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Thierry Martin and Michèle Virol, eds., *Vauban, architecte de la modernité?*. Presses Universitaires de Franche-Comté: Paris, 2008. 301 pp. Notes, bibliography, maps and illustrations. 29€ (pb). ISBN 978-2-84867-232-8.

Review by Michael Wolfe, St. John's University.

According to conventional wisdom, the French predilection for technocratic solutions to the problems of modern public life represents the lasting legacy of seventeenth-century Cartesianism, which reclaimed the power of human reason to understand and reshape the physical world. The first but also perhaps foremost practitioner of this *esprit géométrique* was Sébastien le Prestre, marquis de Vauban, most famous for his military engineering acumen while serving the Sun King and an indefatigable and ever curious pragmatist interested in a wide variety of subjects, ranging from urban planning, demography and political economy, to name just a few areas. Vauban has been the subject of numerous biographies, including recent ones by Michèle Virol and Anne Blanchard.[1] The eclectic essays in this collection first began as papers delivered at an international conference in Besançon in 2007 that asked the question, perhaps *mal posée*, contained in the book's title. While much of Vauban's oeuvre seems uncannily prescient, we do well to remember that most of his writings did not become published until well after this death in the collection, *Oisivetés*. [2] One of the few that did appear in his lifetime, the *Projet pour une dîme royale* in 1707, aroused a storm of controversy so deeply aggrieving to him that it hastened his death a few months later. Even his seminal ideas on siege warfare were generally ignored in his own day and only recast as a "system" later in the eighteenth century. [3] The image we have had of Vauban is thus the classical topos of the man ahead of his time.

The book is divided into two parts. After a brief introductory essay by the editors, the pieces in part one explore the relationship between rationalism, technology and politics. Thierry Martin's essay examines the evolving mathematical approaches toward public policy over the seventeenth century. The growing mania to count everything and then understand the underlying patterns, in time using statistics, began a fundamental re-evaluation of the ways in which governments undertook policy actions. Vauban's path-breaking work on demography, the *Méthode générale et facile pour faire le dénombrement des peuples*, written in 1686—a year after the cruelly intolerant Revocation of the Edict of Nantes which he so deplored—pointed toward the more systematic use of arithmetic in political administration and the natural sciences during the Enlightenment. As such, it mainly grew out of earlier advances in physics and engineering associated with the revival of Archimedean mechanics and the work of such thinkers as Galileo. Michèle Virol's complementary essay delves more deeply into Vauban's numerical approach to problems by looking at it in relation to contemporary work by Gottfried Leibniz and English "social mathematicians" such as William Petty. Petty's innovative studies on demography and political economy exercised limited influence in France, however, as Sabine Reungoat argues in her essay. While Jean-Baptiste Colbert certainly encouraged the use of mathematics in public policy under Louis XIV, Guillaume Garner shows in his essay that the application of statistics to public policy later in the eighteenth century developed most fully in the Cameralist circles across the states of the Holy Roman Empire, particularly Prussia. [4]

The last two essays in part one focus more squarely on Vauban. Hélène Vérin, perhaps the preeminent specialist on engineering in early modern France, surveys the rational methods developing over the seventeenth century in technical literature, the rise of mechanics, and economic calculations to estimate construction costs. Vauban drew and built upon these approaches during his career, and helped to establish them as normative in the military engineering corps he organized. Vauban's most radical ideas, however, came in his recommendation to the crown to replace the antiquated tax system based on elite privileges and exemptions with a simple flat tax paid by all the king's subjects, as André Ferrer discusses in his essay on the *Projet de dîme royale*. It raised a storm of protest, and rightfully so because it implied—if enacted—nothing short of a social revolution. The significance of Vauban's idea on royal fiscal policy, like so much else in his oeuvre, did not become apparent until seen against the background of later events, such as the French Revolution.

Part two takes up the topics of architecture and territorial space. This tack is misleading, however, because Vauban was neither considered nor trained as an architect. His profession was that of military engineer which, while related to architecture, was not synonymous with it. While not devoid of aesthetic value, fortifications relied on both technical functionality and a high level of mathematical abstraction to achieve their purpose, namely, the defense of a place. Christian Corvisier and Isabelle Warmoës reclaim the design continuities—including medieval towers—and the abiding pragmatism in Vauban's plans for bastioned fortifications. While later students of Vauban formulated his approach as systematic, Vauban actually emphasized the importance of site particularities and logistical constraints when deciding upon a design plan. In these regards, Vauban was not really all that exceptional, as Philippe Bragard argues in his essay on engineers and fortifications in Europe during the latter half of the seventeenth century. He points, in particular, to the theories and practices of contemporaries, such as the Dutch engineer Menno van Coehoorn and the German Georg Rimpler, who died prematurely. In Marino Viganò's essay, we can see how Vauban's ideas on urban planning, especially the relationship between defense and the quotidian needs of city dwellers, later informed the work of Jacques-Barthélemy Micheli du Crest in Geneva as well as shaped the political dynamics in this independent republic.

