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Caroline Mailet-Rao, *La pensée politique des dévots Mathieu de Morgues et Michel de Marillac: Une opposition au ministériat du cardinal de Richelieu*. Preface by Donald A. Bailey. Bibliothèque d'histoire moderne et contemporaine 49. Paris: Honoré Champion, 2015. 405 pp. Bibliography and index. €75.00 (pb.). ISBN 978-2745329035.

Review by Jotham Parsons, Duquesne University.

This book provides exactly what its title promises: a detailed study of the political writings and thought of two of Marie de Medicis' closest advisors, who fell with her on the Day of the Dupes. Though their categorization as "devout" has the authority of long tradition, one of Mailet-Rao's most important and convincing claims is that it in fact makes little sense to try to identify a "parti dévot." The queen mother and her associates, she argues, were conventional, Catholic absolutizing monarchists who differed little from Richelieu on most issues. The major and irreconcilable difference was over the desirability of a prime minister who would exercise the near totality of royal power. This anti-ministerialism, she believes, lay at the core of their political identity. It would also triumph later in the century, notably with the personal rule of Louis XIV. It might be argued, though Mailet-Rao does not really do so, that the subjects of this book were closer to the "mainstream" of French political opinion than the man who displaced them.

Though closely associated in government, Morgues and Marillac were very different in background and temperament. The Marillac were one of the great families of royal administrators, closely associated with the royal finances since the reign of François I. [1] By the seventeenth century they had also emerged as aristocrats of Tridentine religiosity: most famously Michel's niece Jeanne de Chantal (with whom he was apparently not particularly close) who founded the Visitandines and was eventually canonized. Michel's own *cursus honorum* was exemplary. Beginning as a councilor in the Parlement of Paris under the League, he turned royalist in good time, was rewarded with a position as *maître des requêtes*, eventually took his family's traditional place in the *conseil des finances*, and ultimately reached the pinnacle of the robe as *garde des sceaux*. His brother, meanwhile, pursued a military career with equal éclat, becoming a Marshal of France. Their fall in 1630 was correspondingly brutal. The marshal was arrested, tried by a kangaroo court, and executed, while the *garde des sceaux* was confined to a state prison where he wrote devotional tracts until he died in 1632. The air of Corneille's tragedies hung over the pair like a mist. By contrast, Morgues was less of a golden boy and more of a survivor. From a somewhat hard-bitten family of provincial nobility, he made a career in the Church, first with the Jesuits, whom he left precipitously, and then as a client of the great: first the Cardinal de Joyeuse, then Marguerite de Valois, and finally the regent, Marie de Medicis. He swiftly became her leading publicist, and though he shared her exile in 1630, he long outlived his nemesis, returned to France, and died at the age of 88 in 1670. An orator above all, he seems to have alternated with complete comfort between preaching and the bitterest of political polemic.

Mailet-Rao makes a convincing case that these very different men shared a common, coherent understanding of French politics. She particularly stresses their commitment to a strict Bodinian

understanding of exclusive royal sovereignty, though how much of this was his direct influence and how much a general climate of opinion remains unclear.[2] Her treatment of their views is organized in three thematic sections. The first, most closely tied to their theoretical absolutism, deals with their relationship to royal sovereignty. Royal propagandists and administrators by vocation, they lacked nostalgia for any autonomous or constitutional authority of the nobility, the parlements, or the law. In one of her more interesting passages, Maillet-Rao dismisses the idea that Morgues and Marillac were in any important sense ultramontanists, instead relating them to the same royalist-Gallican-Tridentine (in roughly that order) “catholicisme d’état” associated with Richelieu. Of course, as Olivier Poncet has demonstrated (and as Maillet-Rao notes, especially in her discussion of foreign policy), the French monarchy and the papacy were in substantial agreement over most issues through much of the seventeenth century, so this was not a position that required great ecclesiological gymnastics.[3]

The second section of the book covers theories of royal counsel and the law. In addition to being a dedicated administrator, Marillac was the principal author of a major legal reform, the 1626 “Code Michau.” He was, in other words, a deeply committed architect and technician of royal power, to which he was every bit as dedicated as the Cardinal. Though Maillet-Rao does not really explore this aspect of the question, it seems quite possible that the way he associated royal absolutism with bureaucratic organization and rationality clashed with the way Richelieu’s ministry and creatures personalized its exercise. Marillac was, plausibly, a martyr of technocracy, probably not the first and certainly not the last.

