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Bertrand Fonck, *Le maréchal de Luxembourg et le commandement des armées sous Louis XIV*. Seyssel: Editions Champ Vallon, 2014. 646 pp. Maps, tables, figures, notes, bibliography, and index. €29.00 (pb). ISBN 978-2-87673-940-6.

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One of the more encouraging developments in French historiography over the past two decades has been the revival of interest in the political and military history of the *Grand Siècle* among French scholars, and the re-emergence of a more pluralistic historical environment within France in which political and diplomatic historians no longer need to be defensive but can, in many cases deservedly, be out and proud. Much of the best of this work has been associated with younger scholars who have come out of the most prestigious training college for archivists in the western world, the Ecole des Chartes, or it has been undertaken by students and academics who have nurtured strong relations with them. The result has been a growing body of work that builds upon the *oeuvres* of earlier historians of French political, governmental, military and financial structures, particularly Yves Durand, André Corvisier and Roland Mousnier, all now deceased. A good deal of this emerging strain of political and military history is focussed upon or around the life and work of an important individual or family. Much of it is well grounded in the great archival riches of France, and much more is promised.<sup>[1]</sup> French scholars working in this vein increasingly argue that they are providing a new biographical history, often tackling figures who have been unwisely written off by earlier *étatiste* historians and whose activities can provide revealing windows into the soul of the French state and society. This work is, in the best cases, thorough and generally comprehensive in the approaches it takes.

The book under review is an impressive study by Bertrand Fonck of François-Henri de Montmorency, maréchal duc de Luxembourg, the most successful of Louis XIV's generals between the passing of Turenne and Condé from the scene in 1675-76 and the victories of Villars and Vendôme in 1709-12. Fonck's book gives us Luxembourg's career from every angle. The author's thoroughness does lead, in the thematic chapters four through eight, to some amount of overlap and repetition from earlier chapters that trace Luxembourg's career. It is an exhaustive effort, some 646 dense pages with small, and for quotes very small, font, coming in at what I would estimate to be well over 300,000 words, based on massive amounts of archival material.

This short review can do little more than whet readers' appetites, and urge all those with an interest in both the state of Louis XIV and the French military machine of the early modern period to read this book. In it, Fonck presents us with a subtle picture of a multifaceted, difficult grandee of the mid- to late-seventeenth century who might not have achieved much beyond enhancing his own family's position—his battles had few demonstrably important strategic consequences—but whose life, activity and concerns cast in an especially clear light the difficulties of military command and operations as well as court politics. In particular Fonck gives us a strong sense of the problems, pressures and issues involved in commanding an army in the later seventeenth century.

Luxembourg was a battle commander and an adept manager of theatre operations, but he also enjoyed a deeply complex position in French society, as the posthumous son of the comte de Montmorency-Bouteville (executed by Richelieu for duelling), as a distant cousin, military acolyte and protégé of the Grand Condé, and as a man who (I would argue) would ultimately have liked to see his line recognised as *princes étrangers* at the French court. After siding with Condé throughout

the Frondes and in exile all the way up to their reintegration into French society in 1660, Luxembourg had limited chances for command in the later 1660s but came into his own as a corps and district commander early in the Dutch War and then gained full command of field armies later in this conflict, with mixed results. He was subsequently caught up in the Affair of the Poisons at the end of the 1670s and beginning of the 1680s, leading to imprisonment and investigation which affected his health, while his relations with the marquis de Louvois, Louis XIV's war minister, already fraught during the later stages of the Dutch War, became antagonistic.

Only once other commanders proved less than adequate for the job of facing the Grand Alliance in the Nine Years' War was Luxembourg fully rehabilitated (for the second time in his life), becoming commander-in-chief of the French army of Flanders from 1690 to 1694 before dying in January 1695 at age 66. In those five campaigns Luxembourg had the task not only of holding Allied armies at bay while the king besieged one of the massive fortresses of the Spanish Netherlands—commanding an army of observation had become one of his skills—but he also had to block aggressive Allied thrusts aimed at expelling the French from their growing foothold in the Spanish Netherlands. Furthermore, acting as France's shield meant managing an army that became quite simply enormous between 1691 and 1693. True, the army of Flanders was the major field force nearest to Paris and the government, so it could benefit more than the other French armies from both the logistical power of the capital and swift communications with the interfering though generally supportive War Ministry. Louvois and Barbezieux may both have been hostile to Luxembourg personally (something Fonck underplays), but they would not go so far as to derail seriously his campaigns for their own ends.

