



The Gondi: Family Strategy and Survival in Early Modern France

Joanna Milstein

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One of the most striking features of French government in the second half of the sixteenth century was the influence of Italians. Notwithstanding widespread French admiration for Italian culture, Italian influence at the heart of French government aroused xenophobic antagonism amongst many in French society. This study throws light on this complex relationship by offering the first detailed examination of the Gondi, one of the most influential of the Italian families active during this period. The Gondi family played a leading part in the finance, government, church and military affairs of the nation, and were indispensable counsellors to the Queen Mother, Catherine De' Medici. They were also the targets of anti-Italian hostility, much of it deliberately stirred by rivals in the French aristocracy who felt threatened by these powerful foreigners occupying positions they believed were rightfully theirs. The book examines perceptions of the Gondi through examination of contemporary pamphlets, diaries, and ambassadors' dispatches. It investigates, among other issues, their notorious role in the plotting of the St Bartholomew's Day Massacre in 1572. Making use of many previously overlooked archival sources from France and Italy, this book charts the Gondi's rise to power and demonstrates how their deft use of patronage and financial expertise allowed them to weave the intricate web of power and obligation that protected them against native hostility. In so doing the book reveals much about government and society in late sixteenth-century France.

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