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Brian Sandberg, *Warrior Pursuits: Noble Culture and Civil Conflict in Early Modern France*. Baltimore, Md.: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010. xxx + 393 pp. Table, illustrations, notes, bibliography, and index. \$60.00 U.S. (cl). ISBN-10: 0-8018-9729-7.

Response by Brian Sandberg, Northern Illinois University.

I would like to thank Jay M. Smith for his detailed review, which determines that the book “does a good job of surveying the seemingly infinite shades of the warrior’s craft.” The review, however, foregrounds methodological problems in interpreting noble culture, religious violence, and civil conflict in early modern France, as well as broader intellectual debates concerning definitions of culture as *discourse*, *ideology*, or *practice*. I appreciate *H-France’s* invitation to address the interpretive issues raised by the review.

Warrior Pursuits demonstrates that many southern French nobles were intimately involved in religious and civil violence in the early seventeenth century, thus warfare was a way of life for these military elites long after the famous Edict of Nantes of 1598. My archival research reveals an astonishing amount of civil violence in early seventeenth-century Languedoc and Guyenne. French historians have long ignored the pervasive civil conflicts in southern France, seeing this period as one of relative peace and government centralization. *Warrior Pursuits* instead emphasizes the serious nature of the ongoing civil warfare and argues that “provincial nobles were the crucial orchestrators of all of this violence, actively financing, organizing, and directing civil warfare” (p. xv). The book investigates the meanings of this noble violence and the motivations for noble participation in civil warfare, finding that “southern French nobles engaged in *warrior pursuits*—social and cultural practices of violence designed to raise personal military forces and to engage in civil warfare in order to advance various political and religious goals” (p. xvi). Smith’s review of *Warrior Pursuits* agrees with this main argument, indicating that “the pursuit of warfare...colored almost every aspect of warriors’ existence” in this period.

My initial research was inspired by Arlette Jouanna’s *Le Devoir de révolte*, a landmark study of noble violence in early modern France that argues that French nobles engaged in civil violence primarily as part of a “duty of revolt” to uphold a constitutional principle of mixed government.[1] *Warrior Pursuits* addresses Jouanna’s arguments throughout all of its sections—extending some concepts (*prises d’armes*, *rituels de la révolte*), revising others (*réseaux d’amitié*, *crédit*, *honneur*), and challenging some conclusions (noble ideologies as coherent; the monopoly of favor as central to civil violence; constitutional motivations for noble revolt). My book concludes that southern French nobles did not engage in civil warfare because of a “duty to revolt” but, instead, pursued various religious and political causes within a “culture of revolt.” I argue that “the king wielded a brand of revolt, designating disorderly opponents as guilty of *lèse-majesté*, but nobles could appropriate the king’s authority to label their own rivals as ‘quarrelsome,’ ‘seditious,’ ‘criminals,’ and ‘rebels’” (p. xxi). Thus, the book not only revises Jouanna’s interpretations of noble revolt, but also rejects older arguments that noble violence was simply the product of petty rivalries and political factionalism.

Warrior Pursuits' reappraisal of noble violence critically questions Norbert Elias's influential theory of a "civilizing process," and Ellery Schalk's application of it to early modern French nobles. Elias claims that a "courtization of warriors" resulted in the "taming and preserving [of] the nobility" and the development of *civilité*, which would later spread outward from the royal court to the rest of European society.[2] In sharp contrast, I argue that "the pervasiveness and intensity of [southern French nobles'] warrior pursuits challenge Norbert Elias's model of a progressive domestication and pacification of nobles through a 'civilizing process' that communicated etiquette and manners throughout European societies, providing a basis for modern cultural norms and behavior. Far from becoming domesticated, early seventeenth-century warrior nobles avidly participated in a violent noble culture defined by civil and religious conflict" (p. xxiv).

My interpretive approach integrates cultural history and military history methods to reveal the bellicose practices nobles used to assemble military forces and wage civil warfare. *Warrior Pursuits* presents French warrior nobles as a provincial military elite, a specific social group defined narrowly by the profession of arms, and sharply differentiated from other groups of nobles who were engaged in other professions and careers (pp. 10-19). The book analyzes the interconnected concepts of kinship, household, lineage, and alliance that were specific to these warrior nobles, shaping their armed clientage, mobilization practices, and military operations. My book thus hardly presents the warrior nobles as an "undifferentiated" group, as Smith claims. *Warrior Pursuits* treats the warrior nobles' individual and collective acts—duels, feuds, armed processions, and combats—as related forms of performative violence.[3] Warrior nobles, I argue, constructed their conceptions of kinship, *crédit*, honor, friendship, and authority through their shared cultural practices of organizing civil warfare and engaging in violence. Interpretive approaches relying exclusively on semiotic or semantic analysis of discourses and ideologies have failed to discern the everyday practices that nobles utilized during civil conflicts.

