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**Benoît Garnot, *Intime conviction et erreur judiciaire, Un magistrat assassin au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle ?***

Dijon, Éditions Universitaires de Dijon, 2004, 160 pp., ISBN 2-905965-93-2

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- 1 The brutal murder of Jean-Baptiste Brunet, an official of the chancery of the *bailliage* of Beaune, and his servant Élisabeth Pelisson, on 22 March 1649, has left an unusually rich paper trail which enables Benoît Garnot not only to reconstruct the details of the crime, its investigation and conclusion in August 1650, but to use the huge corpus of surviving witness statements as a window onto seventeenth-century French provincial life. This is history in the best of the *Annales* tradition: there are sections on matters as diverse as material life, religious belief, kinship relations, the perception of time and space, and the uses of money. It makes for fascinating reading and Garnot writes with economy and authority. Historians of crime may be inclined to skip these sections to get to the nitty gritty of the trial and to the controversial conviction, but reflecting on the outlook and aspirations of the defendants, Nicolas Guyot and his two sons, around whom much of the book revolves, brings it rewards since they were representatives of that group of minor legal officials usually overlooked by historians. Garnot's view that their conviction was unsafe has some validity, but it is underpinned by the erroneous assumption that elite violence in seventeenth-century France was uncommon and inevitably in decline in the face of state repression. Guyot *père*, like many lawyers, did not conform to the pious and urbane stereotype of the Baroque *robin*; rather he shared much in common with the rural gentry, being querulous, debauched and avaricious.

Socially aspirant, his sons eschewed the law for the profession of arms and the elder had only recently returned from campaign. The dispute Nicolas had with Brunet was a classic confrontation between brothers-in-law over a dowry; his flight after the murder the usual response of an accused who had the resources to spend time in exile, while his kin and patrons fought off the judicial challenge and obtained letters of pardon. The reasons why subsequent events did not follow their usual course and why the Guyot, unusually for men of their social status, went to the scaffold, is hinted at by Garnot. But politics is not the domain of the *Annales*-trained historian. Partly, the downfall of the Guyot was their own fault – why flee to Avignon when the army, which teemed with scoundrels, offered better protection? We need to know a great deal more about the micro-politics of Beaunois society before we can assess the forces ranged against the Guyot. Garnot is very good on their own kin group and it seems clear that the downfall and imprisonment of their patron the prince de Condé, governor of Burgundy, in January 1650 harmed their cause. The appointment of a new attorney-general to the Dijon Parlement in July 1650 was crucial to sealing their fate. Lacking a patron, there could be no letters of abolition and no evocation or appeal on technical grounds. In any case, political crises like the Frondes encouraged greater severity by the courts. Whether the conviction of the Guyot was safe is moot, but the tense situation in Dijon required exemplary punishment to be meted out to *gens de bien* as a timely reminder of the power and authority of the king's justice.

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