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Cédric Michon, ed., *Les conseillers de François I* (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2011), pp. 668 + illustrations. 26€ (pbk). ISBN : 978-2-7535-1313-6

Review by Orest Ranum, The Johns Hopkins University.

In his *Discours des estats et offices* of 1579, Charles de Figon published a woodcut depicting the royal government as a tree with many branches on which the names of each institution are inscribed. As the power of first instance, the thick trunk is the chancellor and keeper of the seals, not the council, because royal councilors were sworn in to their *charges* by the chancellor. This ontological dimension of power is not explored in the volume under review, perhaps because it seems so obvious, but it, in fact, made manifest the honor of serving the king. The image of the tree conveys resonances not only that royal governance was part of nature, but that it also was emanationist like the Church, a metaphor not unlike that of the head and the members resorted to so often to describe the body politic or religious. There have been numerous attempts to present fundamentally the same material under such various headings as jurisdictions and duties, or *offices*. René Guillard's *Histoire du Conseil du roi*, published in Paris by Coustellier in 1718, is a synthesis of decrees, judgments, and jurisdictions that takes names as constitutive of historical reality; for example the council of state was for affairs of state. Guillard attempts to legitimate what was the distribution of functions just after the failures of the *polysynodie*.

The "Introduction" to this study is far too ambitious. No one, in just thirty-three pages, can sketch the history of the royal council from 1200 to 1800, present a selection of prescriptive thoughts about the council that ranges from Christine de Pisan to Montesquieu, the court and its relation to the council, and royal councils and favorites in Spain and England, and then present Francis I's councils in forty-eight pages. Jumping out from the studies by Noël Valois, François Olivier-Martin, Roland Mousnier, and Bernard Barbiche might well have led to interesting results, but this would have required a much longer, more analytical, and probably juridical-administrative context to nuance the general point, namely the continuity of kings and their councils over the centuries.[1] Such a level of generalization is less than satisfying. Without carefully developed contexts, sources and assertions prompt so many questions that the reader becomes frustrated. It is virtually impossible to figure out how the council functioned or changed over time, or what prompted the changes. Readers may also tire and lose the thread of an argument when they have to start over several times in the High Middle Ages, then skip over the history of the council under the first three Bourbons before reading a very cursory discussion of the council in the eighteenth century. When Michon mentions no studies on the council during the reigns of Louis XIII and Louis XIV (p. 12), a corrective becomes necessary.

This faulty framework also accounts for erratic references and omissions of important bibliography. Take, for example, the topic "chancellor-keeper of the seals." Readers might reasonably expect to find Hélène Michaud's seminal study of the sixteenth-century royal chancellery among the first works cited, but in fact it is only cited by reference to the "*maîtres des requêtes*." [2] I shall attempt to reduce what could appear pedantic, by appending here a list of works that complement Cédric Michon's texts.

Michon comes into his own in the second part of the introduction: a prosopographic-statistical study of

Francis I's councilors which is at once ground-breaking and an excellent point of departure for the case studies that follow. Michon then presents just over fifty individuals who could make serious claims to be royal councilors. Regional origins, social rank, "profession," age, and years of service are the major points in this part of the study. Councilors were really quite evenly distributed across the realm, were in their late forties on average, and had experience in war, finances, diplomatic service, and the court. Recruitment was fairly co-optative and overwhelmingly involved laymen who sought appointments for sons and nephews first, then for other relatives, and perhaps for clients with ties to their families. At least one prince of the church was in service throughout most of the reign.

Francis's councilors often had protectors or "brokers" (there is a difference) who headed veritable networks of other officials and persons belonging to the political-religious elites. Sharon Kettering's work is noted here, but without the point about their long reach into the provinces.<sup>[3]</sup> The Gouffiers, the Robertets, the Montmorencies, the Bourbons, Annebault, and Tournon "held" the council as they "held" the realm—in a synthesis of personal and administrative powers that were at once systemic (e.g., the governors) and complex. About half the councilors had some expertise in financial, judicial, or diplomatic service, but Michon is careful not to suggest that there was a correlation between expertise and appointment to the council. Reputation, royal service, sometimes for decades and generations, counted for more. The introduction ends by pointing out, and rightly so, that the names of the specialized councils (*étroit, privé, des affaires*, etc.) did not represent the real distributions of tasks, expertise, and powers. The rise of *règlements* in the later sixteenth century may look like rationalization of state services, but it probably was more a tool used by the most influential royal advisors, to jockey *fidèles* in and out of greater or lesser influence.

