

Comptes rendus — Book Reviews

MICHAEL LYNCH—*Edinburgh and the Reformation*. Edinburgh: John Donald Publishers (Humanities Press), 1981. Pp. xv, 416.

“It is surprising how little is known of Edinburgh’s reformation; it . . . has attracted only a single article and not one monograph. What has served in its place is the cult of the personality of John Knox. It is a view of history at times so staggering in its crudity as to be scarcely credible were it not so firmly established in the popular imagination.” (p. 217) In this study Michael Lynch not only rewrites a chapter of Edinburgh’s history but substantially recasts the history of the Scottish Reformation as well. His achievement and his scholarship are alike impressive.

The book is organized into three sections, the first offering an analysis of the city’s society, the second tracing the tortuous political developments in the period from the 1550s to 1585, while the third and possibly most interesting part investigates the religious and political alignments of the participants. Twelve appendices provide detailed evidence for the preceding argument, analyzing such subjects as membership of the town council, the Protestant and recusant groups, the Queen’s and the King’s parties, a list of those inhabitants whose houses were demolished in the struggle of 1572, and the tax rolls of 1565 and 1585. Lynch’s study will hardly seize the popular imagination. Visitors will continue to pay homage at John Knox’s house in the High Street, a property in which the great reformer never resided; but the author has gone far to restore the balance.

Much writing on the Scottish Reformation tends to be far too exclusively concerned with Scotland. As a disciple of A. G. Dickens, Lynch is completely at home in the literature of the Reformation city as well as in the European historiography at large. With a population of about 15,000 in the 1590s, Edinburgh was larger than both Geneva and Zurich. What Lynch stresses time and again is that although the Reformation came late to Edinburgh, it was a surprisingly moderate, indeed haphazard phenomenon. Religion was subordinate to localism; “burgh protestantism was as fickle a creature as burgh politics” (p. 7). The Reformation when it came in 1560 “did not mark any political revolution in burgh politics” (p. 18). Edinburgh was largely the victim of outside forces, France and England. The Protestant victory came about “almost by accident” (p. 38). As late as 1565 the town was far from being a hotbed of radicalism; Edinburgh “shared the general reluctance of Scottish society as a whole to take political risks for the sake of protestantism.” (p. 114)

Another of Lynch’s strengths is the socio-economic analysis he provides on the sixteenth century, an area in which Scottish historiography is again weak. He rightly questions the dichotomy between merchants and crafts which figures so prominently in previous urban studies. Both groups were united in their common devotion to the “religion of Edinburgh . . . their particular” (p. 49). Trade and commerce came first. Lynch is also good on Catholicism, confirming a trend in recent writing which indicates a substantial Catholic population in the 1550s and one by no means negligible in the 1560s and 1570s. He estimates that about half of the burgh establishment was purged in 1559, but there was a similar changeover in personnel after Mary’s deposition in 1567, and further fluctuations as the kingdom coped with the problems posed by a series of regents. Edinburgh in any case was not its own master; the court controlled a sizeable chunk of town patronage.

The author correctly stresses that the word "protestant" embraced a wide spectrum of belief. Protestantism was not monolithic, as is all too often assumed. He finds an interesting correlation, however, between wealth and professed Protestantism, the ranks of which included a majority of the town's wealthiest merchants and two-thirds of the lawyers. These men were by no means unanimous in their support of John Knox who is effectively cut down to size time and again in this study.

The book suffers from that bane of local history, the superabundance of names. Doubtless after ten years of research the author has a nodding acquaintance with a good number of Edinburgh's dignitaries over a period of some thirty years, but they tend to weary the reader and in places obscure the argument. This, however, is a minor carp. Lynch has made a highly significant contribution to Scottish urban studies, and he has not only questioned but eradicated many cherished assumptions in Reformation historiography. Four useful maps and an adequate bibliography accompany the text. Congratulations should also be extended to the publisher, John Donald, a small but courageous publishing house which has been responsible for a veritable renaissance in Scottish Historical publication during the last decade.

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ROBERT MUCHEMBLED — *Culture populaire et culture des élites dans la France moderne (XV^e-XVIII^e siècles)*. Essai. Paris, Flammarion, 1978, 398 p.

Il aura fallu attendre plus de cinq ans avant que cet ouvrage consacré à une « révolution culturelle de grande ampleur » (p. 13) ne fasse l'objet d'un compte rendu dans une revue qui s'intitule *Histoire sociale*. Faut-il s'interroger sur les raisons de tels attermoissements ?

Sans doute les arcanes de la distribution au Canada réservent-elles encore des surprises aux consommateurs de la production savante importée de l'hexagone. Peut-être, aussi, la collectivité fort éclectique des historiens du « social » se trouve-t-elle décontenancée par l'éclatement de la discipline, d'ailleurs perçu au colloque de juin 1982 à l'Université Carleton, et hésite-t-elle à se lancer précipitamment dans le culturel. Il est vrai, de plus, que le contexte dans lequel œuvre l'historien d'ici — quelle que soit son appartenance linguistique — ne facilite pas la perception immédiate des plus récents mouvements que connaissent ses collègues de France. Pour ces raisons, même si le recul dans le temps ne signifie pas grand-chose, nous tirerons parti de ce décalage depuis la parution de *Culture populaire...* afin de situer d'abord le livre et son auteur, qui vient d'atteindre la quarantaine, dans la mouvance de l'« entre-deux-Mai ».

Au cours de son brillant périple d'« histoire sociale des représentations » dans la France de mai 1968 à mai 1981 (*L'Entre-deux-Mai...*, Éd. du Seuil, 1983), Pascal Ory notait à quel point une « précipitation de notre consommation nostalgique » (p. 107), une « véritable fringale rétrospective » (p. 146), avaient renforcé l'attrait exercé par le retour aux racines. Celui-ci transparait dans l'avant-propos de Muchembled qui, comme il se doit, se garde de « découvrir l'avenir dans les brumes du passé » (p. 9), mais n'en affirme pas moins, en moderniste consommé, l'actualité — ou serait-ce la modernité, la contemporanéité? — de ce seizième siècle déjà aux prises avec certains des ébranlements majeurs de notre époque, laquelle, « dans le grand tohu-bohu de ce qui pourrait être une fin de civilisation, voit reparaître ce qui avait été réprimé » (p. 9).