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Stéphane Pannekoucke, *Des princes en Bourgogne. Les Condé gouverneurs au XVIIIe siècle*. Paris: Éditions du Comité des travaux historiques et scientifiques, 2010. 338 pp. Maps, tables, notes, bibliography, and index. €28.00 (cl). ISBN 978-2-7355-0725-2.

Review by Darryl Dee, Wilfrid Laurier University.

In the classic historiography of the French absolute monarchy, the noble governors of the provinces fared rather poorly. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, it was argued, these unruly aristocrats had used their military and political control over their provinces to raise rebellion against the crown. Successive French kings responded by forcefully reducing their posts to little more than prestigious sinecures while shifting real power in the provinces to the *intendants* and other royal commissioners.<sup>[1]</sup> However, the rise of a new approach to the early modern French monarchy, one that emphasizes the constraints on royal power as well as the collaboration between kings and traditional elites, has led to a reevaluation of offices and institutions once thought to have been bypassed by the triumphal march of absolutism. New studies of the provincial Estates, for example, have shown that they were important, dynamic, even innovative bodies down to the Revolution.<sup>[2]</sup> The time has clearly come for a second look at the governors.

Perhaps the most prominent of the provincial governors were the members of the house of Condé. Princes of the blood and among the wealthiest aristocrats in the kingdom, the Condé were governors of the great *pays d'état* of Burgundy almost continuously from 1631 to 1789. Beth Nachison has examined their preponderant role in Burgundian affairs during the Grand Siècle.<sup>[3]</sup> In his new book, Stéphane Pannekoucke takes the story of the Condé prince-governors into the century of Enlightenment. He convincingly argues that the Condé remained powerful and influential political actors. They were not only vital intermediaries linking Burgundy to the royal court, but more importantly, they took an active and effective part in the day-to-day administration of the province.

Pannekoucke bases his assessment of the Condé governors on the following premise: “définir le gouverneur moins par ce qu’il est d’un point de vue institutionnel, que parce qu’il fait, concrètement, dans la province qui lui est confiée, la Bourgogne” (p. 26). Furthermore, he examines their part in the workings of the French royal state, especially in relation to other agents of the monarchy. Pannekoucke is able to focus on the governors in action because he makes extensive use of the Condé’s rich archives preserved at their principal seat, the Château de Chantilly. In particular, he draws on the voluminous correspondence between the governors and their representatives in Dijon and Paris.

Pannekoucke tracks the ebb and flow of Condé power over the course of the careers of Burgundy’s three eighteenth-century governors. Louis-Henri de Bourbon—called Monsieur le Duc after his title of Duc de Bourbon—held the office from 1710 to 1740. One of the chief courtiers of the early reign of Louis XV, Louis-Henri was briefly the king’s first minister. After his fall from power in 1726 and his exile to Chantilly, he devoted much of his attention and energy to his governorship. Under him, Condé power in Burgundy reached its zenith: the royal intendant declared that Monsieur le Duc governed the province as a veritable vicerealty. At his death in 1740, however, his heir, Louis-Joseph, was just three-and-a-half years old. The royal ministers, particularly Louis Phélypeaux, comte de Saint-Florentin, the

secretary of state in charge of Burgundy, saw in this situation an opportunity to reduce Condé power in the province while increasing their own. The king appointed Paul-Hippolyte de Beauvillier, duc de Saint-Aignan, as interim governor until Louis-Joseph turned eighteen. During Saint-Aignan's tenure, the royal ministry appropriated much of the formal power and authority that the Condé had wielded. Louis-Joseph therefore came into a diminished office in 1754. Yet, he was able to use his status as a prince of the blood as well as the still considerable resources available to him to revive much of the Condé's influence and authority. Although Louis-Joseph could hardly aspire to be viceroy of the province like his father, he nevertheless remained a key figure in Burgundy until 1789.

By the eighteenth century, the Condé princes had come to treat the governorship of Burgundy as part of their patrimony. Thus, when the Duc de Bourbon entered office in 1710, he inherited an already well-established "système Condé" consisting of four key attributes: the possession of extensive landholdings in the province; the control over access to offices in the provincial power structure; the ability to appoint loyal clients to key posts; and the role of intermediary between crown and province. The Condé, however, were rarely present in Burgundy themselves, tending to make only brief visits during the triennial meetings of the provincial Estates. They therefore needed loyal servants who could provide information as well as act on their behalf. Two officials from the princely household came to carry out these functions. In Dijon, the Condé's own *intendant* (who is not to be confused with the royal *intendant* of police, justice, and finance) was responsible for both the public duties of the governor and the private affairs of the prince. During the eighteenth century, the *intendant* also held the powerful office of treasurer of the Estates of Burgundy. This key post was monopolized by three families with long histories of loyal service to the Condé. The *intendant* in turn maintained close links with the second official, based in Paris, the prince's *secrétaire des commandements* for Burgundy. The secretary corresponded with all authorities who had an interest in the province and, more importantly, served as the prince's closest advisor on Burgundian affairs. Together, the *intendant* and the secretary constituted what amounted to "un petit département administrative spécialisé" (p. 109). Furthermore, both officials possessed extensive networks of clients and allies in both Paris and Dijon that they mobilized in the service of their master.

