Laurent Lemarchand, *Paris ou Versailles? La monarchie absolue entre deux capitales 1715-1723*. Paris: CTHS, 2014. 402 pp. Maps, tables, annexes, bibliography and index. 28 €. (pb). ISBN 978-2-7355-0797-9.

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On September 2, 1715, the day after the death of Louis XIV, the French court left the palace of Versailles for Paris. Less than seven years later, in June 1722, it suddenly returned to Versailles and would remain there until the Revolution. Laurent Lemarchand argues that these moves by the French court from palace to city and then back again are of more than just incidental interest. In fact, they open an invaluable window on the transformation of the absolute monarchy that took place during the minority of Louis XV. Under the Regent Philippe d'Orléans, reforms were effected that allowed the monarchy to face the new forces of the eighteenth century while at the same time preserving its essentially authoritarian character. The result according to Lemarchand was, borrowing a term from Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, the "transition conservatrice de l'absolutisme" (p. 19).

That reforms were necessary was evident by the final years of the Sun King's reign. The War of the Spanish Succession, particularly the nightmare years from 1708 to 1710, was a military, political, social, and financial time of troubles for France. This general crisis exposed the weaknesses of the absolute monarchy and stoked popular and elite opposition against it.[1] In response, a spirit of reform spread through French ruling circles, even to Louis XIV himself. The old king, however, proved unable and unwilling to carry out large-scale changes. It would be left to Philip d'Orléans to take up this work. Lemarchand portrays the Regent as a committed absolutist who was also politically pragmatic and supremely supple. To neutralize opposition as well as secure his own grip on power, he first embarked on a program of liberalization of the monarchy. By creating the conciliar system called the Polysynodie, he demonstrated that he intended to open up government to formerly excluded elites. He diffused the explosive issue of Jansenism by moderating Louis XIV's repressive policies. And he began an overhaul of the state finances that would culminate with the spectacular and recklessly daring experiments of John Law.

The court's shift to Paris was part and parcel of this program. Lemarchand concedes that almost no archival sources directly discuss the move. The one notable exception is a single memorandum preserved in the Bibliothèque Nationale (and reproduced in the back of the book). Unsigned, unaddressed and undated, though clearly produced before Louis XIV's death, it argued against transferring the seat of government to Paris. Relying on careful readings of trace references in a wide range of other documents, Lemarchand strives to reconstruct why Philippe ignored this advice. He contends that the Regent's principal concern was to avoid a Fronde-style uprising against his rule. He therefore made the move to Paris in order to create a clear break with the regime of the Sun King, remove the boy king from the clutches of the Old Court faction, and bring himself closer to his many Parisian allies. A secondary motive was financial. Philippe wanted to spare the exhausted royal treasury the immense expenses of maintaining the great palace. Moreover, Lemarchand points out that Paris was a natural choice for Philippe because even after Louis XIV had settled at Versailles, the city remained in many ways the capital of the kingdom. It was home to key ministries such as the department of the

Controller General of Finances and it was a center of elite culture that rivaled the court itself. Thus, almost all courtiers maintained Parisian residences, particularly in the Faubourg Saint-Germain, Faubourg Saint-Honoré and the nascent Champs-Élyssées, the western quarters within easiest reach of Versailles. After 1690, the links between the court aristocracy and Paris had only grown as nobles fled the increasingly stifling and austere atmosphere of the palace for the freer ambience of the city.

The Regent's reforms were reflected in the new political geography that took shape in Paris after 1715. Rejecting Louis XIV's policy of centralizing the royal court, Philippe instead permitted the creation of numerous courts—Lemarchand uses the term "nébuleuse" to describe the effect of this approach (p. 184). The five-year-old Louis XV was installed at the palace of the Tuileries, but it was mainly a ceremonial center. The business of government was carried out at the Louvre, where the Polysynodie councils met. In addition, there were numerous princely courts such as that of the duchesse de Berry at the Luxembourg palace, but the most important court of all was the Regent's own at the Palais Royal. From it, Philippe supervised and managed all the others. For example, he intervened to regulate the constant precedence quarrels that erupted at the Tuileries. This dispersal of curial centers across Paris then led to a striking new development: the city became the court. Where Louis XIV had conducted court ceremonial in the seclusion of Versailles, his successor performed them publicly before the people of Paris. Lemarchand argues that the Regent had created a scheme of royal representation that helped to revive support for the monarchy.

