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Jeroen Duindam, *Vienna and Versailles: The Courts of Europe's Dynastic Rivals, 1550-1780*. New Studies in European History. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003. xi + 349 pp. Illustrations, tables, notes, bibliography, and index. \$80.00 U.S. (hb). ISBN 0-521-82262-9.

Review by Tryntje B. Helfferich, University of California at Santa Barbara.

With this book, Jeroen Duindam compares the courts of France and the emperor from the middle of the sixteenth century to the end of the eighteenth, with a focus on what he calls the “apotheosis” of the courts during the reigns of Louis XIV and Leopold I. His goal is to use a comparative technique in order to “re-establish the concrete outlines of the early modern household,” but he is also trying to combat the nineteenth-century idea that the early modern household and government were isolated from each other, with the household taking a secondary role (p. 13). He also challenges Norbert Elias and others who see the early modern court as primarily a mechanism for state-building and the domestication of the nobility. In doing so, he strikes a powerful blow against the myth of absolutism.

Duindam's primary interest is in the court of Louis XIV. His decision to compare it to the Viennese court, he explains in chapter one, was designed “to put into perspective the overstated concept of French unified monarchy ... [and] the configuration of nobles and ruler at court” (p. 18). This seemed, he goes on, the best way to “disentangle the Ludovician court from propaganda, literary embellishment, and eighteenth-century myth-making” (p. 19). He takes up these tasks in the ensuing chapters, where he discusses the two courts' personnel (chapter two), size and costs (chapter three), hierarchies and remuneration (chapter four), routines and activities (chapter five), the forms and use of court ceremony (chapter six), the levels and forms of power at the courts (chapter seven), and the courts' positions within their realms (chapter eight). He then ends the book with a conclusion (chapter nine) that restates and refines his main points.

This thematic organization leads to some repetition and a few oddities (Cardinal Mazarin is not mentioned until p. 242, for example), but it also allows Duindam to delve deeply into the specific structures of the two courts. The extraordinary detail he thus provides was garnered mostly from his own original research, though some sections, especially in chapter eight, depend more heavily on existing scholarship. The individual chapters are also somewhat uneven, with some jumping confusingly between the two courts and between times, and others strictly following the pattern of discussing first France and then the empire. In many of the chapters, moreover, Duindam's analysis tends to get buried under the avalanche of data. In this respect the conclusion is invaluable, for it not only presents a clear summary of his major factual findings, it also brings together his arguments, which he himself admits are otherwise “scattered throughout the text” (p. 302). And while historians of the court or, for that matter, of the history of either state, will find a great deal of extremely useful information within the body of Duindam's book, it is these arguments that are the most striking aspect of this work.

Since Duindam began his study with the goal of disproving the model of the early modern court as a formalized, centralized, absolute monarchy, it is not surprising that this was indeed one of his major findings. In general, he argues, the courts of this period were much less orderly, the bureaucracy less isolated, and the monarchs less powerful than we often assume. While there was an ongoing process of state-building, the early modern household was a large part of this process, and the mixing of personnel, the influence of personal, hierarchical, and family connections, and the practices of the courts made the theoretical barriers between household and bureaucracy extremely permeable. “In no country,” he states, “did the professionalisation of bureaucracies and the insulation of the ruler's household reach a

conclusive phase in the early modern age” (p. 6). Within this fluid environment, furthermore, the ruler was merely a key figure, not a puppet master. Duindam contradicts, for example, the idea that rulers enjoyed and encouraged the constant squabbles over rank and primacy within their courts, arguing instead that both the French kings and the Habsburg emperors consistently tried to diffuse them. He points out, moreover, that the routines and practices of the court “were controlled not by the special agents of ceremony, but by the relevant court dignitaries—that is, by the very persons conventionally depicted as the victims of ceremony” (p. 310). Indeed, ceremony and rank were just as often constraining on a ruler as liberating for him. One should almost pity early modern monarchs, for “in this ambitious environment,” he writes, “the vulnerability and loneliness of rulers strike the eye. Their predicament made it difficult to find a balance between emotional isolation and trust; between overworking themselves and leaving their responsibilities to others” (pp. 257-8).

Such commonalities aside, however, it is when Duindam turns to an analysis of the differences between the two courts that his argument becomes more controversial. This is because he clearly positions the Habsburg court as better fitting the stereotypical absolutist model than the French court. While the court at Versailles was open, lively, and disorderly, he argues, the court at Vienna was closed, somber, and orderly. While courtiers, diplomats, and even random tourists were able to approach the French king at almost any time and even enter his most private quarters, the Habsburg court was much more organized and access to the emperor more restricted and controlled. While the venality and inheritability of offices at the French court allowed courtiers to create vast fortunes and patronage networks separate from the king, Habsburg court offices were neither hereditary nor venal, but functioned as a *cursum honorum* for the local nobility and were dissolvable on the death of the emperor. “In mentality as well as in activities,” Duindam writes, “Habsburg courtiers were closer to a service elite than were French courtiers, and they rarely were as troublesome and haughty” (p. 316). Finally, he argues, “whereas the French kings were wary of their great courtiers’ princely ambitions, the emperor served his own interests by promoting his loyal dignitaries’ princely rank in the empire, as this underlined his supremacy over the ruling territorial princes” (p. 282).

This is a radical new interpretation of the power of the two courts, and it gives us some fascinating insights into the nature of early modern rule. The problem is that it doesn’t support close scrutiny. While Duindam has proven that the Habsburg court may well have been more centralized, formalized, and orderly than the French court, the Habsburg empire surely was not, and the early modern period was instead one defined by the revolt of the princes of Germany against the power and control of the emperor. Especially after 1648, the emperor was in many ways practically irrelevant—more an honorary ruler of a confederation of sovereign states than an absolute monarch. The authority of his much smaller court depended primarily on the willingness of the German princes to play along. Duindam does attempt to address this problem (especially in chapter eight), but it is the Austrian Habsburg court, not the imperial court, that he actually seems to be studying, since he focuses not on the role of the court as the center of an empire, but on the court as the center of the Habsburg hereditary lands.

To make his point about the weakness of the French monarchy, in other words, Duindam overstates the strength of the Habsburg one. This does not invalidate his argument, but it does highlight the dangers inherent in making too close a comparison of apples and oranges. Duindam himself openly wrestles with the methodological problems posed by such comparative research, cautioning that it is easy “either to get lost in the unending variety of courts, finding different outcomes of comparable processes, or fall into the trap of reducing the court to a set of related characteristics too rigid to accommodate its varieties” (p. 320). Yet while he has not been able to avoid some of the very pitfalls he warns others against, he has also shown that such research can be extremely useful. His book is unquestionably thought-provoking, and it also raises further a number of significant questions about the structure and development of the early modern European court. What impact, for example, did the religious changes of the period have on the European court? How did the courts of these two great states compare to those of other European monarchs or princes? And how can we incorporate practical questions about

the actual functioning of decision-making or dynastic politics into our understanding of the structure of the court? It can only be a positive result if other scholars, following Duindam's trailblazing effort, are spurred to take up such important questions.

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