

PROVINCIAL POWER AND ABSOLUTE MONARCHY

The Estates General of Burgundy, 1661–1790

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- 1 The *duchy* of Burgundy in the eighteenth century
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CHAPTER I

Historians, absolute monarchy and the provincial estates

THE 'WHIG INTERPRETATION' OF FRENCH HISTORY

After witnessing the rise and often rapid fall of three monarchies, two empires, five republics and the Vichy regime in the space of less than two centuries, the French people can be forgiven a certain scepticism about the durability of both their rulers and the country's political institutions. Yet through the ruins and debris left by kings, emperors and politicians of every hue, the French have long been able to seek solace in the fact that the state went on forever. The existence of a strong, centralised bureaucracy, simultaneously loved and loathed by the public, supplied a sense of permanence and reliability denied to the mere mortals who flitted across the political stage. Since at least the early nineteenth century, veneration of the state and a belief in its centralising mission has formed an important part of French national identity. It offered a force for unity that a divided and politically traumatised people could cling to, and, not surprisingly, scholars looked back beyond 1789 in search of its origins. The result was what we might describe as the French version of the Whig school of history. Whereas the British exponents of that school believed that the history of their country could be written in terms of a long and triumphant march from the Magna Carta to parliamentary democracy, the French saw a no less inexorable rise of the state. The argument can be pushed back to the middle ages when the monarchy gradually gained control of formerly independent provinces such as Brittany, Burgundy, Provence or Languedoc, but it is the first half of the seventeenth century that is usually taken to mark the birth of the Leviathan.

Historians of the early nineteenth century, most famously Alexis de Tocqueville, believed that it was during the reigns of Louis XIII and Louis XIV that the monarchy first began the process of centralisation with the 'same patterns' and the 'same aims' as in their own day.¹ Throughout his

¹ A. de Tocqueville, *The ancien régime and the French revolution*, trans. S. Gilbert (London, 1955), p. 132.

inspirational work, *The ancien régime and the French revolution*, Tocqueville made repeated references to the alleged continuity of the French government before and after 1789, declaring that in the eighteenth century it 'was already highly centralised and all-powerful'.² Indeed, 'centralisation fitted in so well with the programme of the new social order that the common error of believing it to have been a creation of the revolution is easily accounted for'.³ To justify his thesis, Tocqueville identified a series of inter-related factors including the exclusion of the nobility from an active part in public affairs, the decline of intermediary bodies, the dominance of Paris over the provinces and the establishment of a central authority of royal council, ministers and intendants.⁴

There was nothing particularly original about these arguments.⁵ In 1844, Alexandre Thomas had published a magnificent study of Burgundy during the reign of Louis XIV in which he presented the Sun King, Richelieu, François I and even Louis XI as servants of the 'great national cause' through their contribution to 'the forging of unity through centralisation'.⁶ Thomas was engaging in a polemic with Legitimists about the merits of the ancient privileges and charters of the French provinces, which he represented as a source of weakness and abuse, while Tocqueville had the regime of Napoléon III firmly in his sights. Yet their arguments formed part of a much broader interpretation of the *ancien régime* that took root in the same period and which has become known to generations of students as the 'age of absolutism'. The broad contours of that thesis are reassuringly familiar.⁷ From 1614 to 1789, the French monarchy ruled without recourse to the Estates General, seemingly giving concrete expression to the theory that the king was accountable to God alone. Representative government in the provinces was also sharply curtailed with, among others, the provincial estates of Dauphiné, Normandy, Guyenne and the Auvergne falling into abeyance.

During the reign of Louis XIII the foundations of absolutism were laid. Under the gaze of the cardinal de Richelieu, the Calvinist citadel of La Rochelle was stormed in 1628, marking the end of the Huguenot 'state within a state'. Within a few years, it seemed as if the iron cardinal had

² For this, and other examples, see *ibid.*, pp. 25, 61, 84–5, 94, 222.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 88. ⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 57, 62, 64–5, 99, 100–1, 222.

⁵ Tocqueville borrowed extensively from P. E. Lemontey, *Essai sur l'établissement monarchique de Louis XIV et sur les altérations qu'il éprouva pendant sa vie de prince* (Paris, 1818).

⁶ A. Thomas, *Une province sous Louis XIV. Situation politique et administrative de la Bourgogne de 1661 à 1715, d'après les manuscrits et les documents inédits du temps* (Paris, 1844), pp. xiv–xv.