The dispersal of the court in the city had a transformative effect on the monarchy's relationship with society. Parisians, or at least certain Parisians, were able not only to become political spectators but actors. Examples of this new relationship included the reemergence of dueling into the open and the massive printing of *libelles* during the height of the Law affair. In response, the major powers of the monarchy such as the Parlement of Paris and the Regency government itself quickly learned to appeal to this public in order to gain its support. The court's period in Paris therefore represented a crucial phase in the development of public opinion. Yet Lemarchand stresses that public opinion under the Regency was not the bourgeois public sphere of Jürgen Habermas. Political expression and activity remained reserved for the nobility and the royal state's own officers. The Regency was an aristocratic regime. Its leading figures cultivated the nobility through the elaboration of patron-client ties. The revival of the aristocracy and its renewed bond with the monarchy were mapped on to the cityscape of Paris. After 1715, court nobles accelerated their migration to the western neighborhoods of the city, particularly the Faubourg Saint-Germain. Meanwhile, the Marais and the Ile de la Cité became even more the precincts of the robe nobility.

The court's Parisian sojourn abruptly ended in June 1722. The decision to return to Versailles was made by a now confident Regency that had largely overcome its earlier vulnerabilities. Authoritarianism replaced liberalism as it rid itself of the Polysynodie, increasingly allied itself with the opponents of Jansenism, and put an end to the Law experiment. The court became centralized at the great palace, and the Regent ruled in partnership with a king who was nearing his majority.

The return to Versailles and the turn to a more authoritarian style of government did not, however, signify a restoration of the regime of Louis XIV. The move was intended to create a clearly defined group of courtiers who were closely linked to the king and the Regent. Yet the rest of the nobility were hardly shut out of politics. After 1722, Paris was confirmed as a co-capital, a vital, dynamic center of government and elite culture. With the court aristocracy now at Versailles, lower-ranking robe and military nobles came to dominate the life and development of the city. Most importantly, public opinion continued to mature and find new forms of expression. The Enlightenment salon emerged out of the numerous princely courts that had flourished from 1715 to 1722.

Lemarchand makes some important contributions in this book. He casts the opening years of the reign of Louis XV as a period of vibrant political reform and transformation, a portrayal that contrasts

significantly with Peter Campbell's depiction of an essentially unchanging Bourbon "baroque state."[2] William Beik contends that the eighteenth-century French absolute monarchy remained based on social collaboration with powerful elites.[3] This book suggests how Philippe d'Orléans successfully revived and restructured this collaboration after the trials and disasters of Louis XIV's late reign. Given the importance and ambition of his arguments, Lemarchand could have supported them much better. His bibliography lists ten pages of documents drawn from almost every major Parisian archive and library. Yet he hardly uses them in his text. Instead, he backs up his contentions largely with references to secondary studies. This thinness of primary source evidence unfortunately takes away from the book's originality and persuasiveness.

NOTES

[1] In depicting the late reign of Louis XIV as a period of crisis, Lemarchand's book agrees with several recent works, including James Collins, *The State in Early Modern France*. Second Edition (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Darryl Dee, *Expansion and Crisis in Louis XIV's France: Franche-Comté and Absolute Monarchy, 1674-1715* (Rochester, N.Y.: University of Rochester Press, 2009); and Guy Rowlands, *The Financial Decline of a Great Power: War, Influence and Money in Louis XIV's France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012). Unfortunately, Lemarchand does not cite these works.

[2] Peter R. Campbell, *Power and Politics in Old Regime France, 1720-1745* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996).

[3] William Beik, "The Absolutism of Louis XIV as Social Collaboration" *Past and Present* 188 (2005): 195-224.

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