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Bernard Barbiche, *Le Roi et L'État. Regards sur quelques institutions de la France moderne (XVIe-XVIIIe siècle)*. Paris: École des Chartes, 2021. 388 pp. Notes and index. €50.00 (pb). ISBN 9-78-2357231658.

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In the course of a long and productive career, Bernard Barbiche has established a deserved reputation as one of the leading experts on the reigns of the later Valois and especially early Bourbon monarchs. This book is not a new study, but instead brings together twenty-five essays, published between 1960 and 2015, spanning the early modern period more broadly and delving into many often-neglected aspects of the French state and its institutions. The essays in the collection are grouped under two broad headings. The first, “Des Valois aux Bourbons,” consists of nine papers, focusing on a variety of themes, including contemporary understandings of the terms *conseil du roi* or *conseils souverains*, the titular status of royal mistresses, and the debates around the right of the pope to excommunicate the king of France. The second section, entitled “Henri et Sully,” is composed of a further fourteen essays touching on aspects of government, finance, or diplomacy under the first Bourbon monarch, drawing upon Barbiche’s deep knowledge of the period and in particular of the career of the *Surintendant des finances*. Individually the essays are not always remarkable, and some are quite short or narrowly focused papers rather than articles that were written for workshops or symposia and subsequently published as part of conference proceedings in not always easily accessible places. Taken together, however, the various contributions reveal a deep understanding of the monarchical state as well as offering an insight into the mind and methodology of one of the finest exponents of the scholarly tradition represented by the *École des Chartes*. Like his fellow luminaries of that school, Barbiche combines a forensic knowledge of the archive with the craft and professionalism of the historian. His work is not conventional political history, nor is it unduly concerned with the rituals or culture of state power. Instead, it concentrates upon the workings of monarchical government and the projection of authority through a close reading of legal and other texts with a constant sensitivity to the document both as a literary source and a physical object. To cite one example, Barbiche is attentive to the wax seals that authenticated royal edicts and declarations. Green, for example, was the mark of the sovereign signifying their perpetual nature, whereas red indicated a personal authority as would be the case for a regent. When, on one occasion, the ravages of time had made identification impossible for the naked eye, Barbiche sought scientific tests to determine the correct color. In many ways, his work is an example of the archival turn *avant l’heure*, and it provides real insight into the culture of early modern institutions and of those who labored in them.

If we turn to the collection of essays housed under the title “Valois to Bourbon,” the precision of Barbiche’s scholarship is immediately apparent. Most historians of the Bourbons will be familiar with the conciliar structure and of the names and respective competences of, for example, the *Conseil d’en Haut*, *Conseil des Dépêches*, or *Conseil Privé*. Yet that knowledge is based, in large measure, upon the expertise of another doyen of the *École des Chartes*, Michel Antoine. As Barbiche demonstrates, the confidence with which modern historians feel able to navigate around the institutional structures of the monarchy was not shared by even the most educated or well-informed subjects of the Bourbon kings. Although they had access to a range of seemingly authoritative dictionaries or guides, most were, in fact, either out of date or, with the notable exception of Diderot’s *Encyclopédie*, inaccurate. In some ways, contemporary confusion about the precise nomenclature of the king’s councils was unlikely to have serious ramifications. However, in a related essay, “Conseils souverains ou conseils supérieurs? Un enjeu politique” he addresses an issue that was undoubtedly a political matter of real importance. Whether or not Louis XIV curbed the powers of the *parlements* remains a source of contention, but there is no doubt that his insistence on the use of the term *cours* or *conseils supérieurs* rather than *souverains* struck a blow at *parlementaire* self-esteem. Yet, as was so often the case, seemingly decisive royal victories were more telling in theory than in practice. As Barbiche reveals, when in correspondence with the royal council, the *parlements* swallowed their pride and described themselves as *conseils supérieurs*. In their exchanges with the lower courts of their jurisdictions, lawyers, or litigants, however, they reverted to the superior tone, styling themselves *cours souveraines*, a practice that offers another subtle example of the limits of absolutism.

