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Donna Bohanan, *Crown and Nobility in Early Modern France*. Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave, 2001. x+194 pp. Notes and index. \$65.00 U.S. ISBN 0-333-60971-9. \$21.95 U.S. ISBN:0-333-60972-7.

Review by Jonathan Dewald, SUNY at Buffalo.

Donna Bohanan has written a short book on a large subject. How, she asks, did the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century French state interact with its most prominent subjects, the nobility? Addressing this question requires Bohanan to range widely in the history of these years, as she describes the two participants in this long-running, intermittently tempestuous marriage and traces some of their more dramatic encounters. Along the way, the book offers insights into the workings of representative institutions, the development of national feeling, early modern rebellion, and a variety of other important topics. Two chapters consider these issues in general terms; there follow three case studies, which trace monarchical interventions in three especially independent-minded provinces, Provence, Dauphiné, and Brittany. For the most part, Bohanan relies on secondary studies, including her own fine book on Aix-en-Provence. *Crown and Nobility's* range will make it an especially useful book for students, for it supplies fine overviews of both the period's events and recent interpretations of them.

Those interpretations have tended to stress the nobility's economic and political health during the early modern period, and in this respect Bohanan strongly agrees with contemporary conventional wisdom. "The seventeenth century was the age of aristocracy," she writes (p. 1), with most nobles enjoying solid finances and widening professional opportunities. The solidity of their position made it important for the crown to negotiate carefully with them, and Bohanan (again following much recent scholarship) stresses the government's need to collaborate with provincial nobles. Absolutist fantasies were not practical amidst seventeenth-century conditions, and governments could secure results only when they secured the cooperation of local elites. One method that did work was consultation. Though they appeared on some occasions to disregard provincial opinion, she argues, both the Bourbons and their Cardinal Ministers in fact sought to preserve elements of what J. Russell Major called a Renaissance monarchy, that is, a monarchy characterized by lively representative institutions. Forms of consultation changed, but the government's need to work in concert with provincial opinion remained.

Another, overlapping method for securing obedience was patronage, which Bohanan places at the very center of seventeenth-century political life. "In terms of its effectiveness and long-term consequences," she writes, "the real innovation associated with Richelieu and Louis XIII was not the *intendant*, nor was it the special judicial commission; rather, it was the way in which the crown made use of patronage and clientage" (pp. 57-58). And "The difference was in the more careful and thoughtful management of patronage.... if there was an innovation in the reign of Louis XIV, this was it--to take the Renaissance state and manage it to greater effect" (p. 61). In comments like these, I believe, Bohanan overstates an important insight. At the least, numerous other governmental innovations from these years deserve more attention. Likewise, I think that Bohanan might have said more about the flamboyantly absolutist sides of seventeenth-century government. Show trials, thinly justified imprisonments and exiles, and religious persecutions were also part of seventeenth-century political culture, and they need somehow to be incorporated into this picture of consultation and cooperation. So also does the seventeenth century's

diminishing tolerance for forms of political boisterousness that had been commonplace in the sixteenth century.

Bohanan's chronological choices both shape and reflect her interpretations. Unlike many studies of early modern government, the book says nothing about how seventeenth-century governmental institutions evolved in the eighteenth century; nor does it ask how seventeenth-century governmental innovations contributed to the old regime's eventual crack-up. (Given the author's resolute focus on the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the publisher has made an especially perverse choice of cover art: a mid-eighteenth-century painting of a characteristic mid-eighteenth-century scene, featuring lace-covered gentlemen eating oysters and drinking champagne.) Ending the story in 1715 has both advantages and disadvantages. It usefully highlights the seventeenth century's linkages with earlier periods, bringing to the fore common social arrangements and attitudes. On the other hand, it also tends to hide from view the potent implications of seventeenth-century institutional shifts. Louis XIV's capitation presaged a radical decline in aristocratic fiscal privileges; Colbert's regulations, inspectors, and questionnaires would eventually blossom into full-scale bureaucracies, however limited their scale during his lifetime; the intendants' offices would come to dominate eighteenth-century provincial life. Evaluating the nature of seventeenth-century government must partly turn on interpretations of the eighteenth century.

In a short book, Bohanan has not always been able to say as much as one would like about the complexities of her subject. I would have liked more consideration of the poor nobility, a significant presence on the provincial scene that created special political pressures. Likewise, the book's overview of recent historical scholarship tends to focus on Anglo-American contributions and gives rather limited attention to those of French scholars. But such gaps matter far less than the book's achievements. Bohanan has thoughtfully synthesized much recent research and reflection on early modern government and society, in ways that both specialists and students will find useful.

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