Trained as I was to read and reread bibliographies and book catalogs from small shops all across France, what follows does not seem pedantic to me (I realize that younger generations in this electronic age do not share this view); it will be built on parts of the introduction not mentioned above. It is minimalist, absolutely minimalist. Regarding the prescriptive literature, the lengthy perspective from Claude de Seyssel is particularly appropriate, because Seyssel includes interesting remarks about how the council actually functioned. Not all mirrors of princes join the prescriptive and actual to the degree that he does, or that Louis XIV's *Mémoires* (probably by Périgny) do. Though not discussed, Richelieu's lengthy comments in his *Testament politique* certainly merit close reading to distinguish changes from continuities in the selections of commonplaces about government by council. The role of the council was, of course, a *topos* in the mirror-of-princes genre: hence Christine de Pisan's thought on the subject. But the thoughts of Jean Bodin, Pierre Corneille, Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet, Louis XIV, and the Baron de Montesquieu are stripped of their contexts; all but the obvious points remain impossible to discern.

For a beginning, there is Olivier-Martin's *Histoire du droit français*, first published in Paris in 1945. Mousnier's general work is cited but it should be noted that it is actually the model for the work under review and, as such, it contains numerous case studies. Mousnier's 1948 article on the *règlements* in the Conseil du Roi under Louis XIII contains lists of councilors.<sup>[4]</sup> His mature reflections in *Les Institutions de la France*, especially in volume two, are also very important. My *Richelieu and the Councillors of Louis XIII*, published by Oxford in 1963, while old, is still useful. So are the chapters on the council under Louis XIV in A. de Boislisle's still older and learnedly brilliant edition of Saint-Simon's *Mémoires* (Paris, 1884), volumes four through seven. See also the very significant bridge from Boislisle to Michel Antoine's magisterial work on the royal council under Louis XV that came with T. J. Schaeper's work on the *conseil de commerce* during the last part of Louis XIV's reign.<sup>[5]</sup> Albert Hamscher's study on the *conseil privé* and the *parlements* under Louis XIV is a major work with a very important finding, namely, that instead of conflict and competition, the councils, *parlements*, and other sovereign courts actually cooperated during the years 1660 to 1715.<sup>[6]</sup> For English royal councils, the works of G. R. Elton, W. Notestein, D. H. Willson, and G. E. Aylmer, and John Guy must be mentioned.<sup>[7]</sup> For the Spanish, see Sir John Elliott,

*Olivares*, published by Yale in 1986. A final oversight must be mentioned, this time regarding the court. Jacqueline Boucher's path breaking study on the court of Henri III, which appeared in 1977, may not have the statistical and demographic dimensions that Michon stresses in the latter part of the Introduction discussed here, but it is a mine of information about the court and, indirectly but certainly, about the council.[8]

From the fifty-four councilors listed on a graph in the introduction, Cédric Michon selected forty-six to be presented in case studies which vary in length from a few paragraphs to the thirty-two pages devoted to Anne de Montmorency. It would be too lengthy to present here even the names of the twenty scholars who have written these studies, but it is a pleasure to note that they hail from Britain as well as France. Some are senior, others junior, and several are drawing on much new research developed for these defended at the *École des Chartes*.

Social and regional origins, education and family connections, average age and number of years of service, regional influences, and that elusive technical expertise gained from experience are all pulled from often intractable sources. The excellent use of diplomatic correspondence sent from Westminster, Mantua, and elsewhere has probably skewed to over-emphasis the general theme of advice-giving about diplomacy, but it becomes evident that negotiating with foreign powers occupied, at one time or another, nearly all of France's councilors. Little is said about military strategy or preparation for war (save for a crucial moment in Genouillac's career), nor about advice-giving on religious questions other than relations with the Papacy; and there is nothing at all about the all-important nominations to high offices in the church or the state, aside from anecdotal evidence that councilors favored appointments for sons and relatives.

