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Sven Externbrink and Charles-Édouard Levillain, eds. *Penser l'après Louis XIV. Histoire, mémoire, représentation (1715-2015)*. Honoré Champion: Paris, 2018. 324 pp. Index and notes. €48.00 (pb). ISBN: 978-2-7453-4806-7.

Review by Peter R. Campbell, Bogazici University, Istanbul.

I still remember the surprise I had reading Maassen's *Louis XIV d'après les pamphlets répandus en Hollande*<sup>[1]</sup> when I was preparing my little book on Louis XIV.<sup>[2]</sup> Of course I was steeped in French and Anglo-American works on the image of Louis XIV, but here was a Sun King who was far from being seen as a glorious ray of sunshine in much of Europe.<sup>[3]</sup> This was especially the case in the Dutch Republic and much of the German lands, of course, where the experience of Huguenot expulsion, invasion, and devastation produced a very different image from the French depictions of Louis XIV's glorious conquests. But such a context for assessments never really made it into textbooks used in French high school or university courses, nor into those still republished and even recently written *oeuvres de haute vulgarisation*, nor into truly academic assessments until now. They remained, and indeed mostly remain, *à la Bluche*,<sup>[4]</sup> stuck in the grand narrative of a history of state building, absolutism, and the *rayonnement de la culture française*. So, some papers in this volume come as a provocative reminder of different national perspectives on Louis XIV and of just how negatively he was portrayed in foreign lands right up until recent generations. That too is an important historical reality that needs to be integrated into overall assessments (particularly those contemporary views that are vital for understanding the anti-French coalitions). The papers on France also generally show that in France, until a twentieth-century orthodox view took hold, Louis XIV was perceived quite negatively, even though he was credited with developing the modern centralized state. In this age of European (dis?)integration—I write on the eve of the European elections—the papers published in this volume remind us that national identity is often founded on historical myths and prejudices, and that Whig History (by which I mean fitting new research into an old teleological schema of interpretation without seeing that the research actually undermines it) is alive and well and, in the case of Louis XIV and France, has a long history. Of course, that is far from being the case for the volume's last chapter by Thierry Sarmant, who reflects deeply on writing a biography of Louis, exploring the technique and the sources one might use for what is now very much an international world of scholarship. The conference from which the book stems was held in Paris on June-3-5, 2015, hosted jointly by the German Historical Institute, the Archives diplomatiques de la Corneuve, and the Université de Paris-Diderot, and the scholarly participation reflects these institutions. It was organized as one of the more academic tributes to the tercentenary of the death of Louis XIV on September 1, 1715. Alexandre Maral reminds us too, in a short chapter, of the superb special exhibition at Versailles on Louis that foregrounded his personal taste.<sup>[5]</sup>

The published collection under review has no systematic *problématique*, but all the papers perhaps represent the contrasting perspectives that are rightly or wrongly still drawn upon until this day in both popular or academic history. Interpretations of the personal and kingly qualities of Louis XIV and even assessments of his reign have differed from the moment he attacked the Low Countries in 1672 in pursuit of *gloire*, while the persecutions surrounding the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685 was a self-inflicted wound almost fatal to his reputation abroad. Thus, exploring this topic further and more recently than W. F. Church's 1976 *Louis XIV in Historical Thought* would seem to be an excellent idea.[6] The theme of this collection of papers is more or less the varying representations of Louis and his state in history and literature after his death. The book includes papers on France, on Germany, on Britain and America combined, and on the Netherlands in the guise of a paper on the historian Johan Huizinga. Stemming as it does from a three-day conference, it is far from being really focused like most such volumes. It is of course only one conference, and it is always hard to get invited scholars to fit their contributions into a really systematic approach. The editors divided the chapters into sections, but the contributions can perhaps best be seen as a pathway to a more systematic treatment of the historiography--and much is omitted. Only one essay deals with the image or interpretation of Louis's reign in the last generation--an excellent survey by Guy Rowlands on Anglo-American historiography.