But in the hands of a lesser man, who might have been less inclined to devolve authority to a close circle of talented, trusted aides and arm commanders, the voracious, muscle-bound monster that was the army of Flanders in the 1690s could have collapsed under its own weight, unable to align its movements and camp sites with its strategic role, its size and its logistical needs (especially for forage and bread). Not once but three times Luxembourg inflicted severe defeats in battle upon the Grand Alliance army in the Low Countries, at Fleurus in 1690, Steinkerque in 1692 and Neerwinden in 1693, while the following year, commanding the army notionally under the supreme command of the Grand Dauphin, Luxembourg pulled off a remarkable set of forced marches of a speed that surprised the courts and gazettes of Europe. Fonck suggests at one point that Luxembourg—owing to the sheer size of the force he commanded—was in effect at times running a divisional system, a thought-provoking argument that deserves closer consideration in any subsequent studies of this period. All this makes Luxembourg a very suitable subject for Fonck, a military historian with a deep grounding in structural political, administrative and logistical history.

What makes so many of Louis XIV's generals even more interesting, and of interest to much more than military historians, is that they also had social and political interests in civil society that cut across their military careers. Luxembourg's situation, relationships and aspirations make him perhaps the most interesting figure in the entire French high command in the whole of Louis XIV's personal rule. He was, Fonck convincingly argues, driven by a desire to rebuild his own personal position after the disaster of his father's execution a few months before his birth. What mattered to him probably more than anything else was reconstituting the honor, status and material position of the house of Montmorency in France. The claim to be "premier baron" of France was a controversial one, especially when other branches of the family perhaps had a better claim to head this international clan. Even more controversially, through his marriage, Luxembourg pushed the claims of himself and his sons to be duc de Luxembourg and pair de France of ancient (sixteenth century) creation, involving him in bitter lawsuits with half the members of the high command of the army of Flanders. His opponents credibly argued that his ducal title was actually a recreation of 1661. Furthermore, he also advanced the claims of his wife and sons to be the rightful heirs to the duchy of Luxemburg itself, a Spanish Habsburg possession which Louis XIV annexed in 1683-84. The *maréchal de Montmorency-Luxembourg* is therefore more than worth a sizable investigation, and not just for his military prowess.

Fonck's work began life as a dissertation at the Ecole des Chartes before progressing through a doctorate to become a book, and it is emblematic of the quality of scholarship associated with

scholars enjoying this pedigree. Even for an expert in the field, it is a daunting piece of work, though it is remarkable that Fonck, who is, appropriately for the subject matter, a *conservateur des archives* at the Service Historique de la Défense, appears to make no more than a handful of factual or typographical errors that this reviewer noted. But how far does this deeply learned, profound book, made all the more impressive by a willingness to engage with the work of non-French academics, advance our understanding of the state of Louis XIV in the period Fonck calls the middle phase of Louis XIV's personal rule? To what extent does it develop our understanding of the world of the high aristocracy? How much fresh light does it shed on the transformation of the French army in its crucial phase of development between 1659 and 1689? And, given the subject focus, to what extent do we come out of it knowing more about the *maréchal de Montmorency-Luxembourg* (as he preferred to style himself)?

Just over a century ago Pierre de Ségur wrote a substantial trilogy on Luxembourg's life, but it is a frustrating work, not least because of its weak appreciation of the complexities of French socio-political life and its limited awareness of how the French military machine worked. Fonck's book, which given its size should perhaps be thought of as a trinity (three-in-one book) as opposed to the trilogy produced by Ségur, suffers from neither of these defects. Fonck is acutely sensitive to issues about Luxembourg's status, and he knows a great deal about the French army of the time. Fonck's principal concern is not, however, with the army as a whole, but with the high command. Here he develops and fleshes out work done by myself and Jean-Philippe Cénat while providing a richer sense of the transition era of the 1640s-70s, and giving us an excellent account of the difficulties of commanding huge armies in the 1690s. He also gives his readers a far stronger sense than we have enjoyed so far of the relationship between the Sun King and his principal non-ministerial servants enjoying the highest social status. Fonck thus enhances our understanding of the human characteristics of this developing state.