⁷ The following is no more than an attempt to distil the most significant elements of what we might call the absolutist thesis, and some of its tenets have been subsequently proved to be inaccurate.

made good his boast to 'abase the pride of the nobles'.⁸ After the king's brother, Gaston d'Orléans, had led the latest in a long string of unsuccessful aristocratic revolts, Richelieu ordered the execution of his principal lieutenant, the duc de Montmorency, in October 1632. Such ruthless treatment of a powerful grandee sent an unequivocal message that the habitual disobedience of the high aristocracy would no longer be tolerated. Finally, once France had officially entered the Thirty Years War in 1635, the government's desperate need for funds obliged it to circumvent traditional judicial and administrative officeholders, whose loyalty and efficiency were questioned. They were replaced by the intendants, holding revocable commissions, whose broad professional remit was defined to include 'justice, police and finance'. It was these new state servants who were supposedly in the vanguard of centralisation.

When Richelieu and Louis XIII died within a few months of each other the political scene changed dramatically. In 1643, the new king, Louis XIV, was a mere child, and the regency government of Anne of Austria and cardinal Mazarin was soon confronted by a backlash led by angry officeholders and disgruntled aristocrats, with the latent support of a war weary populace. The boy king was driven temporarily from his capital during the *parlementaire* Fronde of 1648–9, and then saw his own relatives, headed by the Grand Condé, raise their standards against Mazarin. Although eventually defeated, the Fronde was a painful reminder of royal weakness, providing a lesson that was not lost on the young monarch. After Mazarin's death he was determined to complete the work that Richelieu had started, breaking the power of the grandees by obliging them to attend upon him in his magnificent chateau at Versailles where, cut off from their power bases in the provinces, they were effectively domesticated. New robe nobles, allegedly of middle-class origins, dominated government and, after being chased from the provinces during the Fronde, the intendants returned to their posts with their powers and status enhanced. Finally, the parlements were punished for their earlier rebelliousness by a law of 1673, which obliged them to register laws before making remonstrances.

Here, then, are the main ingredients of a thesis that seemingly carried all before it, ensuring that historians long treated the monarchy of Louis XIV and absolutism as synonymous. There was, of course, one glaring problem with the concept of the Sun King commanding a powerful, centralised state – the revolution. How could the monarchy have declined so rapidly and comprehensively? In answering that question, historians were undoubtedly

⁸ L. André, ed., *Testament politique* (Paris, 1947), p. 95.

aided by the personal shortcomings of Louis XV and Louis XVI, neither of whom could match the regal splendour of their great predecessor. Yet, as both men had employed ministers whose commitment to reform was unquestioned, a more weighty explanation was required. The answer was to be found in the persistence of privilege. According to this interpretation, the death of Louis XIV was followed almost immediately by a reaction of powerful privileged groups led by the parlements, the Catholic Church and the court aristocracy. Their largely selfish opposition to egalitarian reform of the fiscal system paved the way to the royal bankruptcy that preceded the revolution of 1789.⁹ The monarchy had thus been unable to complete its centralising mission, and to return once more to Tocqueville, it was the revolution that picked up the baton, completing 'at one fell swoop, without warning, without transition, and without compunction . . . what in any case was bound to happen, if by slow degrees'.¹⁰ With this teleological flourish, worthy of the finest Whig historians, he nailed his colours to the mast; the rise of the modern French state was one long and inevitable process.

THE ADMINISTRATIVE MONARCHY

If few historians were tempted to put matters quite so bluntly as Tocqueville, by the late nineteenth century the absolutist thesis was firmly established as the orthodox interpretation. Rare were those like Pierre Ardascheff, who, on the eve of the First World War, published an innovative study of the intendants during the reign of Louis XVI, arguing that they worked in a mutually rewarding partnership with the provinces.¹¹ Ardascheff also rejected Tocqueville's claim that the intendants were part of a tightly controlled, centralised administration, suggesting instead that they were far more independent than was usually imagined.¹² The impact of his argument was limited, and subsequent historians tended to reinforce the prevailing interpretation. After examining the early decades of Louis XIV's personal rule, the influential Georges Pagès declared:

⁹ Historians of all political hues were attracted to this interpretation, see: A. Cobban, 'The parlements of France in the eighteenth century', *History* 35 (1950), 64–80; F. L. Ford, *Robe and sword. The regrouping of the French aristocracy after Louis XIV* (London, 1953); and A. Soboul, *The French revolution, 1787–1799. From the storming of the Bastille to Napoleon* (London, 1989), pp. 27–8, 37, 81–2.

