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Jean-François Labourdette, *La Maison de La Trémoille au XVIIIe siècle*. Bibliothèque d'histoire moderne et contemporaine 66. Paris: Honoré Champion, 2021. 518 pp. Notes and bibliography. 68€ (pb). ISBN 9782745356307; 68€ (pdf). ISBN 9782745356307.

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In 1668 the French genealogist, Louis de Sainte-Marthe, declared that there was no noble house in the kingdom equal to that of the La Trémoille. His observation derived from the five conditions of grandeur for the aristocracy: virtue, antiquity of origin, service to France through the holding of high office, illustrious marital alliances, and the possession of landed estates. The La Trémoille certainly was renowned as an ancient noble bloodline, traced back to the figure of Pierre de la Trémoille in 1040. Bequests to religious orders and the founding of churches helped establish the family's reputation for Christian piety during the Middle Ages. Military virtues were embodied, for example, by Thibaud de la Trémoille and his three sons who participated in the Seventh Crusade under King Louis IX. The family's geographic origin lay in the province of Poitou where the seigneurie of La Trémoille was located near the town of Montmorillon (in the present-day French department of Vienne). Over the centuries male members were appointed to important positions of leadership and responsibility in the army, at the royal court, and in the Catholic Church. The most lucrative of these offices was the role of *premier gentilhomme de la chambre du Roi* that the La Trémoille secured at the end of the seventeenth century. By that time, there were three marital alliances connecting the La Trémoille family with French royalty, specifically with members of the Bourbon dynasty (the ducs de Bourbon-Montpensier, the princes de Condé, and the ducs d'Anjou). During the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, the La Trémoille family also forged marital alliances with two imperial houses, the Nassau-Orange and the Hesse-Cassel, and were thereby drawn into the orbit of powerful Protestant sovereigns across continental Europe. All of these prestigious royal and imperial links signified an expansion of the La Trémoille family's networking reach that extended beyond the borders of France and into the Low Countries, Spain, Germany, Italy, and Cyprus. Possession of landed estates (the fifth condition of grandeur for the aristocracy) was principally demonstrated by the La Trémoille through ownership of seigneuries and châteaux spread across the western French provinces of Poitou, Saintonge, Brittany, Maine, and Anjou.

Jean-François Labourdette's book is about what happens when aristocratic grandeur starts to fragment. It is a thoroughly researched study of one family grappling with its own internal vulnerabilities as well as with changing external circumstances from about 1700 to the end of the eighteenth century. During this one-hundred-year period, there were numerous signs of the continued enjoyment of capital built up by earlier generations, but a series of problems had the

cumulative impact of weakening the La Trémoille family's grasp on material wealth, political influence, and social prestige. There was no single moment of catastrophic implosion, either in 1789 or in any other year, but rather a pattern of slow erosion that undermined the stature of the La Trémoille from a high point of magnificence around the 1660s.

The book is structured into five parts that progressively introduce the reader first to various members of the house of La Trémoille, then to the family's landed estates, then to its principal agents of administration, then to its sources of income (especially the exploitation of forests), and finally to its involvement in matters of seigneurial justice and charitable aid to the poor. Underpinning the analysis in each of these thematic areas is the author's deep engagement with a wide range of manuscript sources produced by the La Trémoille as well as by their key staff, notaries, judicial officers, and social acquaintances. Labourdette has undertaken research in the collections of the Archives nationales de France, the Archives du Ministère de la Guerre, the Bibliothèque nationale de France, and four Archives départementales. To supplement these public and private archival records, he also draws upon printed primary sources such as memoirs and published correspondence. There is an extensive bibliography that will delight those readers keen to follow up on the many topics covered in relation to noble identity and lifestyle.

One of the archival *fonds* that Labourdette has used in research deserves special mention. The *chartrier de Thouars*, which contains documentation of the genealogy and property holdings of the La Trémoille as well as many letters, was the first private archive to be classified in what became the series AP (*archives privées*) conserved at the Archives nationales de France. From 1563 the landed estate of Thouars in Poitou (the present-day French department of Deux-Sèvres) was made into a dukedom by King Charles IX. Henri de la Trémoille, the third duc de Thouars (1599-1614), resided there with his wife, Marie de La Tour d'Auvergne, in the chateau that this couple ordered to be built to their specifications. In 1934 the *chartrier de Thouars* was donated to the French state by the last duchesse de la Trémoille. Archivist Charles Samaran completed the classification and prepared the inventory for this *fonds* (1 AP).

Part one (chapters one through five) serves as a kind of group portrait of the house of La Trémoille encompassing many different generations. In chapter one, Labourdette details the family's conquest of preeminence using examples from the fourteenth to the seventeenth centuries to illustrate the military and political activities of aristocratic men as governors, knights, and peers. Chapter two concerns the figure of Charles-Armand-René de la Trémoille (1708-1741) who, by inheriting the office of *premier gentilhomme de la chambre*, became a close companion of the young King Louis XV. Sprinkled with royal favors and advantages during adolescence, this aristocrat then caught the disease of smallpox and died at the age of thirty-three. In chapter three, it is Charles-Armand-René's wife, Marie-Victoire-Hortense de la Tour d'Auvergne (1704-1789), who occupies center stage as the salvation of the La Trémoille family. A superb administrator and resolute Jansenist, she efficiently shed the causes of superfluous expense that had been set up by her husband, such as payment of rent for rarely inhabited residences, and sold off some property to help restore liquidity in the family's fortune. All the while this pious widow rigorously maintained her reputation for charitable giving to the poor and allocated generous pensions to her household servants and to members of the clergy upon their retirement.

