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Sara E. Chapman, *Private Ambition and Political Alliances. The Phélypeaux de Pontchartrain Family and Louis XIV's Government, 1650--1715*. Rochester NY and Woodbridge Suffolk, UK: University of Rochester Press, 2004. xv + 292 pp. Illustrations, genealogical charts, tables, notes, bibliography, and index. \$80.00 U.S. (hb) ISBN 1-58046-153-0, ISSN 1542-3905.

Review by Peter R. Campbell, University of Sussex, UK.

Sara Chapman has written one of the first studies of Louis XIV's France in English to focus exclusively and in detail on a patronage network in its own right.^[1] The main aim of this book is "to examine the continuity and shape of traditional clientage at a time when the French state was becoming increasingly centralized, and a nascent bureaucracy had begun to take root." It further seeks "to see to what degree patron client relations changed with evolving structures of the French state" (p. 2); and "to consider how kinship and marriage serve as main building blocks for networks of political authority" (p. 6). These aims are developed in the six chapters that follow, buttressed by a large number of genealogical tables.

Not so long ago this would have been a daring *démarche*: the orthodox view of early modern French government was of a state transformed between the time of Richelieu and the mid eighteenth century (but above all by Louis XIV) into an "administrative monarchy", as Pagès, Mousnier, and Antoine in particular argued. If the state was run bureaucratically, then power lay in the administration rather than in the court, and the higher nobility's role declined as the court as an instrument of government was superseded by the bureaucracy instead of patronage. Over the last two decades there has been a growing challenge to this model. The challenge began with Vicens Vives's devastating 1960 critique of Hartung and Mousnier's 1955 thesis on absolute monarchy, followed up by J. Russell Major, Orest Ranum, and Roger Mettam, in the 1960s, and Robert Harding in 1978. As if to confuse his critics, Mousnier himself had admitted that patronage was absolutely crucial for *social* ascension (but not political power), and this was further proved by some of the essays on how members of the *conseil du roi* rose to power.^[2] Yves Durand's *Hommage à Roland Mousnier* provided more evidence.^[3] As yet no model of this activity was available, for sociologists never included the early modern research in their studies that referred to ancient Rome, the Renaissance or to nineteenth-century Sicily, and these simply did not fit the early modern period.^[4] By 1988, there was enough material for a sociologically-inspired exploration of the theme by Sharon Kettering, and Daniel Dessert's massive work integrated finance into the picture, while Roger Mettam published a reflective book incorporating his thesis of 1967 on the role of the higher aristocracy under Louis XIV.^[5] The last two stressed the importance of the court, which Norbert Elias in *The Court Society* (1983) made the centre-piece of his arching 1932 interpretation of civility and the nature of power. William Beik and James Collins argued that the political system reflected a balance of powers between local elites and the central government. The power of the state is now seen to have rested on a compromise rather than a triumph of one party, and in the mid-1990s I argued that this remained the characteristic of the state up to the 1750s.^[6] In the 1990s numerous studies of the practice of government have revealed patron-client relations at work in Brittany, Burgundy, and Languedoc, and in the *parlements*, local estates and municipalities, although the *pays d'élection* have been relatively neglected from this point of view. More recent contributions from Kristen B. Neuschel, Stuart Carroll and Guy Rowlands have been widely reviewed, while William Beik's recent article in *Past and Present* on the nature of the compromise draws much of this material together.^[7]

Today the issues are not whether patronage was important—it was—but how precisely did it function, how networks were created and maintained, and how did they relate to the parallel bureaucratic