This cultural analysis of violence questions broader narratives of early modern French civil conflict and "absolutist" state development. *Warrior Pursuits* interprets early seventeenth-century civil conflict primarily as a continuation of the French Wars of Religion, here delineated as stretching from 1562 to 1629. Warrior nobles in Languedoc and Guyenne continued to engage in religious activism and promote confessional causes through their violent pursuits. This calls attention to the need for further reconsideration of the Edict of Nantes and its failure to establish religious peace in 1598.[4] *Warrior Pursuits* argues that Languedoc and Guyenne represent an important case because these religiously-mixed provinces contained the vast majority of the Huguenot population and because so much civil war occurred there in the early seventeenth century.

I appreciate Smith's skepticism about French nobles' religiosity, but extensive manuscript sources reveal that religious beliefs and practices significantly shaped their political and military activities.[5] I certainly did not intend to suggest that southern French nobles experienced piety, devotion, and "sanctity honor" (a particular facet of noble honor culture) uniformly in the early seventeenth century. I recognize the complexities of interpreting the religious and political motivations of nobles, such as the duc de Mayenne, who took considerable initiative in civil conflicts (pp. 194-195). Nonetheless, various groups of Catholic and Calvinist nobles promoted diverse religious reforms and divergent confessional politics as they engaged in sustained religious and civil warfare against confessional and political opponents in the provinces with the most heavily mixed-confessional populations of France.

Acknowledging religion's role in early modern French noble culture forces a reconsideration of nobles' involvement in royal service, state development, and political culture. Rather than seeing royal service as a discourse emanating from the monarchy or as an ideology imposed on noble culture through normalization, my book argues that nobles performed royal service instrumentally, in order to advance political, religious, and military causes (p. 141). Nobles' various performances of command in raiding, siege warfare, and battle were constantly evaluated by their noble peers and clients, as well as by the

king (pp. 173-175, 254-267). Far from being disciplined by a centralizing monarch or discourse, provincial nobles in Languedoc and Guyenne pursued personal aims and religious politics through their everyday performances of official duties and royal service. This finding shifts the analysis of noble culture away from older concepts of absolutism, fidelity, or a “crisis of the nobility.”

Warrior Pursuits envisions political culture as operating through “bonds of nobility” composed of clientage, official, and honor relationships. This notion of political culture draws on the work of historians and theorists of practice, rather than simply applying discursive approaches.[6] The book examines southern French warrior nobles’ organization of clientage and their complex constructions of honor. I analyze the provincial military elites’ conceptions of authority, practices of officeholding, and performances of royal service. Provincial nobles actively participated in pamphleteering, civic entries, religious processions, and other politicized activities that question Habermas’s model of the “bourgeois” origins of the “public sphere” in the seventeenth century.

Southern French nobles’ participation in political culture thus intersected with their engagement in civil conflict, exposing the roles that violent rituals and performances played in early modern French noble culture. Rather than employing Geertzian theory, my approach to ritual is based on anthropological approaches that see ritualistic practices as involving contestation (pp. 189-190). The ways in which nobles justified their participation in civil war, armed themselves, and mobilized military forces all involved complex ritualistic practices: closing city gates, assembling in arms, justifying mobilization, branding enemies as rebels, forming armies, and displaying courage.

While I acknowledge the difficulties of combining cultural history and military history methods, I believe that *Warrior Pursuits* succeeds in producing “a cultural history of civil conflict by probing the intersections of noble culture, state development, and civil violence in early seventeenth-century French society” (p. xv). I hope that the book contributes effectively to the ongoing debates over religion, violence, nobility, and culture in early modern Europe.

NOTES

[1] Arlette Jouanna, *Le Devoir de révolte: La noblesse française et la gestation de l’État moderne, 1559-1661* (Paris: Fayard, 1989).

[2] Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), pp. xi-xvii, pp. 465-475; Ellery Schalk, “The Court as ‘Civilizer’ of the Nobility: Noble Attitudes and the Court in France in the Late Sixteenth and Early Seventeenth Centuries,” in Ronald G. Asch and Adolf M. Birke, eds., *Princes, Patronage, and the Nobility: The Court at the Beginning of the Modern Age, c. 1450-1650* (Oxford: German Historical Institute London and Oxford University Press, 1991), pp. 245-263; Ellery Schalk, *From Valor to Pedigree: Ideas of Nobility in France in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986).

[3] My book was substantially drafted when Stuart Carroll’s *Blood and Violence in Early Modern France* was published, but I critique his work in a review: Stuart Carroll, “Blood and Violence in Early Modern France,” *Journal of Social History* 41(Winter 2007): 194-196.

[4] There is so much evidence of French nobles’ involvement in confessional politics and religious violence that I am working on another book manuscript, tentatively entitled *Heroic Souls: French Nobles and Religious Violence after the Edict of Nantes, 1598-1629*, to examine more fully the complex intersections of religion, violence, and politics in early seventeenth-century France.

[5] Although statistical evidence of nobles' religious affiliations is not available, the 110-page prosopographical appendix of my dissertation provides further detail on individual nobles and families analyzed in the book.

[6] I argue that Keith Michael Baker and others “overemphasize the discursive dimensions of political culture” (pp. 116-117, 315 fn 3-7).

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