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Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *Saint-Simon and the Court of Louis XIV*. With the collaboration of Jean-François Fitou. Translated by Arthur Goldhammer. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2001. x + 432 pp. Photographs, tables, figures, appendixes, notes, bibliography, and index. \$35.00 U.S. (cl). ISBN 0-226-47320-1. Originally published as *Saint-Simon, ou le système de la Cour*, Paris: Arthème Fayard, 1997.

Review by John J. Hurt, University of Delaware.

Although one assumes that Le Roy Ladurie was the senior partner in this interesting study, which centers upon Louis de Rouvroy, duc de Saint-Simon, it is a collaborative effort. According to the preface, Le Roy Ladurie drafted most of the text based on his researches, mainly a close reading of the celebrated memoirs, which run to forty-one volumes in the authoritative Boislisle edition. Fitou, an *agrégé* in history and the deputy prefect of Langon, then edited and revised the draft and completed the footnotes. In a team effort, the authors jointly researched chapter five (“Saint-Simonian Demography and Female Hypergamy”), which Fitou wrote and Le Roy Ladurie revised and emended. They together have brought this project to fruition by working on it at intervals over many years.

The authors regard Saint-Simon as a literary genius, ranking with Shakespeare and Goethe, but they leave esthetic judgments to others. Instead, they examine the ideology of hierarchy which they argue, successfully, lay at the core of Saint-Simon’s memoirs. Moreover, they assess what those memoirs tell us about the “court system,” the anthropology, ethnography, and demography of the mostly upper-class figures who populated Versailles in the late reign of Louis XIV and in the regency of Philippe d’Orléans. Le Roy Ladurie and Fitou open up the aristocratic world of Versailles in new, enlightening ways and help us to see Saint-Simon as a serious thinker, as well as a gifted observer and a stylist of genius, thus rescuing the duke from any lingering tendencies to view him as a liverish crank.

Saint-Simon’s concept of hierarchy, his dominant idea, affected virtually everything he saw and recorded. Indeed, he took hierarchy, inequality, or (as he often put it) gradation, as a universal given, the natural order of things, on display throughout Europe, the world at large, and in heaven itself. In his view, then, thinkers such as Hobbes and Rousseau, with their insistence on equality at the origins of society, would be wrong about its fundamental nature.

Society consisted of almost infinite, subtle but perceptible, subdivisions of rank. Although he allowed for personal merit in assigning rank, the *petit duc*, as he did not mind referring to himself, found nothing so meritorious as the qualities of one’s forebears, consisting of military prowess, landed estates, and illustrious marriages along with titles, offices, and honors conferred by the king. Family histories were more important than current achievements, one’s ancestors more consequential than oneself. Civilization depended upon everyone accepting his and her appropriate rank and deferring to his or her betters.

The memoirist therefore took pleasure in observing how gradations properly expressed themselves in everyday behavior. Whether or not one sat in the presence of the king or a member of his family and

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upon what article of furniture (armchair, chair with a back, plain stool) reaffirmed hierarchical principles, as did the proper use of commas and definite articles in forms of address. The relevance of rank extended to the sacred and dictated what one did or did not do when the king took communion and in rites of royal mourning and whether, or when, one became a knight of the Golden Fleece or of the Order of the Holy Spirit. At the same time, Saint-Simon felt compelled to post himself as a lonely sentinel, ever vigilant to decry offenses against the approved social gradations.

When Louis XIV placed his illegitimate sons, the duc du Maine and the comte de Toulouse, not only a notch above peers such as himself but also in line for the throne, Saint-Simon declared a kind of cultural war and did not relent until the regent rescinded the decisions. He indeed nurtured a virulent hatred of illegitimacy which, along with venereal disease, cowardice, drunkenness, and homosexuality, he regarded as compromising the purity he associated with hierarchy. He also disliked, for whatever reasons, Italy, Spain, and the Low Countries—all of France's continental neighbors except Germany, a beacon of hierarchical purity—together with Poland, Russia and ... tobacco.

In perhaps the most original section of the work, the aforementioned chapter five, the authors examine the demographic characteristics of 2,616 of the some 10,000 individuals whom Saint-Simon mentions by name. This group, primarily French, broken down decade by decade from about 1620, shows how Saint-Simon's memory reflected his hierarchical preconceptions. He showered attention upon men of the peerage or higher, slighting magistrates or upper functionaries, even if ennobled, until the latter obtained some notable position. A prominent lawyer who died young escaped his notice, whereas a peer who met the same fate received a proper send-off. He examined marriages of both nobles and non-nobles because, in his view, they reaffirmed or compromised the hierarchy. The information he provided allows the authors to conclude that most marriages among this elite were endogamous, contracted between partners of virtually the same finely observed social gradation. This tells us that Saint-Simon hardly stood alone in his emphasis upon the importance of rank. Patriarchs of the great nobility, for example, would never allow their daughters to marry into a parliamentary family.