Chapter four is about Marie-Victoire-Hortense's son, Jean-Bretagne-Charles-Godefroy de la Trémoille (1737-1792), who became a symbol of disappointment and disgrace. After mediocre

performance in his military career, this young aristocrat suffered the humiliation of being overlooked for the honorable distinction of the Ordre du Saint-Esprit that his mother had solicited on his behalf. Worse, he was denied the status of *prince étranger* in 1781 after Chérin examined and rejected the La Trémoille dossier of genealogical justifications. In his private life, Jean-Bretagne-Charles-Godefroy was constantly under the maternal thumb of Marie-Victoire-Hortense. It was she who set up her son's first marriage to Marie-Jeanne-Geneviève de Durfort de Lorges, from which there were no children. Following the death of this wife in December 1762, motherly intervention rapidly brought about a second marriage, so that in June 1763 Jean-Bretagne-Charles-Godefroy wed Marie-Maximilienne, princesse de Salm-Kirbourg, and this couple produced four sons.

The main trouble for Jean-Bretagne-Charles-Godefroy de la Trémoille, however, was not domination by an ambitious mother. It was his addiction to gambling. The most crippling debt he incurred, for which there is archival evidence, was for the sum of 142,000 *livres* in 1768 (the equivalent of 80 per cent of the La Trémoille family's annual revenue). To a large degree, because of Jean-Bretagne-Charles-Godefroy's losses in gambling, dilapidation of financial resources was already underway within the La Trémoille family three decades prior to the French Revolution.

Notwithstanding the prudent efforts by successive intendants and *régisseurs*, the men tasked with day-to-day economic management of the La Trémoille family's properties, it was difficult to reign in expenditure, pay off debts, and generate sufficient revenue to keep the accounts in healthy order. Labourdette's skill in assembling the fiscal documentation and analyzing its significance at a statistical level is apparent throughout the book. There are very successful passages in chapter five, for example, about the costs involved in raising and educating children in the La Trémoille family during the eighteenth century, the prices of wines and fine food consumed at meals, the investments needed for stables full of horses, and the payment of wages and pensions to servants. The reasons for longevity of service among household staff are discussed carefully. Attention is given to both the financial dimension of a servant's relationship with an employer and to more subtle types of benefit from serving aristocrats that only partially compensated for noble exploitation of the people hired to provide labor.

Part two (chapters six through eight) and part three (chapters nine through eleven) provide in-depth treatment of the running of landed estates in which the role of the intendant, a professional trained in law and accounting, was of critical importance. It could be difficult for aristocrats to find a trustworthy and competent man for this job, but the La Trémoille had the luck to employ in succession several intendants who fulfilled their duties with probity between 1719 and 1789. Three men especially became stalwart pillars of administration: La Roze was intendant for ten years, Treuil for sixteen years and Mesnil for twenty-five years. The work of an intendant was diverse and challenging. There was always a precarious juggling act involved in generating income, and thereby satisfying the demands of aristocratic employers, without raising farm rents so high as to lose tenants or cut down too many trees for rapid wood-selling that would ruin the forests. The letters of Mesnil conserved in the *chartrier de Thouars* (1 AP / 691 and 692) convey with eloquence the constant stress and exhaustion he experienced in supervising a budget that was always in deficit. Precisely because Mesnil was such a valuable employee, the La Trémoille repeatedly refused to let him retire, and he did not finally succeed until reaching the age of seventy-seven in June 1789.

Part four (chapters twelve through fourteen) and part five (chapters fifteen through seventeen) deal respectively with land management systems and the practices of seigneurial justice and charitable assistance. Here again, the determined personality of Marie-Victoire-Hortense de la Tour d'Auvergne, widow of Charles-Armand-René de la Trémoille, emerges from the archival records. Labourdette portrays her in action defending a policy of eradicating venality of office. The duchesse's obstinate efforts at dismantling oligarchies met with strong male resistance. She was equally energetic in organizing bequests of money that were used to buy and distribute bread to the rural poor during the 1740s and 1750s. This practice of charity was undertaken in collaboration with town notables and clergy, especially on three of the La Trémoille properties: the comté de Laval, the duché de Thouars, and the baronnie de Vitré.

In 1779 the La Trémoille family, had an annual revenue of 249 539 *livres* and capital of around 8 718 310 *livres*, allowing them to remain in the upper bracket of wealthy landowners of France. A decade later, in July 1789, when the château de Thouars and flourmills on this estate were attacked and pillaged, it was the family's intendants, *régisseurs*, and servants who stood directly in the line of fire. Some members of the household staff were arrested, imprisoned, and executed during the 1790s, hated and punished by the revolutionaries for their perceived loyalty to aristocratic masters. Relatives of Jean-Bretagne-Charles-Godefroy variously fled to England, Russia, and Germany. On returning to France after the Revolution, members of the La Trémoille family picked up fragments of their fortune, but there were by then only three males left to carry on the name and aristocratic titles. On 9 December 1933 the noble bloodline of La Trémoille was extinguished in tragic circumstances as Labourdette explains in the book's epilogue. Twenty-three-year-old Louis-Jean-Marie de la Trémoille was burned alive in the fire that destroyed a castle at Whitechurch, England. The young nobleman's mother, the last duchesse de la Trémoille, died in Paris in 1964.

Labourdette's study of the La Trémoille family is a compelling read that will be welcomed and appreciated by postgraduate students and researchers in early modern French history. It takes an empirically grounded and socio-economic approach. Through patient excavation of very extensive archives, and long reflection upon the characters of the family members as well as of the men and women who surrounded them in eighteenth-century France, Labourdette has achieved an intricate and masterful account of ducal splendor and follies.

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