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Boris Noguès, *Une archéologie du corps enseignant: les professeurs des collèges parisiens au XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles (1598-1793)*. Histoire de l'éducation. Paris: Bélin, 2006. 240 pp. Notes and index. €24.00 (pb). ISBN 2-7011-4348-9.

Review by Jotham Parsons, Duquesne University.

It would certainly be possible to find a book less fashionable than this one. After all, historians have recently begun to take a serious interest in conservative opposition to the Enlightenment, and as Noguès makes clear, the professors of the Paris colleges were, if not the backbone of that opposition, at least a solid component of it.[1] In almost every other respect, however, this is a book that resolutely ignores the major trends of current historical research, and it is generally all the better for doing so. Education in early modern France has been little studied, and what work has been done has tended to center on the work of the teaching orders (notably the Jesuits and the Oratorians) rather than on the ancient University of Paris. Moreover, Noguès' approach is unapologetically quantitative and sociological in the old tradition of the *Annales*, while his ultimate interest is an even more traditional type of institutional history. The result is an unusually clear, straightforward, and illuminating study of what were a (literally) central element of the old regime and an important precursor of modern French academia. It will be of interest to anyone studying how the culture of seventeenth and eighteenth-century Paris worked on the ground.

In the sixteenth century, the arts faculty of the University of Paris was enormously successful and influential. It was there that humanist education was systematized in a way that would be copied around Europe, particularly by the Jesuits and by Protestant followers of Peter Ramus.[2] From the arts faculty emerged the Collège Royale, one of the pre-eminent educational experiments of the later Renaissance.[3] The colleges of Paris educated the elites of most of northern France, and seemed for a while at least partially to have revived the ancient pre-eminence of the University. The Wars of Religion (which, at their climax, more or less completely cut Paris off from the rest of the kingdom for more than five years and severely damaged the entire French economy) destroyed much of this success. More was lost to competition from the teaching orders, whose colleges were cheaper, located in cities throughout the kingdom, and more closely in tune with the emerging spirit of the Catholic Reformation. The story Noguès tells is thus one that began in defeat and, after a long, arduous, and generally successful effort at rebuilding, ended the same way, as the institutions of French higher education were destroyed in the chaos of the Revolution. Nevertheless, the group he describes is one that will seem familiar in many ways to its twenty-first century successors.

Noguès makes it clear that teaching in the colleges of the University of Paris was a well-defined and largely self-contained career. In general, the professors began as students, mostly from moderately well-to-do families of the urban bourgeoisie, the learned professions, or the lower ranks of royal office-holding. A future professor was generally an exceptional student (at least, many won prizes) who, after completing his undergraduate education, served an apprenticeship of a few years as assistants, often at his alma mater, perhaps while pursuing a theology degree with greater or lesser application. Once he obtained a post in a college, he would likely retain it for the rest of his career, with modest possibilities for promotion to teaching in a higher grade, at a more prestigious college, or into administration. Professors occasionally left teaching to pursue careers in the Church, and outsiders were occasionally brought in to administer colleges, but both of these practices were the exception rather than the rule. It

is easy to see how a distinctive, rather insular culture and a fierce *esprit de corps* developed among the faculty of the arts. They were shaped by a plurisecular tradition of the University (canonized in the period covered by this book by César Egasse du Boulay, a professor whose history of the University remains the starting point for scholarship on the institution); more concretely, most professors lived or at least dined in college, and, with the exception of the Collège des Quatre Nations or Collège Mazarin, founded in 1680 in what is now the Institut de France, they were all clustered at the top of the Mont Ste. Geneviève. All this left them noticeably insulated from the society around them.