structures. For example, was there a progressive centralisation of patronage in the seventeenth century? [8] James Collins puts forward the view that the neglected decades of the reign of Louis XIV saw patronage and clientage play a much more subordinate role in this state system. [9] Sara Chapman adheres to this view but her evidence does not altogether support it. Personally, I find the attempt to characterize the absolute monarchy as a stage of development towards the modern state a slightly doubtful task, in that it still assumes that patronage and clientage are characteristic of the earlier forms of the old regime monarchy, and that effective bureaucracy characterised the later stages. How can we argue this without making distinctions between the kinds of issues that the state had to deal with: is bureaucracy perhaps used for routine low level issues, often generating problems as well, and is patronage used to solve the really important issues of royal power when the administration fails? It also assumes that the story is one of progress, rather than also one of significant reverses with (permanent?) compromises or the alienation of effective power to municipal and provincial elites—as perhaps happened later in the reign of Louis XIV. It leaves no room for the absolute monarchy to be a form in itself that rests upon a specific and fairly long term compromise between elites and the centre, and which saw patronage and clientage as crucial to the maintenance of both this compromise and good order within the state—with government being the art of balancing the interests of all parties through techniques of management. Because “absolute monarchy” refers to the theory of sovereignty, other labels might be less confusing, like the “dynastic state”, or “baroque state” or even “Renaissance monarchy” perhaps. Chapman’s study does indeed contribute to our understanding of some of these issues, and raises further questions for debate.

The first chapter examines the origins of the Pontchartrain network or affinity from Blois to Brittany to Versailles. The family of Phélypeaux originated in Blois and made its most influential connections through a marriage strategy allying them to provincial notables like the Villeroy, the Gobelin in Paris, the Blondeau in Burgundy and other Parisian financial families. A secretaryship of state came early, but a premature death and the appropriation of this office by the parallel La Vrillière branch brought setback. It was thus a long road back for the Pontchartrain and patronage was to be crucial. In the extensive network of marriage alliances the role of women was quite as important as that of the men, as she has argued convincingly elsewhere. [10] The intermarriage with the robe families of the Talon and the Maupeou were decisive, bringing wealth and connections at the centre. Readers may wonder, however, whether their fortunes were also advanced by friends as opposed to relatives, and what the dealings of these financial families were. This helpful analysis of the marriage strategies might have been supplemented by some discussion of the role of individual abilities in their rise. We need to know more specifically what they did for their patrons and later for the king and his minister that helped their rise to prominence.

The Maupeou marriage gave Pontchartrain a solid financial base and significant connections to influential financial and *parlementaire* families. In 1661 Louis de Pontchartrain became a councilor in the Parlement de Paris and from 1677 to 1687 was *premier président* of the Parlement de Bretagne. The post was probably acquired through the outgoing first president in Brittany, d’Arouges, and Claude Le Peletier of the Le Tellier clientele, who balanced the Colbert clan there, and who was also connected to d’Arouges. At any rate Le Peletier was thanked by Pontchartrain. This appointment was a real opportunity to build on. The chapter argues that he built up a lasting clientele: the La Bourdonnaye and Coëtlogon families owed later advancement to him, the former becoming an *intendant*, the latter *syndic* of Breton estates, as well as positions in the navy. Pontchartrain also cultivated the Sévigné family, and this was useful when he was controller general and the comte de Grignan was lieutenant general in Provence and able to keep him informed. Extensive correspondence with Grignan is referred to, as it is with the syndics of the Estates of Brittany, and Pontchartrain’s own letters to Controller General Le Peletier but, sadly, this is not analysed at all. We do however see that Pontchartrain used his clientele to conduct business favourable to the king’s and his own interests, undermining where possible the influence of the Colbert clientele in the province. In this he was not always successful.