¹⁰ Tocqueville, *Ancien régime and revolution*, p. 51.

¹¹ P. Ardascheff, *Les intendants de province sous Louis XVI* (Paris, 1909).

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 95–6, 400.

... the former frondeurs have become the most attentive courtiers. The parlements register edicts without saying a word. The assemblies of the [provincial] estates no longer even discuss the *don gratuit*. The malcontents have disarmed or are compelled to fall silent.¹³

A belief in the modernising role of the monarchical state was another familiar feature of the historical landscape. As a result, many of the great institutional and political histories of the first half of the twentieth century traced the seemingly permanent struggle between the crown and the parlements or provincial estates of the realm.¹⁴ Historians were divided about the virtues of royal polices and the legitimacy of the provincial opposition, but they were united in assuming that the extension of state power had been achieved through confrontation and conflict.

There was also a general consensus that one of the consequences of the governmental changes of the seventeenth century was the emergence of a more impersonal bureaucratic monarchy.¹⁵ That interpretation has received its fullest recent expression in the works of Michel Antoine, who has examined both the maturation of the governmental structure of councils, ministers and intendants created by Louis XIV and its shortcomings.¹⁶ As Antoine makes clear, the almost exponential growth of business transacted by the *contrôleur général* transformed his office into the real heart of government. Yet the sheer volume and complexity of the workload handled by the *contrôle général* meant that even the most dedicated monarch was unable to control its operations. As a result, decisions supposedly emanating from the king's council were being made elsewhere by the increasingly specialised technocrats of what he terms the 'administrative monarchy'. Antoine's works are those of a passionate defender of the system, but he is ultimately forced to concede that the monarchy died by its own hand by creating a bureaucratic structure that was beyond the

¹³ G. Pagès, *La monarchie d'ancien régime en France de Henri IV à Louis XIV*, 3rd edn. (Paris, 1941), p. 181.

¹⁴ A classic example was provided by the spat between Marcel Marion and Barthélemy Pocquet about the rights and wrongs of the infamous Brittany affair, M. Marion, *La Bretagne et le duc d'Aiguillon, 1753–1770* (Paris, 1898), and B. Pocquet, *Le pouvoir absolu et l'esprit provincial. Le duc d'Aiguillon et La Chalotais*, 3 vols. (Paris, 1900–1).

¹⁵ For a number of influential examples, see: Pagès, *Monarchie d'ancien régime*, pp. 134–81; M. Bordes, 'Les intendants éclairés de la fin de l'ancien régime', *Revue d'Histoire Économique et Sociale* (1961), 57–83 and his *L'administration provinciale et municipale en France au XVIII^e siècle* (Paris, 1972); F. Bluche, *Louis XIV* (Oxford, 1990), pp. 133–56, 615–26; J. Egret, *Louis XV et l'opposition parlementaire* (Paris, 1970), pp. 43–5, 93–132; and J. Rule, ed., *Louis XIV and the craft of kingship* (Ohio, 1969), pp. 9–10, 28–30.

¹⁶ M. Antoine, *Le conseil du roi sous le règne de Louis XV* (Geneva, 1970), pp. 377–431, 629–34.

control of the king and the traditional ideas and institutions that supported him.¹⁷

According to Antoine, one of the consequences of these developments was the emergence of modern public employees, 'the first senior civil servants'.¹⁸ Eighteenth-century France gave the world the term bureaucracy, and certain of its characteristics can be glimpsed in key institutions, offering some qualified support for his hypothesis. The engineers of the *Ponts et Chaussées* are amongst the most persuasive examples, as they were appointed by competitive examination, were paid salaries and retirement pensions and founded their careers upon talent rather than personal contacts.¹⁹ Philippe Minard has observed similar patterns in his thoughtful analysis of Colbert's inspectors of manufacturers, and he concludes that amongst their ranks 'the face of the civil servant can be glimpsed through that of the *commissaire*'.²⁰ The employees of the *ferme générale*, the intendants of finance and the *premiers commis* who served in the bureaux of the secretaries of state can also be added to this list.²¹ In a period when finance ministers flitted across the stage as frequently as actors in a theatrical farce, it was their permanent officers who provided a much needed repository of knowledge and competence. It was in these lower tiers of the government that the backbone of the state machine was to be found, and in terms of personnel at least the continuity between the *ancien régime* and its revolutionary successors is beyond doubt.²² There were, therefore, forces within the monarchy that were seeking to move in a more uniform and egalitarian direction, and from an administrative perspective there was undoubtedly a degree of continuity in the years after 1789. Yet the degree of modernisation of the governmental structure should not be exaggerated, and during the last twenty-five years the traditional conception of a bureaucratic, administrative monarchy has been subject to serious challenge.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 634. ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 390.