Material on fiscal and financial advising comes to the fore in the case studies of the social origins in the law of the councilor—*trésorier, financier*, but as yet no *surintendants* of finance. These are generic titles that often concealed their supervision by some high-ranking noble councilor who frequently lacked a title indicative of his duties. *Financiers* needed room to maneuver, yet they had to be watched as they cobbled together huge sums from various sources and negotiated loans from urban elites. Experience in war, in finance, or in intimidating a *parlement*, counted for more than training in the law (or in theology!), but such training was essential in order to be perceived as legitimate by men of the robe and of the cloth. Over the council, for almost Francis's entire reign, loomed a succession of *grands maîtres*: this very high household title suggests that wielding power effectively in the council presupposed control of court appointments.

Discerning distributions of duties and jurisdictions beneath the various adjectives—*privé, étroit, des affaires*, etc.—proved elusive, but the annual lists of first-, second-, and even third-tier councilors in the first appendix are very suggestive about how power was distributed within any given council at any given moment. Down to her death in 1531, Louise de Savoie, the king's mother, looms over all questions involving access to the king. She was seconded by councilors who had grown up with Francis, notably the Gouffiers and Lautrec. Although the various Bourbon princes probably had pawns on the council, they were on short leashes owing to the many years of familiarity that some councilors had acquired through serving continuously from the reigns of Louis XI and Louis XII. Warning the king about over-mighty subjects was commonplace, but not without danger.

The dying-off of long-serving councilors circa 1530 gave Montmorency his chance. Already present for years, he rose in power, but not without challenges. *Parlement's* play for increased influence may at least have been partially inspired by long-robe clients seeking to play a part in the temporarily somewhat fluid situation in the council. The rise in power of a non-councilor, the Duchess of Étampes, could probably be clarified by analyzing the competition for appointments to various high offices. In his *History*, Jacques-Auguste de Thou emphasizes this aspect of her powers, especially over the in-and-out history of appointments to the chancellorship and keeper of the seals.

Certainly the dying-off of the previous generation left Duprat vulnerable, but his social origins in the law and his work on finances suggested a perception of corruption that the Du Bellays and the *parlementaires* could play upon to bring him down. In governments characterized by continuity of service, such brutal disgraces may partially reveal deep and strong cultural attitudes about rank and increased wealth. Some influential nobles—Louis II de la Trémouille being a good example—continued in service owing to their strong provincial connections, notably in the Southwest but also in Burgundy. Absolute fidelity was required for all councilors. For councilors such as La Trémouille, however, an ear to the ground was also necessary to counter revolt or possible Habsburg influence. These councilors were “brokers” in Kettering’s sense of the term.

Montmorency’s enormous powers are carefully elucidated, but there is little attempt to explore his personal relations with Francis or Étampes. Counseling involved a pursuit of intimacy and trust. Francis worked hard at government, and though he never let any councilor become so dominant that the word “favorite” had to be used to characterize him or her, he nonetheless let down his guard or fell apart under the Montmorency-Étampes vision for peace and control of Milan. Had Chabot, Annebault, and Tournon dared to offer an alternative vision? In other words, the possibility of a truly collegial government remained beyond the king’s will. Thus, the inevitable rise to dominance of a series of what would later be referred to as “prime ministers” characterized council membership after the first generation had died off, circa 1530. Was the appellation *chef du conseil* simply part of the talk about governance, or did it have a legal definition? When Seyssel uses the term, the tone suggests he is almost talking about the *chef du conseil en titre*.

The word “ambassador” has been used here and there in the case studies, and all too casually. The hierarchy of diplomatic representation was already quite well fixed, and those holding the highest ranks were not always the ones who wrote lengthy dispatches to the council. Given the implicit concentration on attending and speaking *en conseil*, the letters addressed to the king by a councilor were probably of the same official status; when someone was disgraced, royal magistrates typically turned up at his door to confiscate official documents.

