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Sexual Crime, Religion and Masculinity in fin-de-siècle France: The Flamidien Affair. By Timothy Verhoeven. (Palgrave Pivot.) Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018. 122 pp.

Timothy Verhoeven weaves a fascinating history of regional and national politics, the medical pathologies associated with celibacy, dominant norms of masculinity for the secular and religious worlds, the battle between Republican and Catholic education, and the historical intertwining of the Flamidien and Dreyfus Affairs. His streamlined prose, impressive archival research and detective-novel intrigue produce a delightful and illuminating narrative of an unstudied crime and *fin-de-siècle* France. Throughout his book Verhoeven shows the consequences of the 1899 murder and possible sexual assault of a 12-year old boy named Gaston Foveaux by perhaps one of the priests who taught at his school in Lille, France, after whom the “Affair” is named. The crime set off a clash between Catholics and Republicans locally and nationally, *la guerre des deux France*. Chapter 3 describes how circulating gender norms undergird opinions in the presses and tribunal statements related to the major protagonists involved with the crime. Flamidien, the accused perpetrator, would be judged by society’s dominant view of unmarried men as “suspicious” (33). For many doctors and scientists who were anticlerical, “ecclesiastical celibacy was intolerable in a nation beset by falling birth rates”; it was also viewed as a “trigger for sexual crime” (35). To the prosecuting magistrate, Flamidien’s display of “feminine” characteristics framed him guilty (42). Chapter 5 dialogs with many nineteenth-century studies on homosexuality and the male invert and shows how they link the celibate priest to pathologies of spermatorrhea (involuntary emissions) and satyriasis (“extreme and violent desire”) (53). The former was constructed as a “lack of manliness.” As Flamidien acknowledged those symptoms, he “appeared as a transgressor of normative masculine ideals, and as such, a figure who could easily be imagined committing other, more explicitly criminal acts” (53). Chapter 6 reveals the intense antagonisms between the Church and State related to secondary schooling and Flamidien’s fate in court. There were

Republican and Socialist campaigns against congregational schools because they were viewed as a “danger to the Republic” (80). The Flamidien Affair paralleled the Dreyfus Affair in that there was a hardening of positions for and against teaching, celibate priests. As Verhoeven argues, “one man’s guilt or innocence [would tarnish] an entire class of citizens” (83). Chapter 7 demonstrates how the War of Two Frances continued to be exacerbated. Verhoeven analyses Emile Zola’s posthumous novel *Vérité* (1903), another whodunit unresolved crime, inspired by the first, the Gaston Foveaux murder and the ensuing polemics. Using different characters and circumstances, the novel nonetheless sided with the anti-clerical camp and entwined both “Affairs”. Zola’s novel anticipated the Republic’s action to close religious congregations to teaching in 1904, based in part on the fallout from the Flamidien Affair. Verhoeven’s judicious, rich scholarship beautifully recreates the debates and animosities of *fin-de-siècle* France, demonstrating that the Flamidien Affair was part of a larger, complex tapestry, connecting politics, religion, naturalist fiction and social constructions of gender, especially masculinity. This book will interest non-specialists, undergraduate and graduate students, and professors of history, French cultural studies, criminology, sexuality and gender studies, among others. (500 words)

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