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King Henry III of France has not suffered well at the hands of posterity. Generally depicted as at best a self-indulgent, ineffectual ruler, and at worst a debauched tyrant responsible for a series of catastrophic political blunders, his reputation has long been a poor one. Yet recent scholarship has begun to question the validity of this judgment and look for a more rounded assessment of the man and his reign. For, as this new biography of Henry demonstrates, there is far more to this fascinating monarch than the pantomime villain depicted by previous generations of historians and novelists. Based upon a rich and diverse range of primary sources, this book traces Henry's life from his birth in 1551, the sixth child of Henri II and Catherine de' Medici. It following his upbringing as the Wars of Religion began to tear France apart, his election as king of Poland in 1573, and his assumption of the French crown a year later following the death of his brother Charles IX. The first English-language biography of Henry for over 150 years, this study thoroughly and dispassionately reassesses his life in light of recent scholarship and in the context of broader European diplomatic, political and religious history. In so doing the book not only provides a more nuanced portrait of the monarch himself, but also helps us better understand the history of France during this traumatic time.

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