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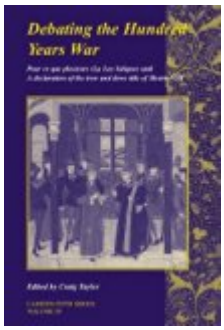

Craig Taylor, ed.. *Debating the Hundred Years War: Pour ce que plusieurs (La Loy Salique) and A declaration of the trew and dewe title of Henrie VIII.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006. xiii + 304 pp. $91.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-521-87390-1.

Reviewed by Glenn Richardson

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At the outset of William Shakespeare's *Henry V*, the archbishop of Canterbury is called on by the young king to clarify the English claim to the French throne to assure the morally scrupulous Henry of his right to make war. The archbishop sets out an elaborate sounding genealogical and legal refutation of the Salic law, which states that no woman can succeed, or pass title to, the crown of France. The French deny Henry's right to the crown as the descendent of Edward III, whose own claim derived from his mother Isabella. According to the archbishop, the Salic law was not intended to apply in France and has been ignored by French kings almost since its inception. Virtually all of them, he maintains, obtained their title through the female line. They cannot, therefore, bar Henry's just claim.[1]

By the time the play was first performed in around 1598-99, the Salic law had risen from what were actually very obscure and uncertain legal origins to become one of the "fundamental laws" of France that its king was now bound to uphold. Probably the single most important document in explaining the rise of the Salic law to such heights of legal sanctity was *Pour ce que plusiers*, the first modern study of which has now been presented by Craig Taylor, together with an English response, *A Declaration of the trew and dewe title of Henrie VIII*, completed in the opening decades of the sixteenth century.

Bringing these two works together in a single volume, Taylor demonstrates their roles in debating the causes of the Hundred Years War in the half century after its effective ending with the English defeat at Castillon in 1453. In its aftermath, the English lost everything they once held in France, except Calais, but no peace treaty brought the war officially to an end. Throughout the remainder of the fifteenth century, the renewal of hostilities was a threat that English kings made periodically and with varying degrees of sincerity. In response, the Valois monarchs vigorously asserted the legitimacy of their line and sought both to isolate their English counterparts and to buy off their threats of war with handsome pensions. According to Taylor, *Pour ce que plusieurs* was written in or around 1464, proba-

bly in connection with one such set of negotiations between Louis XI and Edward IV.

The author of the treatise has never before been identified. Taylor argues persuasively that it was Guillaume Cousinot II de Montreuil (c. 1400-84), a royal secretary, legal official, diplomat, and courtier who had served Charles VII in negotiations with the English. He was well informed about English attitudes toward France, having visited England on embassy twice in 1445 and spent three years there, after being taken prisoner while returning from a mission to Scotland in 1451. His work shows awareness of the weakened state of the English monarchy and a strong pro-Lancastrian bias in his comment on the dispute over the English crown we now know as the Wars of the Roses. Cousinot was also instrumental in advancing Louis XI's claims to sovereignty in Brittany and Burgundy--both allies of England at different times--as part of the consolidation and extension of Valois power in the aftermath of the English defeat. Cousinot's treatise builds on previous tracts refuting English claims in France, principally *Tres crestien, tres hault, tres puissant roy*, but shows none of their reticence about the authority of the Salic law. Indeed, its earliest printed editions were published from around 1488 under the title *La Loy Salique, première loy des françois*, emphasizing the central importance of this authority in the treatise. In preparing his treatise, Cousinot had access to royal archives, particularly those in the abbey of Saint-Denis, and was able, apparently, to consult original documents, such as working papers and treaties. On the face of it, this should have made for a more thorough and reliable account of the war's origins from a French perspective, but Taylor shows Cousinot's motivation was not impartial and that he was an enthusiastic rewriter of history. Rather than citing official legal or diplomatic documents to which he had access, Cousinot often invoked only "les cronicquez de France" as his authority for his version of events, most crucially when he asserted that the Salic law was raised in objection to Edward III's putative succession to the French throne in 1328. This was not, in fact, the case.[2] He illustrated his argument, particularly on the point that no cognates had ever succeeded to the French throne, from sources that are impossible to identify and that he may even have fabricated. Cousinot also drew on English law and chronicles to make inferences that those sources do not, in context, really support.

The English were also not averse to tracts and historical treatises supporting the dynastic claim to the French throne, but they were fewer in number and most were published in the sixteenth century. As Taylor points out, there was never any direct English equivalent of *La Loy Salique*, but the most significant English tract on the legalities of the Hundred Years War was a direct riposte to it. This was *A declaration of the trew and dewe title of Henrie VIII*. Taylor argues from key internal references that it was most likely to have been written in the early years of Henry's reign when he was at his most active in prosecuting war against his two French contemporaries, Louis XII and Francis I. Although the tract is by an anonymous author, Taylor suggests plausibly that he was likely to have been William Spencer, a customs and revenue collector who lived and worked in Ipswich and who had died by 1529. A presentation copy of the tract was made, but there is no evidence that it was ever read by, or known to, people in the circle of Henry and his councilors.

Unlike Cousinot, the author of this declaration had no apparent access to administrative records and sought to refute the arguments of the French tract by relying on English chronicles and discrediting the sources used by Cousinot. He did so in part by setting out an extraordinary conspiracy theory, alleging that from Louis XI's reign onward, the French fabricated entire chronicles that supported their version of events and destroyed the original records that contradicted it. He also attacked *Pour ce que plusieurs* as an attempt to sow dissension among English nobles through its sup-

port for Lancastrian claims to the English throne, finally dismissing it as unreliable and scarcely more than anti-English propaganda. ***A declaration*** had fairly strong propagandistic potential itself, of course, although its author stated that he was not advocating active pursuit of the English claim to France.

Taylor's volume demonstrates careful and painstaking transcription, organization, and research. The two texts are presented with ample supporting academic apparatus and there is good cross-referencing between the different versions of ***Pour ce que plusieurs*** which Taylor has located in a variety of archives and which are also discussed in one of three appendices. Taylor has made a worthwhile contribution to the published primary resources, happily now increasingly available, on Anglo-French political and cultural relations. While it is hard to imagine most undergraduates in courses on the Hundred Years War or related subjects actually working their way through the two ancient French and English texts, the arguments and characteristics of those texts should certainly be put before them in lectures and in the study of extracts illustrating key points. Specialist researchers and those with an interest in the bibliographic histories of late medieval England and France in general and the circulation of French literature in England under the Tudors in particular will find the book useful and illuminating. When taken together with already published mid-sixteenth-century debates, Taylor's work helps to demonstrate how keenly and vigorously the arguments about the English claim to the French crown could still be conducted under the Tudor monarchs. This was something Shakespeare clearly appreciated. Taylor's work presents further evidence, if any were needed, that militarily, politically, and rhetorically, the Hundred Years War had a very active "after-life" well beyond 1453.

Notes

[1]. Shakespeare, ***Henry V***, act 1, scene 2.

[2]. Anne Curry, ***The Hundred Years War*** (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2003), 38-40.

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