As intermediary between crown and province, the governor's most important task was dealing with the Estates of Burgundy. The Condé princes fulfilled this task with great skill, and in so doing, proved themselves dependable agents of the king. During the eighteenth century, the royal ministry assigned ever more administrative tasks to the *élus*, the permanent commission of the Estates, until it became "un véritable gouvernement provincial" (p. 152). The governor supported the expansion of the *élus'* competence, even though it stripped other provincial corps of power and authority, but the governor most visibly exercised his intermediary function when he presided over the triennial meetings of the Estates. Even before the assembly convened, he carefully vetted its agenda. Only after he was certain that nothing in it was contrary to the royal interests did he allow it to be formally adopted. Once the Estates were in session, the governor exercised close supervision over their debates. While these procedures were designed to preempt any opposition to the monarchy, the Condé governors also acted in the province's interests. For example, they continued the custom begun during the reign of Louis XIV of securing a moderation in the province's contributions to the royal treasury.

The governor's intermediary role was conspicuously on display during episodes of open political conflict in Burgundy. Pannekoucke examines the actions of Louis-Joseph during the Varennes affair of 1760 to 1763. The affair pitted the Parlement of Dijon against Jacques Varennes, secretary of the Estates, in a dispute over tax assessments. At stake was authority over taxation. Consistent with the Condé position that the governor's principal responsibility was to uphold royal authority in Burgundy, Louis-Joseph threw his weight squarely behind Varennes, mobilizing the Condé's extensive client networks at court and in Burgundy on his behalf. As the negotiations between the Parlement and the royal ministry intensified, the prince attempted to block the former's attempts to force Varennes from office. When

Varenes was finally compelled to resign as part of the settlement ending the affair, Louis-Joseph secured for him the post of receiver general of the Estates, a promotion from his old office of secretary.

The lynchpin of the Condé system was control over access to office in the provincial power structure, which allowed the prince-governors to appoint loyalists to key posts and also to build an extensive clientele. Until 1740, this power was extraordinarily expansive. Monsieur le Duc appointed the *élus* as well as the administrators of the Estates and also named the mayors and other magistrates of Burgundy's municipalities. After his death, the royal ministers moved quickly to appropriate this power. Instead of the governor, the king would henceforth make appointments to all positions in the Estates and the municipalities. When Louis-Joseph became governor in 1754, however, he worked to reassert control over the appointment process. Whenever a municipal position came open, he vigorously lobbied the royal ministers to appoint the candidate he most favored, and the royal ministers almost invariably complied with his wishes. Louis-Joseph therefore successfully replaced his father's *de jure* power of appointment with a *de facto* one.

In all of their activities in the province, the Condé governors had to deal with the king's commissioners, particularly the royal *intendant* and the military commandant. But the powers of the prince-governors proved to be so extensive that they limited those of the royal agents. Moreover, the Condé's exalted status at court allowed them to exercise considerable influence over appointments to these two posts. As a result, far from being one of competition and conflict, the relationship between the governors and the royal agents was marked by cooperation and collaboration.

In showing that the Condé princes were dynamic political actors and active administrators throughout the eighteenth century, Stéphane Pannekoucke's fine book definitively overturns the classic interpretation that the noble governors of early modern France were shunted aside by the agents of a rising absolute monarchy. Yet his study raises two further questions. First, how representative of the provincial governors were the Condé? Pannekoucke argues convincingly that they were uniquely powerful because of their status as princes of the blood and their long hold over Burgundy. Yet, more work needs to be done on other governors before this argument is completely settled. One family of aristocratic governors comparable to the Condé were the ducs de Villeroy, who governed Lyon and the Lyonnais from 1612 to 1794. Gregory Monahan has shown that the Maréchal de Villeroy played an indispensable role as intermediary between Lyon and the royal court during the great famine year of 1709. It was largely thanks to his energetic lobbying of Louis XIV and his ministers that food aid was sent to save the starving city.<sup>[4]</sup> Of course, studying other governors must deal with the problem of adequate sources. None, perhaps, have archives as rich and concentrated as those of Chantilly.

Second, what does the experience of the Condé tell us about the development of the French royal state? Pannekoucke argues that 1740 represented a decisive break in which a better developed, more specialized royal administration seized a long awaited opportunity to take direct control over Burgundy from its princely viceroys. The last Condé governor was undoubtedly weaker than his predecessors. Yet, as Pannekoucke himself shows, the royal ministers nevertheless had always to reckon with Louis-Joseph's lobbying. This suggests that the traditional politics of status and patronage persisted for at least as long as the monarchy itself.

## NOTES

[1] The clearest statement of this interpretation in English is found in Robert Harding, *Anatomy of a Power Elite: The Provincial Governors of Early Modern France* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1978).

[2] See, for example, Marie Laure Legay, *Les États provinciaux dans la construction de l'État moderne aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles* (Geneva: Droz, 2001) and Julian Swann, *Provincial Power and Absolute Monarchy: The Estates General of Burgundy, 1661-1790* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

[3] Beth Nachison, "Absentee Government and Provincial Governors in Early Modern France: The Princes of Condé and Burgundy, 1660-1720," *French Historical Studies* 21 (1998): 265-297.

[4] W. Gregory Monahan, *Year of Sorrows: The Famine of 1709 in Lyon* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1993).

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