¹⁹ J. Petot, *Histoire de l'administration des ponts et chaussées, 1599-1851* (Paris, 1958), and A. Picon, *L'invention de l'ingénieur moderne. L'école des ponts et chaussées, 1747-1851* (Paris, 1992).

²⁰ P. Minard, *La fortune du colbertisme. État et industrie dans la France des lumières* (Paris, 1998), pp. 75-114, esp. 113.

²¹ See: G. T. Matthews, *The royal general farms in eighteenth-century France* (New York, 1958), pp. 185-227; J. Clinquart, *Les services extérieurs de la ferme générale à la fin de l'ancien régime. L'exemple de la direction des fermes du Hainaut* (Paris, 1995), pp. 60, 183-208; and J. Félix, 'Les commis du contrôle général des finances au XVIIIe siècle', *L'administration des finances sous l'ancien régime. Colloque tenu à Bercy les 22 et 23 février 1996* (Paris, 1997), 81-102.

²² C. H. Church, *Revolution and red tape. The French ministerial bureaucracy, 1770-1850* (Oxford, 1981), offers an impressive analysis of the development of French bureaucracy.

REVISIONISM AND THE NEW ORTHODOXY

It was with a certain amusing symmetry that Yves-Marie Bercé published his textbook, *La naissance dramatique de l'absolutisme* in France at exactly the same time as Nicholas Henshall's, *The myth of absolutism*, appeared in Britain.²³ These diametrically opposed texts illustrate perfectly the gulf separating the hostile camps in the debate. Bercé has written of the rising power of the French state in the half century after 1630, with Mazarin's victory in the Fronde marking 'the triumph of the very absolutism and centralisation against which it had been directed'.²⁴ It is a firm restatement of the classic thesis, and when Bercé declares that 'Mazarin wagered on a cause which had a long past and a glorious future: the power of the French state' his stance is unequivocal. He is not alone, and François Bluche, while more nuanced in his judgement, suggested in his acclaimed biography of Louis XIV that the king could be considered the 'first enlightened despot'.²⁵

Henshall, on the other hand, rejects the term absolutism as a myth resulting from a misreading of the political system of the *ancien régime* by the historians of the nineteenth century.²⁶ As he freely acknowledges, his work has been inspired by the writings of, among others, Roger Mettam and Peter Campbell, who form part of the radical wing of revisionist thinking. They are at pains to point out that to talk of absolutism is to commit the sin of anachronism, and to risk imposing a whole series of value judgements about the nature of the French monarchy that would have made little sense to contemporaries.²⁷ When an historian as distinguished as Guy Chaussinand-Nogaret can describe the death of Louis XIV as ushering in a period of 'destalinisation',²⁸ it is easy to share their misgivings. Louis XIV

²³ Y.-M. Bercé, *La naissance dramatique de l'absolutisme, 1598–1661* (Paris, 1992), published in English as *The birth of absolutism. A history of France, 1598–1661* (London, 1996), and N. Henshall, *The myth of absolutism: change and continuity in early modern European monarchy* (London, 1992), Sharon Kettering, *French society, 1589–1715* (London, 2001), pp. 81–95, has recently made a useful attempt to steer between the two extremes.

²⁴ Y.-M. Bercé, *Birth of absolutism*, p. 177–8.

²⁵ Bluche, *Louis XIV*, p. 619. A claim repeated by Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *The ancien régime. A history of France, 1610–1774* (Oxford, 1996), p. 130.

²⁶ Henshall, *Myth of absolutism*, pp. 210–12. As does J. B. Collins, *The state in early modern France* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 1–2, in another important general survey.

²⁷ For a sample of their comments, see: Henshall, *Myth of absolutism*, pp. 199–212; R. Mettam, *Power and faction in Louis XIV's France* (Oxford, 1988), pp. 6–7, 34–41; and P. R. Campbell, *The ancien régime in France* (Oxford, 1988), pp. 46–70, and his *Louis XIV* (London, 1993).