All the chapters are very good and for the most part distil enormous erudition into a few pages. Nevertheless, in a published volume with a broad title, it is a pity not to have papers at least on postwar French, Italian, or German historiography, and there is nothing at all on Italy or Spain, and yes, given the importance of Boris Porsnev and Aleksandra Lublinskaya in provoking crucial debates on popular revolts and power, why leave out Russia?[7] So, for this reviewer at least, the core of the book is best read as a number of essays that contribute piecemeal to our understanding of how an orthodox view of the reign of Louis XIV emerged in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The vision that almost triumphed--and is still current--is of an arbitrary monarch who for all his mistakes in foreign policy and despotic tendencies nevertheless was a great king who played a key role both in establishing the institutional basis of the modern state and promoting the European diffusion of French classical culture. And yet, parts of that view were contested well before Goubert's *Annales*-style attack in 1966, as several chapters in this volume also remind us.[8] Was Louis an absolute monarch incarnate and nation state builder, or a warmongering religiously intolerant king obsessed with *gloire* who slipped into despotism and ruined a potentially thriving kingdom? As the early chapters here demonstrate, the ambiguity in interpretations is even to be found in the works of Montesquieu, Saint-Simon, and in the reactions of many of Louis's contemporaries, like Robert Challe's memoirs, be they French subjects and courtiers, Huguenot exiles, foreign ambassadors, or foreign opponents and propagandists. The enduring and often stereotypical nature of perceptions of Louis abroad is shown in the chapters on Germany and the Netherlands, where a more negative view of France prevailed. This critical view was subject to nationalist readings that changed over time while remaining broadly critical.

The opinions of Montesquieu, Voltaire, and Saint-Simon about the King are of course well known to most historians of Louis XIV, and one hopes that they are careful about accepting these assessments of Louis the man as definitive. The development of archival research in the mid-nineteenth century with a subsequent accumulation of studies of Louis XIV's reign, has given modern scholars access to materials that these eighteenth-century writers did not have. (But it is true that their personal and ideological assessments of Louis XIV's near contemporaries did

also benefit from some written sources and were developed within a valuable oral anecdotal tradition, as Montesquieu, Voltaire, and Saint-Simon were surrounded by people who had lived through all or part of the reign). Popular histories of Louis naturally draw more heavily on these three contemporaries than academic ones. But the essays on the three giants of the eighteenth century certainly also show the historian today how much attempting to understand Louis XIV was a key concern, and how elusive and troubling a personality he was to truly discern. The problem was that Louis the individual was necessarily always going to be confused with Louis the king and, therefore, held responsible for the achievements and failures of his whole reign.

The papers begin with an essay on the memoirs of Robert Challe, who perhaps illustrates elements of the more popular non-courtier view of the Sun King. Deceived by his advisors, Louis made mistakes and paid insufficient attention to the misery of his realm created by his ambitious and warlike foreign policy (and, from Challe's point of view, he failed to understand the importance of New France). The view is, I suggest, reminiscent of the journals of village *cures*, who saw the king from afar and the catastrophic poverty from their window. But the trope of the king's evil ministers misleading him was widely adopted at all levels of society, and it is to be found in Saint-Simon too. And if this trope preserves the image of a good monarch, it certainly suggests that contemporaries did not share the view of some later nationalist historians, who have glossed over the misery, foreign policy errors, and persecution, for these witnesses saw that all was not well in Louis XIV's France. As the excellent chapter on Montesquieu shows, Louis could be seen not as the quintessential absolute monarch respecting his royal duties and the laws, but as an increasingly arbitrary and despotic ruler undermining the basis of legitimate monarchy and its necessary support, the nobility. In his search for the truth, Saint-Simon, who truly venerated his king, was disappointed and angry that Louis XIV's greatest moment was his fortitude in the face of death rather than a reign respectful of the social order and of his natural counsellors. One aspect of Saint-Simon's critique not discussed here is his depiction of Louis as having emasculated noble power and brought about the rise of the intendants as regional despotic administrators. Such a description would fit so well with the arguments about the rise of the nation state that were put forward by the nineteenth-century historians discussed in this book. Were such claims, along with John Law's famous quotation about France being ruled by thirty intendants, actually at the source of this administrative monarchy thesis? If so, the claim has had a very long after life--and apparently, in another book, Thierry Sarmant would agree, with reservations.<sup>[9]</sup> Or did nineteenth-century historians simply come to that conclusion on the sound basis of their research on institutions? Was Saint-Simon always in their heads, distorting the reality? Voltaire, of course, in his concern to monumentalize the reign in spite of its horrors, ended up reflecting an image wilfully projected by the king in a policy of artistic representation, of preambles to laws, and in propaganda.