Barbiche brings a similar precision to his analysis of titles and offices. For example, his discussion of the emergence and subsequent development of the office of *garde des sceaux* is particularly compelling. As the convention became established that the office of chancellor was *inamovible*, that is to say, short of voluntary resignation, held for life, successive monarchs resorted to the practice of appointing *garde des sceaux* whenever a chancellor fell out of favor. Some thirty-two individuals were appointed between 1515 and 1789, and Barbiche tracks the gradual evolution of what was initially a simple *commission* into a great office of state, examining the powers attached to the office, interactions between chancellors and *gardes des sceaux*, as well as the often-fraught relationship with the *parlements*, which almost invariably defended the prerogatives of the chancellor. The ways in which seemingly well-defined roles could be transformed by circumstance or individual agency is further demonstrated by three papers focusing on the regencies of Catherine de Medicis and that of queen Marie-Thérèse. While regencies are usually associated with periods of royal minorities, they could also be established when an adult king left the kingdom on campaign (1552 and 1672) or, as in the case of Henri III, inherited the throne while resident outside it (1574). As we might expect, a regency caused by the monarch’s absence was very different to that of a minority when Anne of Austria, for Louis XIV, or Philippe duc d’Orleans, in the case of Louis XV, exercised full regal authority. In both 1643 and 1715, attempts by a dying king to organize a regency after his death failed, whereas in the examples studied by Barbiche, the regent’s powers were carefully and effectively proscribed by the king. Not that Catherine de Medicis or Marie-Thérèse were mere figureheads. In the absence of the sovereign, they were extremely active, representing the monarch, holding council, raising troops and taxes, and exercising authority over the *parlements*, provincial governors, and other bodies.

The second half of the book, concentrating on the reign of Henri IV, contains a number of valuable essays touching on aspects of the administrative career of the king’s *surintendant des finances*, Maximilien de Béthune, duc de Sully, and the fiscal administrative and monetary reforms

of the period. One of the measures sponsored by Sully, with significant long-term social and political consequences, was the introduction of the *droit annuel*, commonly known as *la Paulette*. To achieve his aim, the *surintendant* had to overcome the resistance of the chancellor, Pomponne de Bellièvre, who suffered the indignity of losing the seals as a result. The *droit annuel* played an important role in the consolidation of the system of venality and the fortunes of the robe nobility, but this episode also formed part of a wider political crisis which Barbiche compares to the later Day of Dupes (November, 1630), when the enemies of Cardinal Richelieu mistakenly believed that they had succeeded in persuading Louis XIII to dismiss him. Despite the close bonds uniting Sully to his royal master, the *surintendant*, like any powerful favorite, was constantly exposed to the machinations of rival courtiers, and in his own memoirs, he referred to 1605 as a moment when he feared disgrace. Barbiche weighs the evidence for and against the idea that Sully was in genuine peril. That the *surintendant's* great favor was a source of resentment and jealousy at court is beyond doubt. Yet, that was in itself unremarkable, and Sully could count upon the backing of his own aristocratic faction. More importantly, rumors of impending ministerial disgrace were commonplace at the Bourbon court, and ultimately, the *surintendant's* survival depended on the king. In his memoirs, Sully refers to a dramatic public scene in the gardens of Fontainebleau where, he claims, he was only prevented from throwing himself at his master's feet by Henri IV's effusive declaration of his continued affection. While Sully may have embroidered the scene somewhat, this vignette nevertheless illustrates how even a strong ruler was periodically obliged to demonstrate his support for a favorite in order to quell, at least for a time, the cabals and rumors which could so easily destabilize the court. In this respect, 1605 was an example of a phenomenon that saw its most dramatic expression on the Day of Dupes.

In an essay discussing the *lit de justice* held by Henri IV on 21 May 1597, Barbiche touches upon another of the most important political rituals of the early modern period. Summoned, on this occasion, to impose a series of contested financial edicts, it was a ceremony that would be repeated many times before 1789. In many ways, the *lit de justice* was a barometer of the state of relations between the crown and the Parlement of Paris, and that of May 1597 was no exception. It was the only time that Henri IV was obliged to resort to forced registration, and his reign was generally associated with effective management of the Parlement. A second essay, examining *parlementaire* resistance to the creation of the office of *Grand Voyer* for Sully in 1597, helps to explain why. Confronted by persistent opposition to the establishment of the office, the king avoided the temptation of imposing his will at a *lit de justice*, opting instead to make modifications to the original edict in order to secure voluntary registration. Here we have an excellent example of how one essay in this collection raises questions that are subsequently answered in others, and the book is therefore greater than the sum of its parts. While the meticulous and often narrowly focused approach of the *École des Chartes* can at times be frustrating, close reading pays dividends, and there is much here of value for anyone interested in the workings of the monarchical state.

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