²⁸ G. Chaussinand-Nogaret, *The French nobility in the eighteenth century*, trans. W. Doyle (Cambridge, 1984), p. 10. The introduction to this hugely influential work is entitled 'le ghetto doré de la noblesse royale', and has as its starting point the assumption of an aristocracy reacting against the absolutism of Louis XIV.

behaved on occasions as an autocrat, as the Huguenots and the nuns of Port-Royal could both testify, but he should never be compared with modern tyrants. As a result, Mettam treats the term 'absolutist historians' as if it was synonymous with error, and Campbell has suggested that 'baroque state' be used as an alternative.²⁹ Revisionism is, however, about more than just terminology, and it strikes at the heart of our understanding of the development of the French state, with almost every aspect of the traditional interpretation being vigorously challenged.

As we have seen, it was long argued that the political authority of the nobility rapidly declined once the great aristocrats had been confined to Versailles, far way from their power bases in the provinces. Rather than seeing the palace as part of a deliberate strategy to tame the nobility, historians such as Mettam and Jeroen Duindam have offered an alternative explanation.³⁰ They have drawn our attention to the court's primary role as royal household, an arena to which the *grandeues* naturally gravitated both to protect their own rank and status and to pursue their wider personal and family strategies. It was through attendance upon the king that they could hope to secure the titles, offices and pensions needed to finance their opulent lifestyles and to reaffirm their position in the social hierarchy. Even the most cursory glance at the generals, governors, ambassadors and senior clergy appointed between 1661 and 1789 confirms that the *grandeues* were fully employed. It is true that during the personal reign of Louis XIV, the offices of secretary of state were dominated by the robe dynasties, most famously those of Colbert, Le Tellier and Phélypeaux. Yet as Mettam makes clear, Louis XIV constantly sought the advice of members of his extended family and the aristocratic courtiers, none of whom would have accepted the office of secretary of state, which they believed was beneath them.³¹ It was not until the middle of the eighteenth century that these aristocratic prejudices were abandoned with damaging consequences for the monarchy.

Crucially, Louis XIV took personal responsibility for the distribution of royal favour, successfully 'focusing attention upon himself as the fount of patronage, because of his evenhanded distribution of favours'.³² The contrast with the ministries of Richelieu and Mazarin, when many aristocratic revolts had been inspired by a sense of hopelessness resulting from

²⁹ Mettam, *Power and faction, passim*, and P. R. Campbell, *Power and politics in old regime France, 1720–1745* (London, 1996), pp. 4–5, 314.

³⁰ Mettam, *Power and faction*, pp. 47–65, and J. Duindam, *Myths of power. Norbert Elias and the early modern European court* (Amsterdam, 1994).

³¹ Mettam, *Power and faction*, pp. 55–65, 81–101. ³² *Ibid.*, p. 56.

the monopoly of royal favour enjoyed by the cardinals, was striking. Such desperate measures were no longer required, and to achieve their ends, the courtiers formed into relatively fluid factional groupings, the infamous cabals and *partis* that haunted the corridors and council chambers of Versailles. It was a world that changed little in the hundred years after 1682, when Louis XIV made the great palace the principal residence of his government and court.³³

By putting Versailles back into its proper historical perspective, the argument that the nobility was deprived of its authority loses some of its shine. Much the same can be said of our understanding of politics in the period. One of the dangers arising from a uniquely bureaucratic conception of the monarchy in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries is that it overlooks the persistence of more traditional features of government. The ability of individuals or institutions to achieve their personal or corporate goals depended, in part, upon their ability to secure access to the monarch, or the powerful courtiers or ministers that surrounded him. Within this context, influence was exerted through private, informal contacts, and winning the ear of the king's favourite,³⁴ or mistress, could produce results far more rapidly than petitioning through the official channels of ministers and their clerks. There is nothing incompatible about a vision of government functioning in both a formal and informal way, and to try and study the royal administration from just one perspective runs the risk of distortion.

Rethinking the nature of court society is only one part of a broader revisionist programme, and there is now a much greater awareness of the enormous degree of continuity within almost every aspect of *ancien régime* society and government. Central to that argument is a belief that it was, in part, through the workings of patronage and clientèle that the crown extended its authority, suggesting that the *ancien régime* state had as much, if not more, in common with its medieval ancestors as with modern bureaucratic regimes. A lively debate has raged about the strength of clientèle ties, with, at its most extreme, Roland Mousnier arguing that it was possible to talk of emotionally intense bonds of loyalty, what he termed 'fidelités',

³³ Recent studies highlighting the role of court faction in old regime politics include: M. Bryant, 'Françoise d'Aubigné, marquise de Maintenon: religion, power and politics – a study in circles of influence during the later reign of Louis XIV, 1684–1715', unpublished Ph.D. thesis (University of London, 2001); Campbell, *Power and politics*; J. Hardman, *French politics, 1774–1789. From the accession of Louis XVI to the fall of the Bastille* (London, 1995); M. Price, *Preserving the monarchy. The comte de Vergennes, 1774–1787* (Cambridge, 1995); and J. Swann, *Politics and the parlement of Paris under Louis XV, 1754–1774* (Cambridge, 1995).