The final section deals with policy, particularly around the two great issues of Louis XIII’s reign: civil war with various combinations of magnates and Protestants, and external war against the Habsburg power. On the former question there seems to have been little disagreement within the royal council. Everybody wanted to tolerate Protestantism while eliminating its military force as rapidly as practicable. As for the Italian expeditions, which were the immediate context for the rupture that led to the Day of the Dupes, Maillet-Rao suggests some subtle but important differences between Marillac and Morgues on one hand and Richelieu on the other. Here, she thinks, the “dévots” did somewhat live up to their label, not because of any sympathy for Habsburg interests or tendency to put religion before country, but because they were more devoted to ideals of just war and to what she considers a Grotian commitment to *jus in bello* and continuous diplomacy.

It is unsurprising that this book is at its most convincing when it deconstructs the myth of the *parti dévot* originally constructed by Richelieu’s propaganda and often repeated with insufficient reflection by historians. As Donald Bailey points out in his preface, this is a task that historians have been undertaking for several years, but Maillet-Rao’s contribution is significant: Morgues and Marillac were very significant players in Louis XIII’s France, and they deserve the kind of comprehensive treatment they receive here. Future scholars will find the work useful, and it speaks to its accuracy that it produces a somewhat more staid and coherent picture of the politics of the 1620s than the received version.

There is, however, a basic structural problem with this study that Maillet-Rao could not have avoided, and of which she is certainly aware, but which might still repay further reflection. The sources on Morgues’ and Marillac’s political outlook are relatively abundant (and the author has dug up some valuable and underappreciated ones), but they are narrow in important ways. Neither was a deep or systematic political thinker, and more importantly, neither really strayed much beyond his particular professional niche. It is very hard to determine where their specific circumstances—the need to make polemical points or to fulfill specific bureaucratic functions—ended, and deep conviction began. This might be a case in which what is now the slightly old-fashioned method of the “Cambridge School” of the history of political thought might have been useful: to think less in terms of individual viewpoints, and more in terms of the conceptual and rhetorical languages that could be chosen among and deployed in specific political situations.[4]

There are a few other nits to be picked in Maillet-Rao's work. Although her analysis of religious politics is generally sure-footed and illuminating, I am not entirely comfortable with the way she labels ultramontanist and potentially regicidal tendencies in France "Jesuit": this tends to reify a line of propaganda that corresponded in only the most limited way to the reality of the Jesuit order.[5] While the systematic comparison of Morgues and Marillac to Richelieu is entirely logical, there are places where the scope of the analysis could have been expanded so as better to situate the subjects in the political spectrum of the day. For example there might be interesting parallels between their views and those of Père Joseph, who nevertheless remained a close collaborator of Richelieu's.[6] Less importantly, many of her quotations could have been cut down substantially, though there is a great deal of interesting and previously quite inaccessible documentation here. A memoir of Marillac's on the war of Casal, published in its entirety for the first time as "Document II," provides an exceptionally detailed window into the deliberations of the royal council at a crucial moment of French foreign policy.

Nevertheless, this book does a great deal to fill one of the important remaining gaps in the recent explosion of work that has demythologized and recontextualized the age of Richelieu. Anyone interested in completing their picture of that tumultuous era should read it.

NOTES

[1] See Michel Antoine, *Le cœur de l'état: Surintendance, contrôle général et intendance des finances 1552-1791* (Paris: Fayard, 2003), passim.

[2] I don't think enough people have read J.H.M. Salmon, "The Legacy of Jean Bodin: Absolutism, Populism or Constitutionalism?", *History of Political Thought* 17 (1996), 500–522.

[3] Olivier Poncet, *La France et le pouvoir pontifical (1595-1661): L'esprit des institutions* (Rome: École française de Rome, 2011).

[4] It would be tedious to rehearse the literature on the Cambridge School here. J.G.A. Pocock, *Politics, Language, and Time: Essays on Political Thought and History* (London: Methuen, 1972) is a classic statement, and Kari Palonen, *Quentin Skinner: History, Politics, Rhetoric* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003) provides a fairly comprehensive and up-to-date overview.

[5] Eric Nelson, *The Jesuits and the Monarchy: Catholic Reform and Political Authority in France (1590-1615)* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), which Maillet-Rao does cite, is probably the best account.

[6] See Benoist Pierre, *Le père Joseph: l'éminence grise de Richelieu* (Paris: Perrin, 2007).

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