In 1689 Pontchartrain became Controller General, about the time of the decline of Le Tellier. He owed his appointment to Claude Le Peletier, his predecessor as minister. Unlike Colbert and Le Peletier, Chapman shows, Pontchartrain had little influence over the appointment of his *intendants des finances*, because their families were now powerful enough to perpetuate themselves. This may be true, but can we infer with Chapman that this lack of influence means a professionalisation of the bureaucracy, rather than a slippage of control? Pontchartrain inherited the Le Peletier clientele (although with Louvois not dead until 1691 it would be interesting to know why), and this would have made it less necessary to change personnel. That the system may not have progressed that much, is shown by the example of the appointment of his client Caumartin as *intendant des finances*, and the fact that Caumartin was later essentially demoted by Chamillart later in favour of one of his own men. She also argues that Pontchartrain did not make an effort to change provincial *intendants* as his predecessors had done, except for Rouen and Paris, and this was a period when many clients of Colbert and Le Tellier remained in place, although he did whenever possible nominate his clients. But was this really because of the bureaucracy becoming more established and if so, why did his successor revert to the previous policy? Perhaps it was because he did not yet have sufficient power to enforce his will against the rival but longer established clans? As Chapman says, Pontchartrain allowed the longer standing *intendants* to use their existing patron-client relations to conduct their business, and this is highly plausible. She also argues that he seems to have co-opted such men into his clientage network, like Nointel in Brittany (but this is the only convincing example given, so we must beware generalizations about this practice). Without a detailed investigation of the activity of clients it is thus hard to agree with the assertion that the long extended tenures of *intendants* in the provinces “mark the maturation of the financial bureaucracy that tied the provinces to the crown” (p. 86). Sometimes in the book the author seems torn between arguing that clientage was and continued to be more important than formal bureaucratic structures and the argument for the decline of clientage in the face of a more administrative ethic. This is understandable, for it is a big question that a single study and first book cannot answer.

The next chapter focuses on informal networks of political power. She argues that Pontchartrain’s clientage networks were used “to solidify the more formal [bureaucratic?] chains of power and royal institutions that linked the provinces with Versailles” (p. 91). This seems well supported by the evidence, though it could equally be argued on this evidence that he used clients to make up for deficiencies in the administrative structures. The chapter includes the only significant discussion in the book of the higher clergy’s role in providing information, but this is not tied to clientage. Such an important subject as the ecclesiastical dimension of the family deserved more attention, and few references are made to the clerical members of the clientage networks or clans discussed in the book. Presumably, there remains more to be said on this aspect, as it would be useful to know through analysis of examples how biased such informants’ views were, and whether they favoured other clans and networks with misinformation or dilatory behaviour. The lack of a definition of power becomes important when Chapman suggests, for example, that two-way discussion of financial matters “illustrates the growing efficacy and stability of the nascent royal financial bureaucracy” (p. 111). But Boulainvilliers and the Circle of the Duke of Burgundy were later to claim that many *intendants* often lied or concealed the facts, and the varied quality of the *intendants’* memoirs on the provinces for the instruction of the Dauphin, is further testimony to that.

In the chapter on Louis as secretary of state for the navy we see most clearly that there is an unresolved contradiction here between the suggestion that a more professional bureaucracy must have developed, and references to Geoffrey Symcox’s work which show the bureaucracy’s failure in the later decades.[11] Although the tone of thirty-seven letters referred to is important (there is no analysis of forms of address in the book), it would have been useful to see exactly what Bégon did for Jérôme de Pontchartrain in 1696 that led to this ex-Colbert client joining with them. More examples of “the solving of delicate problems” (p. 128) would have been helpful, as we really need to know what lies behind the usual “formules de politesse”. Interestingly, Chapman shows the Pontchartrain often losing

out to the influence of the comte de Toulouse, who was admiral but not a minister, both in Brittany and the navy.

By the final chapter on Louis de Pontchartrain as Chancellor, the reader might be frustrated that the sets of correspondence used to reveal the existence of patronage connections have not been further analysed to show more precisely how, and how effectively, these worked. Charles Frostin, whose articles first charted the Pontchartrain clientele, argued for example that as Chancellor he used this position as chief patron of the magistracy as a technique of government.^[12] Taking up this point, Chapman gives us a fine detailed analysis of patronage in action in the chancellor's relations with three provincial *parlements*. Those familiar with the new history of *parlementaire* crises in the eighteenth century will know how important this official and private patronage was in defusing contentious issues. Nevertheless, it would be useful to know if it worked for the important controversy over the registration of the Bull *Unigenitus* of 1713.