After the Revolution and before the July Monarchy (at which point our nineteenth-century papers here begin, with an exposition on Mignet that mentions his methodology, criticized at the time) a certain idea of the reign had developed that was first expressed by Pierre-Edouard Lemontey in his 1818 *Essai sur l'établissement monarchique de Louis XIV*.<sup>[10]</sup> The argument is one we usually today associate with Alexis de Tocqueville, but which was actually not his original contribution: it was a view widely shared by historians in this period of the July Monarchy and the Second Empire. This view is that Louis had overcome provincial elites and aristocratic resistance by creating the centralized administration that would broadly be built upon by the Revolution. Allan Potowsky in his rich essay actually provides yet more evidence that even in the domain of planning Paris, the new state could not easily get its way in the following century.

Four fine chapters explore the views of nineteenth-century French historians from Mignet to Lavissee. For me, they form the core of a possible *problématique*. What is striking is that while there are differences of interpretation between them, all those historians from the July Monarchy to the Third Republic actually accepted the Lemontey post-revolutionary view that Louis played a key role in creating the modern centralized bureaucratic nation state. Where they differ amongst themselves is on what kind of state it was and whose interests it was meant to serve. Stephen Sawyer shows Louis Blanc envisaging a nation state potentially operating in the interests of the people, while Paule Peletier in her chapter on the Second Empire shows exactly how and why the center of gravity of the new national history was displaced from the Revolution to the reign of Louis. It did indeed all begin with Lemontey, but later liberals and often positivist somewhat-socialist Saint-Simonians wanted to use the example of Louis XIV to praise the apparently efficient Colbertian administration but still criticized the excesses of authoritarian rule in order to occult the Revolution, relativized the military glory of Napoleon by remembering that of Louis XI, and stressed the link between the ruler and the nation (pp. 136-7). Louis's excesses could be criticized while his work remained intact. As Peletier writes, "L'historiographie liberale valorise donc le règne de Louis XIV au prix d'une dissociation entre oeuvre administrative et forme du régime" (p 140). What we often regard as Tocqueville's thesis is in fact not different from the perspective the other liberals (and Lemontey). Thus, the thesis is commonplace, but the arguments based on it differed. I have always felt that one of Tocqueville's subtexts was to criticize the regime of Napoleon III, by relating the centralized despotism of Louis XIV to that of Napoleon III, showing that Emperor Louis-Napoleon's claim to be the ruler best suited to manage the centralized administrative inheritance of Napoleon was a path to a Louisquatorizian despotism of which he and his contemporaries strongly disapproved. Interestingly, and unlike today, the issue of the ethos in the nation created by despotism interested all these historians, and they all condemned the impediments to the development of liberty that were an essential part of Louis's regime. On the basis of these papers, the period of the Second Empire appears to me to have been crucial in forming a much longer-lasting orthodoxy of the development of the administrative monarchy that is central to the views of Georges Pagès, Roland Mousnier, and Michel Antoine and that we have been questioning in the last thirty years or so. The emphasis that Second-Empire historians put on the classical achievement in art and on creating an ordered society was also to find an echo with *Action française* and the research into corporatism, which represented social harmony instead of class conflict in the Fascist-influenced 1930s. Thus, for all his hostile and official Republican condemnation of aspects of Louis XIV's reign, Lavissee still builds on the administrative monarchy thesis of Lemontey, Thierry, Clément, Tocqueville, Taine, and their mid-nineteenth-century contemporaries. The core of this collection therefore raises questions about the more recent "Après Louis XIV." Perhaps only the recent *Les Rois absolus 1629-1715* by Hervé Drévilion succeeds in de-centering this debate to offer a non-judgemental all-round view.[11]