The *maîtres des requêtes* may not have possessed the right to regular attendance, as a councilor might, but their access to the chancellor and their right to present *affaires* before the *Parlement* made them almost super-councilors. Through his dedications, Guillaume Budé, a *maître des requêtes*, addressed the king, and on occasion (see the *De Asse*) his paralleling of an ancient past and a current political situation constituted a form of counsel. Blaise de Monluc’s account of being egged on to speak ever more boldly before the king is quoted twice in the volume (pp. 452-53, and 596, n. 31), and appropriately so, but in neither instance is there sufficient interpretation. Monluc was not a member of the council (see p. 605), yet the Dauphin entrapped him in its deliberations, an interesting indication of the informality, if not the casualness that prevailed in a divided council. Historians are interested in the terms of a debate: who orders those terms to one or another conclusion? And how do these terms or arguments square with the probably hierarchical order of speaking before the council?

Contemporaries were also fascinated by the relation between the individual and his discursive powers. To what degree did it depend on social rank? Machiavelli’s *Art of War* permitted readers to become armchair councilors, as would Étienne Pasquier’s *Pourparler du Prince*. Even more information on Francis’s councilors might be gleaned by a very close reading of the surviving correspondence between the councilors. Though excellent, the sources quoted here are often left without context or interpretation. Finally, the conceptual frames of these studies rarely include the juridical. The historians of law perhaps stressed the legal too much in their studies of the council, but government in early modern France was really an *État de droit*. The emphasis on precedent, precision of vocabulary, and attention to layers upon

layers of jurisdictions constituted a particular and unique discourse in all the instruments emanating from the council—a corpus of thought that legitimated the exercise of power.

The book ends with brief, excellent studies of the chambers where the council met and their proximity to the royal chamber, the surviving portraits of councilors (a moment of glory for the Clouets' artistry), and their prestigious new residences in the Loire valley or near their *terres*. The material on Montrésor and Assier is particularly welcome to this reviewer. It might be mentioned that the chantry tomb ensemble in the church that Genouillac built for himself and his "villagers" at Assier still has its original, glorious oak enclosure bearing the arms of the deceased in majesty. This is a most welcome beginning to a holistic approach, and one for which Cédric Michon and his nineteen collaborators must be congratulated.

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[1] Noël Valois, *Le Conseil du roi aux XIVe, XVe et XVIe siècles*, (Paris, 1888); François Olivier-Martin, *Histoire du droit français. Des origines à la Révolution*, (Paris: CNRS, 2010), originally published in 1945; Roland Mousnier, *Les Institutions de la France sous la monarchie absolue, 1598-1789*, 2 volumes, (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1974-1980); and Bernard Barbiche, *Les institutions de la monarchie française à l'époque moderne, XVI-XVIII siècle*, (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1999).

[2] Hélène Michaud, *La Grande Chancellerie et les écritures royales au XVIe siècle (1515-1589)*, (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1967)

[3] Sharon Kettering, *Patronage in Sixteenth and Seventeenth-Century France*, (Ashgate Variorum: Woodbridge, 2002).

[4] Roland Mousnier, "Règlements du Conseil du roi sous Louis XIII," *Annuaire bulletin de la Société de l'Histoire de France*, années 1946-47 (published in 1948), pp. 94-211.

[5] Michel Antoine, *Le Conseil du Roi sous le règne de Louis XV*, (Droz, Paris/Geneva, 1971) and Thomas J. Schaeper, *The French Council of Commerce* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1983).

[6] Albert Hamscher, *The Conseil Privé and the Parlements in the Age of Louis XIV: A Study in French Absolutism*, (Philadelphia, Penn.: American Philosophical Society, 1987)

[7] G. R. Elton, *The Tudor Revolution in Government: Administrative Changes in the Reign of Henry VIII*, Cambridge University Press, 1953 and *The Parliament of England, 1559-1581* Cambridge University Press, 1986; Wallace Notestein, *The House of Commons, 1604-1640*, (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1971); D. H. Willson, *The Privy Councillors in the House Of Commons 1604-1629*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1940); and G. E. Aylmer, *The Crown's Servants: Government and the Civil Service Under Charles II, 1660-1685*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); John Guy, *Politics, Law and Counsel in Tudor and Early Stuart England*, (Ashgate Variorum 2000).

[8] Jacqueline Boucher, *Société et mentalité autour de Henri III* (Service des reproductions des thèses, Lille, 1977), 4 volumes.

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