop to Henry’s reign.

To eliminate confusion in the text, the reader should note that municipal governments came in all shapes and sizes in the sixteenth century. The corps de ville numbered four at Blois, five at Paris, six at Narbonne, eight at Toulouse, twenty at Dijon, and twenty-four at Poitiers. A varying degree of advisory bodies could boost the number of municipal councillors in any given town to over one hundred, as in the case of La Rochelle, although this was rare. Terminology was not uniform either. Mayors headed most municipal governments in northern and central France, but this position equalled that of viscomte-mayeur in Dijon, prévôt des marchands in Paris and Lyons, and lieutenant du capitaine in Reims. Aiding these important officials were burghers for the most part known as échevins. Governing councils in the south of France were known as consults. Consuls shared equal power and prestige whereas mayors outranked échevins, although sometimes a premier consul was named. A few towns acquired unique titles for their municipal officers. There were gouverneurs at Senlis, jurats at Bordeaux, and capituols at Toulouse.

After a short introduction that places French early modern towns in historical context, chapter two on patronage and clientage in Amiens demonstrates how Henry used his clients to broker his clemency for capitulation and to secure the town from within as the Catholic League fell apart in Picardy. Chapter three looks at ceremonial entries and the imaginative way Henry turned former Catholic League towns into institutional clients. Chapters four and five explore Henry’s relationship with former Catholic League, royalist, and Protestant towns and underscore his use of clientage to negotiate with the towns. Chapter six discusses
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the clients Henry placed in municipal office. Chapter seven examines two tax riots Henry faced and argues that his responses to these crises helped to resolve ongoing problems related to the religious wars. Chapter eight investigates the issue of post-war debt liquidation and reveals how Henry and his financial minister Sully used the debt issue to increase the Crown’s authority. A short conclusion summarizes the relationship between town politics and absolutism. The chapters move chronologically from 1589 to 1610, but most of the book centres around the years 1593 to 1598 when the towns of France capitulated to the king and the religious wars came to an end. All translations are my own and original spellings have been maintained from the document sources.

The respect and influence enjoyed by urban elites and their control over town patronage made them exceedingly important to Henry IV. The Wars of Religion created a situation in which the king had to placate the towns in order to pacify France. Yet in rebuilding a royal alliance with the towns, Henry IV also took every opportunity to strengthen his royal authority. The success of his kingship cannot be fully understood without reference to his achievement with the towns.
To many historians, and especially to Fernand Braudel, the part French towns played in the religious civil wars, and in particular their support of the Catholic League, marked a return to the age of medieval urban independence. French medieval towns had exhibited a republican spirit that included pride in their urban autonomy, but increasingly during the sixteenth century their hallowed liberties and privileges came under attack. Louis XI, Charles VIII, Louis XII, Francis I, Henry II, Charles IX, and Henry III all interfered in municipal elections on a sporadic basis and passed a variety of laws designed to increase royal involvement in town politics and finances. Francis I’s Edict of Crémaieu ordered bailiffs from the local royal courts to observe all municipal general assemblies and elections while Charles IX’s Ordonnance of Orleans instructed all towns to submit their financial records to royal officials for auditing. In 1547 Henry II enacted legislation that made municipal offices incompatible with royal ones and ordered municipal offices on town councils reserved for merchants and bourgeois notables. In 1566 Charles IX passed the Ordonnance of Moulins which restricted municipal jurisdiction to criminal affairs and matters of police and delegated all civil suits to royal judges. What these laws had in common was that they threatened municipal independence, although they were operated for the Crown more as fiscal expedients but were rarely enforced. Towns with healthy treasuries and wealthy citizens paid fees to buy exemptions from their restrictions. Thus while Crown control of municipal