In her conclusions Chapman argues that Louis de Pontchartrain's tendency to retain men in post rather than replacing them with his own clients shows a budding bureaucratic ethos. She does not say why, though the implication is that this was because this ethos had made enough progress for him to be able to rely on loyalty to the office. Further work will be needed to see if there were other factors at work, such as a policy of appeasing interests, or notions of political management and the balancing of interests to achieve this. The author is right to argue that ties with provincial elites "were indispensable to the functioning and growing stability of Louis XIV's state institutions." On the other hand, the argument for growing stability should not be overplayed, because the renewed and administratively unnecessary (except for revenue purposes) sale of subdelegates' offices, for example, undermined the ability of crown to control and discipline its agents. Pontchartrain was in power in the final decades of the reign, and it is important that clientelism is here shown to still be of significant value to ministers. In the light of Chapman's evidence, we must consider how far the state after Louis XIV was still characterised by patron-client relations exploited not only for social mobility and family fortunes but also for the effective exercise of political power.

Chapman's study is a useful exploration of the existence and membership of the Pontchartrain clientele over generations, and the role of patronage in the rise of one of the key ministerial dynasties of the ancien régime. By showing that patron-client relations remained crucial for ministers, it implicitly challenges notions of the rise of a new kind of state, and suggests that we need further studies on eighteenth century patronage and clientage. It confirms and deepens our understanding of the ministerial milieu, and with Frostin's articles finds a place alongside other works on Colbert's clan and the Le Tellier. It is perhaps less successful in exploring the related issues about the exact nature of private ambition, the practice and nature of patronage and its role in the wider governmental system. This is unfinished business, but a welcome start and an important contribution.

NOTES

[1] There is another work that may be of interest: I. Chrysafidou, "Richelieu and the *grands*: the duc d'Épernon" D.Phil thesis (University of Sussex, 1991). It focuses on the clientele network of the duc d'Épernon and its destruction by Richelieu.

[2] Roland Mousnier, *Le conseil du roi, de Louis XII à la Révolution* (Paris: P.U.F., 1970).

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- [3] Yves Durand, ed., *Hommage à Roland Mousnier, clientèles et fidélités en Europe à l'époque moderne* (Paris: P.U.F., 1981)
- [4] S. N. Eisenstadt, and L. Roniger, *Patrons, Clients and Friends* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).
- [5] Roger Mettam, "The Role of the Higher Aristocracy in France under Louis XIV", PhD. thesis (University of Cambridge, 1967).
- [6] Peter R. Campbell, *Power and politics in Old Regime France* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996)
- [7] William Beik, "The Absolutism of Louis XIV as Social Collaboration" *Past and Present*, no. 188, August 2005: 195-224.
- [8] C. Giry-DeLoison and R. Mettam, eds., *Patronages et clientélismes 1550-1750* (Lille: Université Charles de Gaulle, Collection "Histoire et Littérature régionales, 10, n.d. [1995]) shows that in 1990 there was still little agreement on definitions and directions.
- [9] Perhaps too much weight is put on Gary McCollim's thesis on Desmaretz, "The Formation of Fiscal Policy in the Reign of Louis XIV" PhD diss., (Ohio State University, 1979), particularly when it can be contrasted on the issue of clientelism with John Rule's study of the *commis*, "The *commis* of the Department of Foreign Affairs, 1680-1715," *Proceedings of the Western Society for French History* 8, (1980): 69-80 and Douglas C. Baxter's, "Premier *commis* in the War Department in the Later Part of the Reign of Louis XIV," *Proceedings of the Western Society for French History* 8 (1980): 81-9; J. Ricommard's articles on the subdelegates also show their entrenchment and patronage relations; see "Les subdélégués des intendants aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles", three articles in *L'Information historique* (1962): 139-48, 190-5 and (1963): 1-7.
- [10] Sara E. Chapman, "Patronage as Family Economy: The Role of Women in the Patron-Client Network of the Phélypeaux de Pontchartrain Family, 1670-1715," *French Historical Studies* 24(1) (2001):11-35.
- [11] Geoffrey Symcox, *The Crisis of French Sea Power, 1688-1697: From the guerre d'escadre to the guerre de course* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974).
- [12] C. Frostin, "Le chancelier de France, Louis de Pontchartrain, 'ses' premiers présidents, et la discipline des cours souveraines (1699-1714)" *Cahiers d'histoire* (1982): 9-34.

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