As the authors follow Saint-Simon into the regency, which occupies about one fourth of his memoirs, they shift their attention from a social analysis of the Versailles court to a largely political analysis of the government of Philippe d'Orléans. This involves them in the "positivist" history that they had originally eschewed, but their two regency chapters hold considerable interest nonetheless. Siding firmly with current favorable revisionism on Orléans, whom they see as heading a successful center-left government, they praise the regent for the skill with which he picked his way through the political minefield he inherited in 1715 and give him very high marks for backing the modernizing economic efforts of John Law and the diplomatic masterstroke of the abbé Dubois in aligning France with England and Holland. These chapters, drawing upon a scholarly lifetime of reflection and inspiration, merit more than one reading.[1]

Saint-Simon helps the authors in this discussion because, in addition to enjoying the friendship of Philippe, he was a privileged eyewitness to the inner workings of the regency. Regency scholars have always had recourse to him, whether they liked him or not. Le Roy Ladurie and Fitou exploit the little duke in a new way, however. Using the information he provided, they describe and analyze the ebb and flow of elite groups and "cabals" with whom Philippe had to contend, thus showing how elements of the duke's hierarchical society aligned themselves with regard to Law, Dubois, and other issues.

The authors had already enumerated and analyzed the cabals (perhaps too strong a word) of the late reign of the Sun King in chapter four.[2] Two of these, that of Monseigneur, the son of Louis XIV, and the reformist cabal of the duc de Bourgogne, his grandson, fell apart when their leaders died before the king did. The most powerful cabal, organized by Madame de Maintenon, the late king's second wife, which notably included Maine and Toulouse, survived long enough to oblige the regent to appease some of its adherents, drive wedges between its constituencies, and humiliate and punish the remaining

stalwarts. To achieve his goals, Philippe necessarily formed his own faction of upper-ranking hierarchs, led by Dubois, the future cardinal and prime minister. The authors skillfully identify the members of these groups, supply relevant biographical information, and explain how individuals interacted with each other. They thus personalize the regency administration to a degree never before attained.

This book is a formidable piece of historical scholarship, throwing welcome light upon the late reign of Louis XIV and the ensuing regency.[3] Although it says little about Saint-Simon's view of the French political system, a subject already treated by Brancourt,[4] it makes the thought of Saint-Simon, and the content of his memoirs, far more understandable than before. In short, this study leaves a reviewer with little about which to complain, and nothing very important. It does appear to suffer a bit from having been worked at intermittently. Some chapters, especially chapter two ("The Sacred and the Profane"), do not cohere as well as they might, and others suffer from repetition. We are told so often how Dubois longed for his cardinal's hat (pp. 310-320) that it comes as a relief when he finally gets it, except that we get more than one version of his triumph. Similarly, the administration of John Law, once evaluated in chapter seven (pp. 292-96), gets much the same appraisal in chapter eight (pp. 302-05).

From time to time, moreover, Le Roy Ladurie and Fitou seemingly contradict themselves in their various assessments. They regard Saint-Simon's observations as "excellent" (p. 8), while also faulting him "seeing things through the wrong end of the telescope" (p. 322). His sympathy for Spain "never wavered" (p. 13), but he also experienced general "disdain" for that country and its society (p. 113). He is a man of at least occasional "genius" (pp. 325, 332), who is also occasionally stupid (p. 286). Of course, all these comments may be true, if in different ways, but it would be a good idea to synthesize the overall view of a complex writer. Anyway, John Law, similarly a man of "genius" (pp. 292, 305) and a brilliant visionary (p. 280), was, however, "never more than a master technician" (p. 310). One can find such lapses in many fine studies; one more editorial revision would have tidied these up.

The Goldhammer translation, although smooth and readable, is not without its occasional miscues, most of them too trivial to publicize. However, it is wrong to say, and the authors did not say this in the French, that Chancellor d'Aguesseau was "replaced as chancellor" (p. 269) when the regent disgraced him in 1718 and made d'Argenson keeper of the seals. Chancellors, of course, held office for life. Incidentally, Voysin was chancellor not keeper of the seals (p. 281) (correctly identified on p. 283). It is also not true that the regent restored to the *parlements* the right to remonstrate against new legislation (pp. 272, 299), which Louis XIV had not in fact taken away; but here the French is a bit vague. These mistakes, the trivial along with the substantive, do not otherwise mar the usefulness of this translation, which on the whole merits our respect. Indeed, the University of Chicago Press is to be commended for publishing this fine study in English, including all the learned annotations in the bibliography. But would it seem too ungrateful to wish that the illustrations, as in the French original, had appeared in color?

## NOTES

[1] Le Roy Ladurie had already provided a briefer, but similar, appraisal of the Regency in *The Ancien Régime. A History of France, 1610-1774* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 279-301; originally published as *L'Ancien Régime, 1610-1770* (Paris: Hachette, 1991).

[2] An earlier version of this chapter appeared as "Versailles Observed: The Court of Louis XIV in 1709," in *The Mind and Method of the Historian*, trans. Siân Reynolds and Ben Reynolds (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981).

[3] For comparable studies, see Jean-Pierre Labatut, *Les ducs et pairs de France au xvii siècle* (Paris:

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Presses universitaires de France, 1972); Jean-François Solnon, *La Cour de France* (Paris: Fayard, 1987); and William Ritchey Newton, *L'espace du roi. La Cour de France au château de Versailles, 1682-1789* (Paris: Fayard, 2000).

[4] Jean-Pierre Brancourt, *Le duc de Saint-Simon et la monarchie* (Paris: Éditions Cujas, 1971).

John J. Hurt  
University of Delaware  
hurt@udel.edu

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