Some criticism is justified, however, and at this point I should declare an interest. In my study of how the French army was transformed from the ramshackle organism of the Cardinal-Ministers to the powerful, relatively well-run fighting force of the 1690s, I made a short case study of Luxembourg's position as a *grand* and as a leading figure of the high command, and Fonck is very gracious in fully acknowledging my contribution.<sup>[2]</sup> Where we differ on Luxembourg's socio-political position in France is on the matter of the duchy of Luxemburg. It seems to me that the *maréchal-duc* was keen to try to secure the status of *prince étranger* for his dynasty, putting them at least on a par with the La Tour d'Auvergne-Bouillon and Rohan families. Of course, Luxembourg would have been realistic that a reacquisition of the border duchy was only remotely likely, though we must acknowledge that people like him kept some of the most unlikely claims and aspirations alive for generations, and some of them were even realised eventually. As Fonck notes (p. 177), Luxembourg was quite prepared like many other nobles to attend to some claims while leaving others to simmer away quietly. More immediately, recognition of at least residual rights over the lost sovereignty of Luxemburg was central to getting *prince étranger* rank for the family.

As Fonck notes, Luxembourg was keen to enhance his family's status, but once the Montmorency side of this was resolved, would he have been likely to settle for what he had achieved and not press further claims in the years and decades ahead? Unlikely, and Fonck himself is suggestive in places that Luxembourg may have been serious about his son becoming a *prince étranger*. After all, in *factums* related to his disputes with the other *ducs et pairs* in the 1690s, Luxembourg persisted in emphasising family claims to the duchy of Luxemburg. Fonck acknowledges that this cropped up as an issue, especially in the 1670s, but in his justifiable desire to emphasize the restoration of the prestige of the house of Montmorency as the *maréchal-duc's* goal, he is reluctant to engage with the question of Luxemburg, which is surprising considering he advanced claims for the status of *prince étranger* up to his death.

He also feels I erred in suggesting Luxembourg might, after the 1670s, have defected to the Allies over the issue. Rather, I suggested Louis XIV might have been concerned not to alienate his general and drive him into service abroad, the prerogative allowed to a *prince étranger*. This is not the same as saying this was seriously in Luxembourg's mind. Here we have to remember that Louis XIV was

a skilled games player who could undoubtedly see many possible moves, many moves ahead. One of the hallmarks of his reign was to try to head off domestic trouble coming down the tracks as early as possible through a judicious combination of favor and stalling. In this case he therefore favored many of the Montmorency claims, while stalling on (or even evading) the more controversial Luxembourg issue: the duchy of Luxemburg, *prince étranger* status, and the rank of the *duché-pairie*.

Why should this seemingly petty scholarly dispute over the minutiae of aristocratic status matter to us? Essentially we need to be aware that it gets to the heart of historiographical approaches surrounding state development. First, there is still reluctance in some quarters to take deep-rooted noble ambitions seriously if they seem, at a particular moment in time, to be absurd. We need to be constantly aware that, like volcanoes, what is very dormant at one moment can erupt quite suddenly through accidents of history, affecting the history of states and elites. This is particularly so for a period when dynastic inheritance, shaped by births, marriages and mortality, mattered a great deal. Second, while some historians persist in looking at what happened and arguing that very little different could have happened, others are more inclined to think of a wider range of possibilities, drawing implicitly or explicitly upon knowledge of related or similar episodes or cases. The exact bounds of possible alternative paths and scenarios are always going to be a matter of debate, of course.

