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Elizabeth C. Macknight, *Aristocratic Families in Republican France, 1870-1940*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017. xiv + 252 pp. Figures, notes, appendix, list of archival sources, and index. \$30.95 (pb). ISBN 978 1 5261 0680 3.

Review by Carol Harrison, University of South Carolina.

Readers of Proust will enjoy Elizabeth Macknight's insights into the world of the French aristocracy under the Third Republic. Reading *Aristocratic Families in Republican France* is like rummaging through the cupboards of *Remembrance of Things Past*: Macknight shows us the backstairs gossip, wage bills, the dirty laundry, and, especially, the price tags of aristocratic life. Drawing on private, familial archives, Macknight shows us the distant ripples of the Night of August 4, 1789 as she examines strategies for noble survival under a republic committed to the revolutionary principle of equality. Women and men both conducted this "conservative rearguard action against the regime" (p. 3) that sought to maintain lineage as a meaningful category in French society and politics.

The first three chapters deal with aristocratic capital and its transfer: titles, property, inheritance, and marriage. Old Regime attitudes toward property—especially land—persisted among noble families, even as republican taxation made them increasingly difficult to sustain. Although President MacMahon ended the conferral of titles in 1875, nobility was "not simply a matter of antiquarian interest" (p. 21). Rather, verifying nobility occupied government ministers, professional genealogists, and of course noble families and their lawyers. Noble property was similarly complex and it, too, was a legal anomaly in the Third Republic. The *majorat*—an arrangement that allowed noble families to avoid the consequences of partible inheritance and to concentrate resources in the hands of a single heir—was in direct conflict with republican egalitarianism. Government buyback efforts involved negotiations between noble families and government bureaucracies that produced files full of birth certificates and family trees. Macknight shows us the gears of these encounters grinding well into the 1940s. Aristocratic families often sought solutions to modern financial woes in the most traditional of institutional strategies—marriage—and Macknight explores both the persistent endogamy of France's nobles as well as the American "dollar princesses" like Anna Gould or Winaretta Singer who occasionally rescued the fortunes of aristocratic families. Disdain for exogamous matches, especially those that involved religious difference, reveals the extent to which "purity of blood" remained a goal for aristocratic dynasties (p. 48).

Macknight then turns to noble social and cultural capital with chapters on domestic service and on familial roles. Aristocratic households, though reduced in size from earlier generations,

remained large, usually twenty to thirty servants. The old family retainer was not merely a fictional character as living-in remained the rule and there was very little turnover in noble service. Servants and employers largely recognized and accepted their respective parts well into the twentieth century. Parenthood was similarly a role that generated a good deal of consensus in the cases that Macknight explores. Fathers took seriously their responsibility for the political education of their children. They inculcated their sons and daughters with a sense of their obligations: to royal or imperial dynasties, to the Catholic Church, and to their own lineage. Often, and conveniently for the historian, fathers imparted these lessons in correspondences that they diligently maintained with their children. Noble mothers resisted many of the era's norms of family life: their birth rates remained higher than those of the rest of the population, and wet-nursing persisted in aristocratic families. Modern political strategies did, however, reach noblewomen, who mobilized in associations such as the *Ligue des Femmes Françaises* and the *Ligue Patriotes des Françaises* that combated republican anticlericalism. A chapter on aristocratic childhoods returns to the family's entourage, because children entailed governesses and tutors, dancing lessons and musical instruction. Male and female religious were often part of the family circle: their role was to prepare children for first communion and for adult lives as defenders of Catholic doctrine. A final chapter on "space and memory" explores rituals surrounding death and the "permanent rhetoric of nostalgia" that accompanies the aristocracy (p. 198).

The resistance to *embourgeoisement* is the most sustained theme of this book; there was, Macknight convincingly argues, very little "trickle-up effect" of bourgeois culture. Noble investment strategies continued to focus on family land, even as other ventures promised better returns. Aristocrats carried on arranging marriages for their offspring, paying little more than lip service to the loves and desires of their children. Sizable retinues of both male and female servants lingered in their homes, which they persisted in filling with old furnishings and family heirlooms. The hallmarks of bourgeois society—the love match, the house furnished in a uniform historicist style for the wedding, and the maid of all work—had very little impact among the aristocracy. The nineteenth century may have been the era of the *bourgeois conquérants* of Charles Morazé's classic formulation, but the nobility certainly didn't admit defeat easily.

For all their differences, the significance of family—as an emotional resource as well as a social and economic strategy—was the common ground of noble and bourgeois cultures, and *Aristocratic Families* is a useful addition to recent literature on the persistence of kinship in the modern world. The nobility's attentive maintenance of family ties both vertically across generations and horizontally among cousins is, in its general outlines, very similar to the bourgeois "sibling archipelago" that Christopher Johnson has recently described.<sup>[1]</sup> In the era of the rights-bearing individual, lineage nonetheless remained significant for a variety of purposes across a wide swath of French society. The "cultural hegemony" (p. 108) that Macknight identifies with the French aristocracy perhaps lay not so much with any particular economic or social strategy but rather in noble participation in the broader exercise of cultivating family loyalty and affection.

## NOTES

[1] Christopher H. Johnson, *Becoming Bourgeois: Love, Kinship, and Power in Provincial France, 1670-1880* (Cornell University Press, 2015).

Carol E. Harrison  
University of South Carolina  
[ceharris@mailbox.sc.edu](mailto:ceharris@mailbox.sc.edu)

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