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Olivier Poncet, *Mazarin l'Italien*. Paris: Tallandier, 2018. 288 pp. Chronology, biographical glossary, bibliographic essay, indices, color plates. 21€ (pb) ISBN 979-10-210-3105-0

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Jules Mazarin was the principle figure in French politics during the tumultuous regency and early reign of Louis XIV, and his legacy has reflected the complexities, and often the prejudices, of those years. Across the nearly two decades of his administration (1642-1661) he was by turns vilified by rivals and opponents or lauded by allies in the many arenas in which he intervened. By competing for and often winning contests for raw political power, dynastic advantage, ecclesiastical eminence, financial largesse, cultural patronage, and more, the Cardinal-Minister galled a wide range of rivals. These were necessarily powerful figures, capable of shaping the narrative around Mazarin's motives, methods, and ministry as a whole for years to come. Influential French authors like Retz, Guise, Saint-Simon, or Cyrano de Bergerac, to say nothing of anonymous frondeur pamphleteers and rumormongers, lambasted the Cardinal throughout his career. Even posthumously, a steady trickle of memoirs relitigated his choices, sometimes whole centuries after the fact.^[1] All the while, Mazarin's defenders wrote mainly in Italian and contemporaneously, or in a concentrated burst soon after the Cardinal's death, such that their accounts did little to inform the dominant historical view. The anti-Mazarin narrative was slightly moderated, but ultimately solidified in Voltaire's *Siècle de Louis XIV*, where the Cardinal appeared as a clever, but ambitious usurper of the young Sun King's splendor and authority. Michelet's *Histoire de France*, however, revived and reinforced the black legend in the heyday of nineteenth-century nationalism, durably stamping Mazarin as a "faquin," whose admixture of Caesarism and "poltronnerie" were as Italian as the opera he allegedly imported to France. He was, in a memorable phrase, the "fourbe Italien" who plunged France into the abyss of the Fronde, saved only by the humble genius of Turenne.^[2] Less adamant versions of that characterization continued down to the twentieth century. From the time of Richelieu to recent historiography, Mazarin's Italian origins have defined his memory, in more or less explicit terms.

In response, Olivier Poncet's *Mazarin l'Italien* directly counters this narrative, but undertakes more than a simple reclamation project. Poncet takes the Cardinal's origins and ongoing connections to Italy as an analytical framework, which he argues can unify the disparate pursuits of his long career in France into a more coherent enterprise. The distinction between this and what we might call the "politique Italienne" thesis may at times be subtle, but crucial. For Mazarin's contemporaries, as well as nationalists like Michelet and those he influenced, Italy had indelibly marked Mazarin's character, which in turn determined his choices. For

Poncet, Mazarin's upbringing and early experiences provided an Italian perspective that persisted upon his arrival to French politics, while the transalpine links he forged and studiously maintained incentivized and facilitated a suite of policies centered on the southern peninsula. To be sure, the line between geographical or cultural determinism on the one hand, and recognition of contingency or the subjectivities of actors on the other can at times be thin (and Poncet occasionally dangles a toe over it). Nevertheless, *Mazarin l'Italien* offers a necessary, explicit corrective to the entrenched influence of two centuries of historiography colored by implicit stereotypes, or pernicious xenophobia, without overcompensating into apologetics. More than just correcting errors, though, acknowledging the centrality of Italy in Mazarin's approach and affinities both lends structure to his career, and to some extent rehabilitates Italy's vitality and importance in *Seicento* European politics and diplomacy.

The four chapters that comprise the body of *Mazarin l'Italien* originated as lectures delivered at the École Française de Rome in 2016-17. Poncet's expertise regarding French institutions and France's papal and Italian relations, however, draws on nearly two decades of research, while his experience in historical biography dates to his 1998 *thèse* on Pomponne de Bellièvre, written at the Sorbonne under Yves-Marie Bercé.[3] In the present work, Poncet takes a roughly chronological approach. Chapter one addresses Mazarin's early career and especially the prominence of Rome in his formation, while chapters two, three, and four focus respectively on his reception in France, then his ambitions and policy around Italy, before closing on his attitudes and strategies toward faith, the Church, and his personal finances. The introductory and concluding chapters frame the broader issues well, while a useful chronology of Mazarin's career and extensive biographical glossary provide non-expert readers with material for coming up to speed with the tortuous events of his life. A bibliographic essay, "La cuisine de l'historien," takes the place of a formal works cited section, although the body of the text includes no citations beyond parenthetical attributions for most block quotes. These choices on presentation, in support of a text born from a series of public lectures, amount to a work that will appear unintimidating for a popular francophone audience, but may sometimes frustrate scholars.

