

HAINES, Roy Martin — *King Edward II: His Life, his Reign, and its Aftermath, 1284–1330*. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003. Pp. 604.

The enduring fascination of the British people with the antics of the royal family boasts a long and distinguished history. Every decade in the last century or so has seen the publication of a significant number of volumes on a host of medieval, early modern, and modern rulers, with each successive book mining previously untapped source materials in the hope of casting new light on the successes and failures of one or the other in governing the realm. For the vast majority of medievalists, pride of place among the most disreputable and most controversial of kings has long been accorded to Edward II. His rule quickly degenerated into tyranny and ended in an ignominious death. Roy Haines's biography may thus appear in one sense as little more than the newest in a long list of monographs dedicated to the dismal reign of a much-maligned king, but to view it as such would do the work a serious injustice. Although the research of a scholar as seasoned as Haines cannot accomplish the impossible task of restoring Edward's reputation, the author offers here a fresh, up-to-date perspective on a figure about whom much has been written.

Perhaps surprisingly, Haines offers little in the way of explanation for his decision to embark on a new biography of Edward. He takes no issue with long-held opinions about why the king failed so spectacularly to govern his people with the cooperation of his magnates, and makes no claim to have uncovered important new evidence that will either exonerate the king or condemn him to further infamy. This book is, rather, a labour of love, the culmination of Haines's long and distinguished career as an historian of the fourteenth century. As such it is a superbly crafted piece of work, painstakingly researched and beautifully written. If, in the end, Haines fails to win his readers over to Edward's cause, he succeeds nevertheless in presenting a balanced assessment of the many flaws that beset the son of a great and much-renowned father.

Haines begins his study of Edward's life with a balanced and comprehensive review of the patchy materials that inform the prince's early years, but the author's sympathy for his subject begins to become apparent in his treatment of the young king's relations with the magnates who dominated the English political scene almost from the onset of his reign and who quickly came to focus their animus on the person of Piers Gaveston. Chief among these was Thomas of Lancaster, who occupies almost as much of Haines's attention in the book as does the king himself. Lancaster, in fact, is cast throughout the work as the author of most, if not all, of the problems that Edward experienced between 1310 and 1322, and, although Haines makes no attempt to excuse the king's failure to address adequately the very legitimate grievances that Lancaster and his supporters voiced, the earl is very much the *bête noire* of this work. Thus, in accepting the Ordinances of 1310–1311, Edward "acted under duress"; his acquiescence, moreover, is seen as "an ominous foreshadowing" of the events of 1326, when Edward was forced to abdicate. The king's helplessness in the face of events is again in evidence in Haines's review of the period 1318 to 1321, when a fragile rapprochement with Lancaster was achieved, but ultimately collapsed. Here again, the earl is blamed for causing the rift, although his

avowed opponent this time was not Edward, but the latter's favourite, Hugh Despenser.

Haines is a scholar of great erudition, and his reconstruction of the complex political world of the early fourteenth century draws on a daunting array of primary source materials and secondary works. Few historians can match his familiarity with the numerous chroniclers who wrote (some at great length) about the reign or with mind-numbing minutiae of royal government, as revealed in the massive number of documents generated by Edward's Exchequer and Chancery. Yet one consequence of Haines's attention to detail — perhaps unintended? — is that the figure of Edward himself remains something of a cipher. Characters such as Thomas of Lancaster, Piers Gaveston, Hugh Despenser, Adam Orleton and Walter Reynolds, Queen Isabella, and others all loom large in this work, and each in his or her own way is allotted a principal role in fomenting trouble for the hapless king. But, in the chapters that concentrate on events in England between 1307 and 1326, Edward II attracts little comment and even less overt censure on the part of the author, so that by the end of the work it remains difficult to grasp the extent to which Haines believes Edward to have been responsible for the grisly fate to which his opponents subjected him within the confines of Berkeley Castle. The chapters that treat England's relations with Ireland, Gascony, Wales, and Scotland — regions that too often receive only cursory treatment from English scholars — are more balanced. Here, Edward is portrayed more clearly, sometimes as victim of circumstance, at others as guilty of poor judgement, in still others as assertive in his aims and successful in his achievements. At the conclusion of the book, then, the reader is inevitably left with an ambivalent sense of the Haines's own "take" on the king. In some scholarly works such equivocation might be criticized as a serious flaw. In a biography of a ruler who has universally been considered a failure it is perhaps laudable.

Haines's life of Edward II is a fine piece of scholarship. There are few surprises for those familiar with the reign: the military setbacks, the outrageous advancement of favourites, the poor political sense, and the lack of sound judgement that earlier biographies have discussed are all repeated here. But Haines's ability to recreate in exhaustive detail a formative time in the constitutional era in English history will ensure that his book becomes a standard reference work for the period.

Cynthia J. Neville
Dalhousie University

HAVARD, Gilles — *Empire et métissages. Indiens et Français dans le Pays d'en Haut, 1660–1715*, Sillery et Paris, Éditions du Septentrion et Presses de l'Université Paris-Sorbonne, 2003, 858 p.

À quelques exceptions près, l'histoire de la colonisation française en Amérique du Nord a longtemps été fragmentée en îlots d'écriture isolés les uns par rapport aux autres, tantôt en vertu de la langue de publication, tantôt en vertu d'écarts occasionnés par des téléologies nationales différentes. À la longue, pourtant, l'ethnohistoire