The question prompted by these observations, a question implicitly posed by but not really addressed in this collection, is why did twentieth-century French historians of this period not only stick with this state-building thesis but also abandon the critical elements present under the Second Empire and early Third Republic? Why did they downplay the clearly regressive elements in state formation that took place in the later part of the reign? (Mind you, Pagès does say it was all falling apart by 1715).[12] They seemingly ignored historians like Alexandre Thomas's works on Burgundy and on the continued role of the Condé, the estates, and the parlements.[13] They even overlooked Pierre Clément, the editor of the arch administrator Colbert's papers, who said the following: "However conscientious the administrator may have

been, the Controller-General was always of central importance. But the liquidation of the municipal debts proceeded slowly. Begun in 1661, twenty years later it had been successfully completed in only a small number of cases...Inflexible rules and regulations, so many and such constant efforts to bring about results that were so partial, so disputed and so poorly established, prove just how difficult it was to bring about even the most useful of reforms, in spite of the despotic nature of the government. It is tempting to conclude that, during the old-regime monarchy, and even during that most brilliant and most autocratic period of the reign of Louis XIV, centralization was somehow nominal and fictitious. With the exception of certain specific cases, for example, when it was a matter of bringing some rebels to heel, the mechanism existed but worked badly: the command was passed down the hierarchy, but was most frequently carried out tardily and partially. Even the most energetic ministers failed when confronted with the inertia of the *pays d'états*, of the communities and sometimes even of the governors or of the intendants, all of whom were assisted on the one hand by family connections or by important personages, and on the other by the distances made ten times longer by the poor roads and the unbelievable sloth of communications.”[14] That from the editor of eight volumes of the Colbert papers! There is so much administrative correspondence in the Depping and Boislisle collections that undermines the administrative monarchy thesis, that one has to conclude that possible counter arguments were willfully ignored or simply not perceived in the age of the nation state. Even Louis began his memoirs by saying that “le desordre règnoit partout,” and was it not the same in 1715, over fifty years later?

Part of the answer lies in too much reliance on Saint-Simon’s denunciation of the power of the intendants in the provinces and on his claims that the local nobility was dispossessed of power while the higher nobility had been replaced in counsel by bourgeois ministers. But a key element of the answer lies not just in the *parti pris* of historians or observers, but also in the methodology used by historians. This appears to be a blind spot for the several literary scholars represented in this volume, as none of them mentions methods. Although we have a lot on the assessments or judgments of historians concerning the reign, there is only one essay in this set of studies that touches on how the afterlife of Louis and his reign was constructed in the last three hundred years through a certain kind of historical methodology. Nevertheless, it strikes me that all these nineteenth-century historians in the orthodox tradition set a high premium on memoirs, legal documents, and institutional records. There would seem to be merit in this, except for the fact that reliance on these kinds of sources led to the virtual exclusion of whole areas of state or societal practice that substituted for, aided and abetted, or bypassed and subverted institutional and administrative structures. It was the methodology of legal and institutional history as well as a nationalist bias obsessed with state building that ensured the survival of the orthodox interpretation until almost today. This same methodology was used by Pagès, Mousnier, and Antoine and was criticized in a little known but brilliantly wide-ranging article by Jaime Vicens Vives in 1960. Seductively entitled “On the Administrative Structure of the State in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries,” it took issue profoundly with the use of administrative and legal documents such as correspondence, preambles, or Loyseau’s lawyerly attempts to tie down a much more fluid reality, to characterize a reality that was in fact very far from static, not so easily changed by a mere law, and so much more tumultuous.[14] It seems that a full critique of the old view could not take place, even in Anglo-American historiography, interestingly discussed here by Guy Rowlands, until the informal channels of power and influence were recognized as important. Such elements are not easily studied in the fashion of French masters and doctoral theses seeking to add another positivist brick to the wall of French history, because patronage, clientage, and the court do not have clear institutional archives on which students might work.

What spurred British historians to take a more critical look at the nature of the reign of Louis XIV was that the administrative nation state argument on France was paralleled by Elton's Tudor revolution in government thesis on England.[15] The London Institute of Historical Research Early Modern Seminars, in which David Starkey and Roger Mettam played an important role, and where John Rule *et al* spoke, brought together Helmut Konigsberger, K. W. Swart, and Ragnhild Hatton, and this meeting of minds (it seems to me, and I was there) was the methodological force behind the critiques that Rowland traces in a magisterial paper that historicizes them mostly on the basis of their publications. And the British (but also European) reassessment of the royal court and the higher aristocracy played a vital role in leading to a new interpretation.[16]

The erudite papers in this volume thus lead us towards the wider debate on the interpretations of Louis and his reign over the following three centuries. It is a story the first pages of which were written by Louis and his contemporaries. But by the nineteenth century, in post-revolutionary France, a certain set of views emerged that were naturally largely negative about absolute monarchy and Louis himself. So too were many foreign perspectives, as we see in Germany and the Netherlands in the four papers here, but for different reasons. I think that we have to wait until the 1930s, it seems, for the nationalist Right in France (and abroad in Nazi Germany as we see in Christian Kühner's essay), to successfully stress the idea of Louis and his reign as not only building the centralized nation state but also, *à la* Voltaire, developing *la gloire de la France*. His often-chaotic despotic governance is still today occulted in histories that focus on the rise of the nation state and the royal patronage of culture. The answer to exactly why that is so must await another conference and volume, perhaps.

