

**Serres, Pierre.** *Histoire des Penitens de Montpellier (1602–1684)*. *Publiée pour la première fois in extenso sur le manuscrit autographe*. Présenté et annoté par Jean Nougaret et Louis Secondy. Montpellier: Éditions de l'entente bibliophile, 2003. Pp. 217 ISBN 2-902852-09-6 (paperback) n.p.

In this volume Jean Nougaret and Louis Secondy provide an annotated and edited version of Pierre Serres's seventeenth-century manuscript *Histoire des Penitens de Montpellier (1602–1684)*. A prominent and powerful confraternity, the Penitens played a significant part in the religious, social, and political life of Montpellier, a city located on the southern coast of France in the Languedoc-Roussillon region. Serres's text, composed across the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, is a history of the confraternity that chronicles the participation of the Penitens in key local events and describes their devotions and processions, their building and decoration programs, and the daily activities of the confraternity's members. Offering a contemporary picture of the confraternity in the century following the French Wars of Religion, the *Histoire de Penitens* should be of interest to those who study reform, co-existence and conflict, as well as the role of lay confraternities in the religious, social, and political life of seventeenth-century France.

In their explanatory introduction, editors Nougaret and Secondy supply readers with a brief personal history of the manuscript's author, Pierre Serres, highlight important aspects of the text, and discuss their reasons for publishing the *Histoire de Penitens*. A native of Montpellier, Pierre Serres authored a number of local histories on the city and surrounding area, including the *Histoire de Penitens*. Though the Serres family had been practicing Protestants during the sixteenth century, by the time of Pierre's birth in 1649 they had already converted to Catholicism. Serres's father joined the Penitens in 1646 and, in time, was followed by his son Pierre who remained a devoted member of the confraternity until his death in 1725. Serres's original *Histoire des Penitens de Montpellier*, housed in the confraternity archive in Montpellier, consists of two volumes. The Nougaret/Secondy edition, however, presents only the first volume since the second volume was unfortunately lost in the early twentieth century and has yet to be found.

In order to establish the importance of the *Histoire* for scholars, Nougaret and Secondy give three reasons why they chose to publish the text. The first is that eighteenth and nineteenth century historians of Montpellier relied so heavily on Serres's manuscript that more recent scholars refer to these secondary sources rather than to the original, which results in a piecemeal and often skewed perception of the text. This edition thus seeks to solve the problem by making the full text of the original more readily available. Second, for those interested in Pierre Serres as a historian, Nougaret and Secondy argue that the *Histoire* complements his other works and shows the full breadth and depth of his ability as a historian. Most importantly, a third reason for the publication of the manuscript is what Nougaret and Secondy view as its value to confraternal studies and to the history of seventeenth-century France. Serres's

portrait of the Penitens depicts the ideal of a well-functioning confraternal brotherhood, highlighting examples of zeal and faith, establishing a favourable account of the Penitens for his present and future confraternal brothers. As such, it offers historians a useful contemporary perspective on French confraternal practices and ideals.

The *Histoire* does indeed bring the Penitens to life during a significant period in the history of Montpellier and French religious history more broadly. Much of the manuscript focuses on interaction between the Penitens and local Protestants, with Serres casting the Penitens as the target of anti-Catholic persecution and highlighting the confraternity's participation in triumphal Catholic events such as the 1614 and 1683 conversion of local Huguenot pastors and congregations. (57–58, 162–173) Serres also describes the prominent role given to the Penitens in Montpellier's celebrations and processions for religious holidays, jubilees, and in honour of significant visitors such as King Louis XIII in the fall of 1622. The text also documents episodes of plague (including an outbreak in 1629), the construction and decoration of the confraternity's chapel and buildings, and sheds light on their devotional practices, including particular dedication to worship of the Cross and the Holy Sacrament. Additionally, Serres includes transcripts of documents associated with the confraternity's history throughout the manuscript, the most significant being a new rule and constitutions for the Penitens propagated in 1683 (148–158).

As editors of the manuscript, Nougaret and Secondy have produced a fine, usable edition of the *Histoire*. Spelling has been modernized, abbreviations expanded, and punctuation edited so that the text reads easily, all with due care to maintaining the meaning and sense of the original. Subheadings from the original document and a modern index of names assist the reader in navigating through the manuscript, while the editors' explanatory notes offer clarifying details for many of the events, places, persons, and practices mentioned in the text. By way of illustration the volume includes a photograph of the Penitens' chapel and six pages of woodcuts, reproduced from a book of hours published by the confraternity in the early eighteenth century. As mentioned above, Nougaret and Secondy's explanatory introduction places the manuscript firmly within the context of Montpellier's own history and relates the value of Serres's work to French history more broadly.

The *Histoire des Penitens de Montpellier (1602–1684)* is an excellent contribution to the canon of available, published primary sources in the field of confraternal studies. This work will no doubt be relevant not only to those pursuing the study of lay religious organizations and seventeenth-century Catholic reform in the Languedoc-Roussillon region, but also to any scholar with an interest in the history of penitent confraternities and confessional relations, whether in France or Europe more broadly.