Still, throughout the seventeenth century, the arts faculty remained economically precarious, depending on student fees that are hard to calculate exactly but that were certainly neither particularly generous nor particularly reliable. Beginning in 1719, however, the faculty brought to term a long-sought reform that led to their salaries being paid by the royal treasury, in exchange for the cession of a medieval right to run a postal service (originally intended, it seems, to allow students to write home to their families for more money). From that day to this, the professors have been (in the modern term) *fonctionnaires d'état*; already in 1719 this status carried the same advantages in money, prestige, and stability that it has today. The socioeconomic position of the professors did not change radically—they remained in the lower ranks of the Parisian notability, comparable to the city's *curés*—but it was much more solid than before. Over the next seventy years, the faculty went from strength to strength: their salaries and pensions increased, and the expulsion of the Jesuits in 1762 removed their major competitor (the Collège Louis-le-Grand was integrated into the University) and left them as the titular heads of French higher education. The *agrégation*, another eighteenth-century reform that has survived to the present, confirmed this status without seriously altering the already-existing academic career path. Given this history of success, it must have come as a tremendous shock to the faculty when, as the Revolution entered its radical phase in the 1790s, they were unceremoniously swept aside without even a plausible replacement being offered until the Napoleonic era.

Noguès explores the background to this turn of events in his final section, an analysis of the sociocultural identity and engagement of the arts faculty. He finds that after their engagement in the Jansenist quarrel (which reflected their very close ties to two of the major protagonists in that affair, the Sorbonne and the Paris *curés*), and in tandem with their new status as royal functionaries, they became strong supporters of the political and intellectual *status quo*.^[4] Although they gradually moved away from their already tenuous identification with the clergy, taking orders or theology degrees in decreasing numbers as the eighteenth century progressed, and though they found room for the new science and other intellectual innovations in the corners of their curricula, these were changes at the margins. Even a relatively high rate of acceptance of the Civil Constitution (about two-thirds) could not save the faculty of arts from its association with the forces of privilege and reaction, and so the Jacobins abolished it. As with so much else, this element of the old regime proved harder to kill than its opponents had expected, and many former professors found employment in the *écoles centrales* of 1795 and then in Napoleon's system of *lycées*, which resurrected much of the old institutional structure, though without a decisive level of continuity.

There is more to praise than to comment on in Noguès' straightforward methodology, thorough research, and clear conclusions. What is perhaps most valuable about this book is the detailed glimpse it gives into the ordinary functioning of an important but rather banal institution of the old regime. It is largely through education that societies, ideologies, and class structures perpetuate themselves, and, as academics should be well aware, this is a process that says a great deal about a society. In its religiosity, its quiet conservatism, its successful blend of monarchism and self-interested corporatism, and its tradition of hard work and intellectual rigor, the Paris arts faculty was both typical and partially constitutive of the old regime's governing elite. And, *mutatis mutandis*, much of this remains true of French society and its educational establishment today.

NOTES

[1] See, for example, Darrin M. McMahon, *Enemies of the Enlightenment: The French Counter-Enlightenment and the Making of Modernity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001). This book does not appear in Noguès' bibliography.

[2] On Ramus and his influence, see Walter J. Ong, *Ramus, Method, and the Decay of Dialogue: From the Art of Discourse to the Art of Reason* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004 [1958]). On the Jesuits, the literature is immense, though one should probably now start at the beginning with Claude Pavor's edition and translation of the *ratio studiorum*: *The Ratio Studiorum: The Official Plan for Jesuit Education* (St. Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2005). There is a French equivalent in the same series as Noguès' book.

[3] See Abel Lefranc, *Histoire du Collège de France: Depuis ses origines jusqu'à la fin du Premier Empire* (Paris: Hachette, 1893); and now André Tuiller, ed., *Histoire du Collège de France*, tom. 1, *La création, 1530-1560* (Paris: Fayard, 2006).

[4] On the details on the institutional side of later Jansenism, see Richard M. Goldin, *The Godly Rebellion: Parisian Curés and the Religious Fronde, 1652-1660* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1981); and Jaques M. Gres-Gayer, *Théologie et pouvoir en Sorbonne: la faculté de théologie de Paris et la bulle Unigenitus, 1714-1721* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1991).

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