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Lawrence M. Bryant, *Ritual, Ceremony and the Changing Monarchy in France, 1350-1789*. Variorum Collected Studies Series. Farnham, Surrey and Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate Variorum, 2010. x+340 pp. \$139.95 (cl). ISBN 978-0-7546-6.

Review by Jotham Parsons, Duquesne University.

It has become a commonplace that early modern monarchs derived much of their identity and even a substantial portion of their real power from the endless round of ritual and ceremony that shaped practically all their interactions. This is most visible in what might be called the great liturgies of monarchy: funeral, coronation, and royal entry—the last of these being Professor Bryant’s particular specialty—or the peculiarly French institution of the *lit de justice*.<sup>[1]</sup> But it also appears very clearly at moments of crisis, and indeed in the daily round of court life, where in turn it shades off into the broader patterns of elite sociability that ran through Europe. This collection of essays explores exactly that continuum, investigating how a range of royal ceremonials, but especially entrance ceremonies, were reshaped by various actors over the centuries in response to different political, social, and cultural configurations. Bryant moves confidently from the 100 Years War to 1789 and from the details of royal entries to the development of intellectual, court, and political culture. Yet the nature of this collection is such that anyone who reads it from beginning to end will be frustrated, for it offers repeated glimpses of a broad, synthetic treatment of royal ceremony that would be immensely valuable, but that we do not yet have.

It is actually possible to extract the broad outlines of such a history from this collection, which is certainly a testimony to the coherence and continuity of Bryant’s project over the years. The royal entry, at least (and probably a range of other public ceremonies) first rose to prominence in France after the collapse of Charles VI’s authority in the wake of Agincourt. Attempting to confirm an authority that was novel and, to say the least, contested, the Lancastrian kings in France developed a form of civic ritual that dramatized the claims of their vital Parisian allies to participation in the commonwealth; Charles VII, after his victories, continued the tradition, though Louis XI modified in the direction of a rather temperamental royal control. From the late fifteenth century, the Parlement of Paris and humanist scholars associated both with the rising robe nobility and the courts of the later Valois began taking control of entry ceremonies.

As a result, sixteenth century entries became a contest between two visions of monarchy: one centered on rhetorical power and consultation (implicitly, with the robe elite) and the other on a much more forthright version of royal absolutism. The Valois were willing to consider the former model, and Henri III arguably made it the centerpiece of his regime, but the Bourbons, and above all Louis XIV, brought about the definitive victory of the latter.<sup>[2]</sup> The Sun King and his successors withdrew from any dialogic form of royal ceremonial, until the crisis of 1789 brought about the return of the repressed contest over ceremony. Louis XVI lost this contest in the early weeks of the Estates General, and by July he had become a tool of others seeking some kind of ceremonial control over the onrushing events. In a way, the story had come full circle, as royal ceremonial once again appeared as a way to stabilize and renegotiate a monarchy in profound crisis: but this time, of course, all attempts were vain. After the night of Varennes, the heritage of royal ceremony became for a long time unusable.

Since this book consists of a collection of articles published over the course of thirty years in a wide array of venues, it provides a very partial and uneven survey of that process. In compensation, though, it contains many fascinating detours. It is interesting to see how English ceremonial practice could to some extent influence its French counterpart, given how used we are to seeing the influence going in the other direction.[3] Bryant does a fine job of investigating Louis XI's peculiarly antisocial approach to both court and public ceremonial, showing how it fit into a consistent political strategy without negating its elements of personal idiosyncrasy. And his take on the Revolution is very productive, using his expertise on royal ceremonial to combine a Tocquevillian understanding of the revolution as a culmination of old-regime processes with the interpretation I tend to associate with Georges Pages, seeing the Revolution as the final collapse of Louis XIV's inflexibly centralized and unworkably personalized monarchy.[4]

What attracts the largest share of Bryant's attention within his larger narrative, though, is the relationship between royal ceremonial and historical consciousness in the sixteenth century. Since Donald Kelley first drew attention to the importance of Jean du Tillet's antiquarian research forty-five years ago, scholars have recognized the significance of that connection.[5] By working from ceremony to historiography rather than the other way around, though, Bryant throws new light on the relationship among antiquarianism, governance, and the broader culture.[6] In his article on the reign of Louis XI, "Extravagance and Royal Authority," he interprets discussions of royal ceremonial as a way to categorize the political views of the major chroniclers of the period.

For the sixteenth century, his perspective is wider. In "Making History," he relates the rise of antiquarian studies of royal ceremonies to the developing struggle over competing, broadly humanist portrayals of the monarchy as either a consultative partner exercising rhetorical leadership in various assemblies, either traditional or invented for the purpose, or as the sole arbiter and creator of public discourse, and thus the sole authority on the history of that discourse. Either way, the creation and exploitation of the historical record was essentially instrumental to all concerned, a salutary reminder considering, for example, Kelley's emphasis on the modernity of French Renaissance historicism.