The globalization of bastioned fortifications *à la Vauban*, a point made years ago in Geoffrey Parker's landmark book on the Military Revolution, forms the subject of André Charbonneau's essay on French urban models in New France and Francisco Martín Muñoz Espejo and Benjamin Blaisot's piece on Vauban's influence on fortification design in early modern Latin America.^[6] This diffusion becomes less remarkable, however, when set into the broader context of the spread of Western urban forms such as the orthogonal grid or radical plan. The collection closes with two essays on cartography. The first by David Bitterling suggests that Vauban's celebrated idea of France as a *pré carré*—a unified territory enclosed within fortified frontiers—perhaps reflected the influence of Chinese imperial thought, symbolized by the Great Wall, brought to France via translations by the Jesuits. However, evidence of the desire to protect the kingdom with a system of integrated borderland defenses, especially along the vulnerable northeast, went back at least to the reign of François I.^[7] Guillaume Monsaingeon's closing essay sounds a contrarian note by suggesting that, for all his forward thinking in so many areas, Vauban and the men he trained eschewed and perhaps even retarded advances in modern cartography in France. Yet Vauban's ability to conceptualize the kingdom as a totality in terms of population and resources did not require visual aids. Indeed, when he focused on representations of physical space, it was highly localized; however, this by no means meant he did not use other, non-visual methods of thinking abstractly about the king's realm. His sharp grasp of travel times and logistics revealed this, if nothing else.

In sum, the essays largely leave unanswered the question posed in the book's title. And that is probably just as well. The contributors instead present a much more complex picture of Vauban both in his own day and in terms of his legacy in the eighteenth century. Vauban's achievements largely became possible because his patrons, Louvois (who barely rates passing mention in any essay) and Louis XIV,

recognized and used his talents for their own ends; his late life frustrations and the limited scope of his immediate influence beyond fortification design likewise reflected these same dynamic constraints. Vauban's ideas only became big when later Enlightenment acolytes and administrators decided to appropriate him as one of their own, to make him, in effect, decidedly modern.

LIST OF ESSAYS

Thierry Martin and Michèle Virol, "Introduction"

Première partie: Rationalité de l'action technique et politique

Thierry Martin, "Rationalité de l'action et arithmétique politique à l'aube du XVIIIe siècle"

Michèle Virol, "Vauban et l'arithmétique du politique"

Sabine Reungoat, "Les travaux d'arithmétique politique de William Petty et leur diffusion en France"

Guillaume Garner, "Entre texte et chiffre: la pratique statistique en Allemagne au XVIIIe siècle"

Hélène Vérin, "Les conditions de la rationalité technique des ingénieurs au temps de Vauban"

André Ferrer, "Vauban et la fiscalité royale"

Deuxième partie: Architecture et espace, réalisations et représentations

Christian Corvisier and Isabelle Warmoës, "L'art de fortifier de Vauban. Normalisation de la fortification bastionnée et réminiscences des formes médiévales"

Philippe Bragard, "Vauban...et les autres, tradition ou modernité? Ingénieurs et fortifications en Europe dans la seconde moitié du XVIIe siècle"

André Charbonneau, "Les diverses formes d'expression des modèles français d'urbanisme militaire dans les agglomérations de la Nouvelle-France"

Marino Viganò, "Jacques-Barthélemy Micheli du Crest, urbaniste 'éclairé' à Genève (1717-1730)"

Francisco Martín Muñoz Espejo and Benjamin Blaisot, "L'influence de Vauban en Amérique Latine"

David Bitterling, "La France forteresse—une idée vaubaniennne?"

Guillaume Monsaingeon, "Vauban a-t-il rate la Révolution cartographique?"

NOTES

[1] Michèle Virol, *Vauban. De la gloire du roi au service de l'état* (Champ Vallon: Seyssel, 2003) and Anne Blanchard, *Vauban* (Fayard: Paris, 1996).

[2] See the recent edition by Michèle Virol, ed., *Les oisivetés de Monsieur de Vauban ou ramas de plusieurs mémoires de sa façon sur différents sujets* (Champ Vallon: Seyssel, 2007).

[3] Jamel Ostwald, *Vauban Under Siege: Engineering Efficiency and Martial Vigor in the War of Spanish Succession* (Brill: Leiden, 2007).

[4] See Garner's *État, économie, territoire en Allemagne: l'espace dans le caméralisme et l'économie politique, 1740-1820* (Éditions de l'École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales: Paris, 2005) as well as Wolfgang Radkte, *Gewerbe und Handel in der Kurmark Brandenburg 1740 bis 1806: zur Interdependenz von kameralistischer Staatswirtschaft und Privatwirtschaft* (Berliner Wissenschaft-Verlag: Berlin, 2003). On the evolution of political economic theory in the early modern period, see Hans-Werner Holub, *Eine Einführung in die Geschichte des ökonomischen Denkens* (Lit: Vienna, 2005-2006), 3 volumes.

[5] Hélène Vérin, *La gloire des ingénieurs. L'intelligence technique du XVIIe au XVIIIe siècles* (Albin Michel: Paris, 1993).

[6] Geoffrey Parker, *The Military Revolution: Military Innovation and the Rise of the West, 1500-1800* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1988).

[7] Gaston Zeller, *L'organisation défensive des frontières du Nord et de l'est au XVIIe siècle* (Berger-Levrault: Paris, 1928). The bibliography in the collection mistakenly identifies the century for this book as the *seventeenth* when in fact it was one hundred years earlier.

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