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#### NOTES

[1] Pieter Johannes Wilhelmus Van Malssen, *Louis XIV d'après les pamphlets répandus en Hollande* (Amsterdam: Universiteit van Amsterdam, 1936).

[2] Peter R. Campbell, *Louis XIV 1661-1715* (London: Longman, 1993).

[3] The most notable of such studies is J.-M. Apostolides, *Le Roi-machine: Spectacle et politique au temps de Louis XIV* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1981); then the fine studies by Yves Bottineau, *Versailles, Miroir des princes* (Paris: Arthaud, 1989); Peter Burke, *The fabrication of Louis XIV* (London and New York: Yale, 1992); N. Ferrier-Caverivière, *L'image de Louis XIV dans la littérature française de 1660 à 1715* (Paris: P.U.F., 1981); and Gérard Sabatier, *Versailles ou la figure du roi* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1999).

[4] François Bluche, *Louis XIV* (Paris: Fayard, 1986).

[5] Alexandre Maral writes of three Louis XIV exhibitions since 1715, so it would be remiss of me not to point to the apparently major exhibition and excellent catalogue full of illustrations and academic essays that accompanied the exhibition "Louis XIV and the New World" in 1984: *The Sun King, Louis XIV and his world, Louisiana state Museum exhibition catalogue* (New Orleans, 1984).

[6] W. F. Church, *Louis XIV in Historical Thought* (New York: Norton, 1976).

[7] Boris Porsnev, *Les Soulevements populaires en France de 1623 à 1648*, translated by Mme Ranieta et Robert Mandrou (Paris: S.E.V.P.E.N., 1963); Aleksandra Lublinskaya, *French Absolutism: The Crucial Phase 1620-1629*, translated by Brian Pearce, forward by John Elliott (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968).

[8] Pierre Goubert, *Louis XIV et vingt millions de français* (Paris: Fayard, 1966).

[9] Thierry Sarmant and Mathieu Stoll, *Regner et gouverner: Louis XIV et ses ministres* (Paris: Perrin, 2010).

[10] Pierre-Edouard Lemontey, *Essai sur l'établissement monarchique de Louis XIV* (Paris: Deterville, 1818).

[11] Hervé Drévilion, *Les Rois absolus 1629-1715* (Paris: Belin, 2011).

[12] Georges Pagès, *La monarchie d'ancien régime en France de Henri IV à Louis XIV* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1946), p. 215: "A la fin du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle,—pour emprunter à Lavisse qu'il a lui-même emprunté à Lemontey,—les colonnes sont creuses sur lesquelles la royauté s'appuie sont des colonnes creuses."

[13] Alexandre Thomas, *Une Province sous Louis XIV, Situation politique et administrative de la Bourgogne de 1661 à 1715* (Paris: Joubert, 1844). A hundred and twenty years later, Eugene L. Asher's *The resistance to the maritime classes: the survival of feudalism in the France of Colbert* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1960) was another hugely significant case study that could have changed the field but did not: it completely undermined the received wisdom.

[14] Pierre Clément, *Lettres, instructions et mémoires de Colbert* (Paris: Imprimerie impériale, 1861-82), vol. IV, pp. xxxi-xxxii.

[15] J. Vicens Vives, "The administrative structure of the state in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries," in Henry J. Cohn ed., *Government in Reformation Europe, 1520-1560* (London and Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1971), pp. 58-87, esp. p. 61.

[16] G. R. Elton, *The Tudor Revolution in Government. Administrative Changes in the Reign of Henry VIII* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press. 1953).

[17] Peter Campbell and Chantal Grell, "La Cour et les modèles du pouvoir, bilan historiographique," in Marcello Fantoni, ed., *The Court in Europe* (Rome: Bulzoni, 2012), pp. 175-93.

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