Finally, in the article on the Huguenot artists Perrissin and Tortorel's pictorial history of the early Wars of Religion, the *Quarante tableaux*, Bryant, together with Philip Benedict and Kristin Neuschel, give an extraordinary glimpse of historical memory in the making. Bryant's most obvious contribution to this joint project is a reading of the ways the artists both exploited and shaped their audience's knowledge of royal ceremonial in order to shape a subtle but powerfully propagandistic portrayal of a monarchy gone astray in its persecution of the Godly and its loss of control over its subjects.

The article on the *Quarante tableaux* is, we are told, the intersection of two larger projects. One of them has already reached its conclusion, in the form of Benedict's massive study of the production and nature of the *Tableaux*. [7] We are also promised a joint work by Bryant and Neuschel on "royal magnificence and national redemption." After reading this collection, it is hard not to look forward to that with some eagerness. [8] As I have said before, there is a good deal here that is as much tantalizing as satisfying, and one very obvious step is to expand the study of ceremonial beyond large public events to court life more generally, and beyond the civic and humanist worlds on which Bryant is an expert to the noble culture which is Neuschel's domain. In the mean time, though, anyone interested in the nature of old-regime political discourse would do well to look through this volume. Even for those who have followed Bryant's work, there is probably something worthwhile in here they have missed, and collectively these papers provide a fine introduction to the important place the study of ceremonial holds in the work of understanding early modern society.

## NOTES

[1] The relevant literature is large. Restricting ourselves to monographs by American scholars of early modern France, a fairly distinct school into which Bryant can be placed, see Ralph E. Giesey, *The Royal Funeral Ceremony in Renaissance France* (Geneva: Droz, 1960); Richard A. Jackson, *Vive le roi! A History of the French Coronation from Charles V to Charles X* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984); Lawrence M. Bryant, *The King and the City in the Parisian Royal Entry: Politics, Ritual, and Art in the Renaissance* (Geneva: Droz, 1986); Michael Wintroub, *A Savage Mirror: Power and Identity in Early Modern France* (Stanford, Cal.: Stanford University Press, 2006); Sarah Hanley, *The Lit de justice of the Kings of France: Constitutional Ideology in Legend, Ritual, and Discourse* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1983); and Elizabeth A.R. Brown, *The Lit de justice: Semantics, Ceremonial, and the Parlement of Paris, 1300-1600* (Sigmaringen: J. Thorbecke, 1994).

[2] On Henri II's embrace of rhetoric as a tool of governance, see Mark Greengrass, *Governing Passions: Peace and Reform in the French Kingdom, 1576-1585* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), which appeared after all the articles in this volume were written; for the reign of Louis XIV, which he doesn't treat directly, Bryant relies heavily on that warhorse, Peter Burke, *The Fabrication of Louis XIV* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1992).

[3] The classic example being the touch for scrofula, which on Bloch's account was copied wholesale by a jealous English crown: Marc Bloch, *Les rois thaumaturges: étude sur le caractère surnaturel attribué à la puissance royale particulièrement en France et en Angleterre* (Paris: Gallimard, 1983 [1924]).

[4] See Alexis de Tocqueville, *L'ancien régime et la Révolution*, ed. J.-P. Mayer (Paris: Gallimard, 1987 [1856]); and Georges Pagès, *La monarchie d'ancien régime en France (de Henri IV à Louis XIV)*, 4 ed. (Paris: Armand Colin, 1949). There are no doubt better and more up-to-date versions of this thesis, but this is the one I was brought up on, and it has the virtue of being compulsively readable. Bryant has no pretensions to a totalizing "explanation" of the Revolution: he merely demonstrates some ways in which these approaches can be interpretively fruitful.

[5] See Donald Kelley, "Jean du Tillet, Archivist and Antiquary," *Journal of Modern History* 38 (1966): 337-54; and idem, *Foundations of Modern Historical Scholarship: Language, Law and History in the French Renaissance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970).

[6] Two of the articles that focus on these issues are, not coincidentally, the ones currently most familiar to specialists. "Making History: Ceremonial Texts, Royal Space, and Political Theory in the Sixteenth Century" was published in one of the best edited collections of articles on early modern France to appear in recent years, Michael Wolfe, ed., *Changing Identities in Early Modern France* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1997), 46-77; "Graphic History: What Readers Knew and Were Taught in the *Quarante Tableaux* of Perrissin and Tortorel," co-written with Philip Benedict and Kristen Neuschel, appeared in *French Historical Studies* 28 (2005): 175-229, and won the 2006 Roelker Prize of the Sixteenth Century Studies Society. On a personal note, I was in the audience at the session at the 2003 meeting of the Society for French Historical Studies where this work was first presented: it remains to this day the best conference session I have ever seen.

[7] See Philip M. Benedict, *Graphic History: The Wars, Massacres, and Troubles of Tortorel and Perrissin* (Geneva: Droz, 2007).

[8] All I really know about that book is that it is supposed to include some study of the tournament tradition in the sixteenth century. There would certainly be much to learn from returning to the detailed study of royal festivities as in that more admired than imitated classic, Frances Yates, *The Valois Tapestries* (London: Warburg Institute, 1959).

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