Poncet's most valuable contributions concern Mazarin's direct interactions with Italy. His intimate knowledge of Roman and curial personalities and politics enriches his assessment of these forces in the early years of Mazarin's career. Moreover, Poncet clearly demonstrates the centrality of the Cardinal-Minister's longstanding Italian ties for his ambitions once installed in France. The author's apparent familiarity with papal and ecclesiastical archives (though the lack of detailed citations is especially notable here), Italian visual arts, and the architecture and built environment of Rome add color and depth, especially in the first chapter. Likewise, his long experience with French administration at home and ambitions in Italy, alongside familiarity with diplomatic relations between French and Italian officials, provide unique perspectives in the second and third chapters. On this point, the linguistic analysis of Mazarin's correspondence (pp. 81-83) as evidence of his assimilation, or putative imposition of a "gouvernement Italien" sheds useful light on slippery questions. On the same foundations, the analysis of the Cardinal-Minister's approach to Italian and Western Mediterranean policy draws the reader's attention southward, against the sometimes teleological tendency to see French strategic priorities track inevitably northward across the seventeenth century. In the third chapter especially, Poncet undertakes an admirably evenhanded evaluation of his protagonist's often-tenuous pursuits in his homeland. The final chapter, on Mazarin's wealth and faith, capably synthesizes in turn dense financial data, sticky theological and sectarian

concerns, and questions of the Cardinal's personal beliefs. In the final analysis, the success Poncet achieves in presenting a realistic, nuanced, and sensitively contextualized portrait of Mazarin offers real value to expert and amateur historians alike.

Some sacrifices seem to have been made for the sake of appealing more to the popular audience, however. Most strikingly, the lack of notes and barebones citations do significantly limit the work's value for scholarship, and in some instances work to obscure interpretive issues. Though the contributions of other scholars are acknowledged, following up on their arguments would be a challenge in many cases. Expanding on archival findings would be still more difficult in light of the inconsistent attribution, particularly given the sheer volume of Mazarin's correspondence, and of the frondeur pamphlets that bear his name. Both of these form the basis for major portions of Poncet's work. Yet, paradoxically (if intended for a popular audience), Poncet is careful to include the original language of quotations in Italian, Spanish, and Latin, even when the citation of their source is murky.

Beyond references, however, some issues of argumentation may raise flags among specialists of the era. The narrative and analysis seem light on some major events: Westphalia and the Pyrenees are discussed repeatedly, but never at length or in depth. Given the indirect but significant bearing of the latter negotiations on Italian policy, this seems surprising. More central to Poncet's project, discussion of Mazarin's 1639 arrival in France and meteoric rise within Richelieu's circle is notable for its brevity, occupying a single sentence expressing marvel at the rapidity of the soon-to-be Cardinal's ascent (p. 39). On the topic of Mazarin's establishment in France, additionally, Poncet's language in some ways betrays the difficulty of excising a tendency he explicitly argues against: in the three passages directly addressing Mazarin's relationship with Richelieu, the verb used is invariably *séduire* (pp. 15, 37, 76). This exact term was a constant refrain in Mazarinades and attacks from courtly rivals, which fixated on his sly, effeminate, "Italian" manner. In a similar way, the discussion of Mazarin's "sensibilité italienne à la mer" (pp. 105-6) verges into stereotype, and relies for evidence on the Cardinal's use of the ubiquitous "ship of state" metaphor in his correspondence with Queen Anne. Similar cases of suboptimal terminology arise in more analytical cases, as well. Poncet includes references to nation-states (p. 49), Mazarin's national identity, (p. 57) and public opinion (p. 137), though scholars working on these issues would surely pose questions about their unqualified use in the context of the seventeenth century.

Though the issues above may furrow the brows of historians hoping for exacting scholarly argumentation on Jules Mazarin's Italian legacy, diplomacy, or relationships, this remains a work of real value for scholarly and popular audiences alike. For the former group, the synthesis and reframed presentation of the Cardinal's transalpine links can serve as a reminder and corrective on the enduring legacy of historical Italophobia, as well as a primer on the specialized research conducted into such questions in recent decades.[4] For historically-informed popular readers, the book will offer a view far different from the familiar image of a Machiavellian schemer, though at times the assumptions of background knowledge may cause frustration. Either audience will quickly appreciate Poncet's successes, though both may simultaneously wish for a work more tailored to one of their particular interests.

NOTES

[1] Saint-Simon's *Mémoires* did not appear in print until 1856.

[2] Voltaire, *Siècle de Louis XIV* (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1966); Jules Michelet, *Histoire de France* (Paris: A. Lacroix, 1877), iv: 207-8, *passim*.

[3] Olivier Poncet. *Pomponne de Bellièvre (1529-1607) : un homme d'état au temps des Guerres de Religion*. Paris: École des Chartes, 1998.

[4] In particular, Poncet capably digests and utilizes the findings of such weighty tomes as Anna Blum, *La diplomatie de la France en Italie du Nord au temps de Richelieu et Mazarin*. Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2015; the wide-ranging researches in Jean Serroy, *La France et l'Italie au temps de Mazarin: 15e colloque du C.M.R. 17*. Grenoble: Presses Universitaires, 1986; and Jean-François Dubost, *La France Italienne : XVIe-XVIIe siècle*. Paris: Aubier, 1997.

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