In part, of course, this is a matter of speculation and of trying to set Luxembourg in a comparative perspective with other grandees about whom we still know too little, in spite of the work of scholars like Jonathan Spangler and the late Jean-Pierre Labatut.<sup>[3]</sup> As on several issues, it is gaps in the evidence that allow for rich debate on this and other matters. Fonck, like me and others before us, has had little luck in finding any of the *maréchal-duc's* personal papers. On two final issues, though, there is room for slightly more astringent criticism. Fonck argues at several points that Luxembourg and Louvois were not really on bad terms in the crucial early years of the Nine Years War. Fonck seems to take epistolary exchanges, with their customary courtesies, too much at face value, in essence overlooking that the later seventeenth century was the age of dissimulation, especially in courtly circles. It is very hard indeed to find any evidence of outright rudeness and hostility in French letters of the period, certainly compared to the more forthright (uncouth?) letters generated by their British contemporaries. But there was still plenty of sarcasm, and Fonck seems too inclined to downplay this, as he does the admittedly limited but still extant evidence of direct irritation Luxembourg felt towards Louvois. Fonck also is inclined to dismiss the importance of Louis giving Luxembourg the authorisation to write to him personally in 1690, arguing that this was allowed for all generals. But if it was just the norm, why should contemporaries have gone out of their way to notice it? It really seems that what the king was granting was a right to bypass Louvois entirely over issues of strategy and operations and to correspond instead with the king on key matters should relations with Louvois once again deteriorate to a significant extent, something Luxembourg obviously feared might transpire.

Secondly, Fonck appears wedded to what seem to me some long-standing misunderstandings about developments in the organisation and hierarchy of the high command in the period of the Dutch War. Turenne's position as *maréchal général des camps et armées du Roi* was not a superior rank created by the king that somehow granted him the right of command over other *maréchaux de France*. The legal correspondence of the early 1670s is crystal clear on this point, explaining that Turenne was placed above other marshals in fact because the king had the right to nominate whoever he wished to command his armies, and install anyone else as secondary generals. It took several painful months in 1672-73 before the other *maréchaux de France* recognised this to be the case. This was, then, a milestone in the king's extension of control into the high command, something that Fonck shows would produce a more pliable set of generals in the period from the Dutch War onwards.

I would also take issue with Fonck on the *Order de Tableau* issued in 1675, which did not lay down principles of seniority to promotion (and thus affect the role of patronage and grandee brokerage in advancement) but was concerned with enforcing a system of command hierarchy within each rank based upon date of promotion into that rank. The aim of the crown was to eradicate the corrosive

disputes about precedence, dilute a misplaced sense of corporate equality among the *maréchaux de France*, and reduce the disruptive practice of *roulement* (rotation of command) at the highest levels of army command, something Luxembourg himself thought was wretchedly ineffective. To be sure, though, Fonck does describe at considerable length Louis XIV's efforts to bring the high command to a more pliant state, with Luxembourg exemplifying greater subordination to the king and his ministers. All this is indisputable, even if the details of how it was achieved are a matter of debate.

What we have to be careful of, however, is conflating a greater orderliness within ranks with a promotions approach that still, in fact, was governed by a mixture of attention to merit, patronage, seniority, experience and spectacular achievements. We must, in short, be careful not to give too much succor, in some latter-day *étatiste* way, to the idea of the development of an orderly state in which patronage and actions of *éclat* suddenly played a much-diminished role for noble progression in some rule-governed state army. As Fonck so admirably shows, individuals both matter in history and act as valuable lenses through which to investigate entire periods, while personal relations—with the king and among his army officers and civilian officials—were of considerable importance in this period. At a time when private interests (be they related to social status, official rank, material acquisitiveness or the preservation and validation of honour) were inextricably linked to royal power, the state was not impersonal and rule-bound but very, very human.

#### NOTES

[1] e.g., Katia Béguin, *Financer la guerre au XVIIe siècle. La dette publique et les rentiers de l'absolutisme* (Seyssel: Editions Champ Vallon, 2012); Jean-Philippe Cénat, *Le roi stratège. Louis XIV et la direction de la guerre (1661-1715)* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2010); Emmanuel Pénicaut, *Faveur et pouvoir au tournant du Grand Siècle. Michel Chamillart, Ministre et secrétaire d'État de la guerre de Louis XIV* (Paris: Champion, 2004); Mathieu Stoll, *Servir le Roi-Soleil. Claude Le Peletier (1631-1711) ministre de Louis XIV* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2011).

[2] Guy Rowlands, *The Dynastic State and the Army under Louis XIV. Royal Service and Private Interest, 1661-1701* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), at pp. 326-35.

[3] Jonathan Spangler, *The Society of Princes. The Lorraine-Guise and the Conservation of Power and Wealth in Seventeenth-Century France* (Farnham and Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2009); Jean-Pierre Labatut, *Les ducs et pairs de France au XVIIe siècle* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1972).

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