³⁴ Bryant, 'Marquise de Maintenon', provides an excellent example.

linking patron and client.³⁵ Such bonds undoubtedly existed, and there is no shortage of examples of individuals risking their lives and their fortunes for a benefactor. However, as we might expect, many patron-client ties were more complex, or, as Sharon Kettering describes matters, ‘the ideal may have been a fidelity relationship of lifelong devotion to one patron, but the political reality was messier’.³⁶ It was, therefore, common for clients to swap patrons, or serve multiple patrons, as part of the broader pursuit of self-interest, and it was these personal, non-bureaucratic ties that proved crucial not only to the expansion of royal power in the seventeenth century, but also to the functioning of the *ancien régime* political system.

An examination of the principal officers and administrative servants of the crown quickly reveals the importance of patronage. Struck by the contrast between the aristocratic warlords, who repeatedly plunged France into civil war before 1661 and their courtier descendants, historians assumed that they had been cut off from the provinces, where the intendants now reigned supreme, with governorships being gradually transformed into sinecures.³⁷ By the end of the eighteenth century it is likely that this was the case,³⁸ but the pace of change was much slower than was initially thought. Instead of losing contact with the provinces, the absentee governors, in the words of Robert Harding, ‘revived their renaissance roles as brokers’.³⁹ Their social rank brought proximity to the king and an authority that even the most powerful minister could not ignore, and quite naturally provincial bodies, or private individuals, looked to them for assistance and preferment.⁴⁰ The works of Katia Béguin and Beth Natcheson have provided some of the most compelling evidence in favour of the continuing power of the governors. They have demonstrated the immense influence wielded by the Condé in Burgundy, and this study will reinforce that argument.⁴¹ Elsewhere the evidence is more mixed. The duc de Chaulnes proved an effective governor

³⁵ R. Mousnier, ‘Les concepts de “ordres”, d’ “états”, de “fidelité” et de “monarchie absolue” en France de la fin du XVe, siècle à la fin du XVIIIe’, *Revue Historique* 502 (1972), 289–312, and his ‘Les fidélités et clientèles en France aux XVIe, XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles’, *Histoire Sociale – Social History* 15 (1982), 35–46.

³⁶ S. Kettering, *Patrons, brokers and clients in seventeenth-century France* (Oxford, 1986), p. 21. Kettering’s work is an essential introduction to the subject.

³⁷ Bordes, *L’administration provinciale*, pp. 26–7, 32–5.

³⁸ A research project on the role of the provincial governors in the reign of Louis XVI might well yield some interesting results.

³⁹ R. R., Harding, *Anatomy of a power elite: the provincial governors of early modern France* (New Haven, 1978), pp. 201–3.

⁴⁰ Mettam, *Power and faction*, pp. 47–54.

⁴¹ K. Béguin, *Les princes de Condé. Rebelles, courtisans et mécènes dans la France du grand siècle* (Paris, 1999), and B. Natcheson, ‘Absentee government and provincial governors in early modern France: the princes of Condé and Burgundy, 1660–1720’, *French Historical Studies* 21 (1998), 265–98.

of Brittany, and successive generations of the Villeroy family proved to be able and active governors of the Lyonnais.⁴² Others were less conspicuous, Kettering has suggested that in the second half of the seventeenth century, the governors of Provence 'chose to focus their careers on military service in the royal armies',⁴³ and William Beik's study of Languedoc in the same period conveys a similar impression of decline.⁴⁴ That Kettering and Beik should discount the role of the governors after 1661 is not the result of any doubts about the importance of patronage to Louis XIV's government. Instead, as Beik describes matters, one of the reasons for the sun king's success lay in the fact that 'for the first time under Colbert, the dominant client network was really a *royal* network, centering on the king himself and tied directly to the central administration'.⁴⁵

Closer examination of other areas of government has produced further evidence of the significance of clientèle and of the persistence of patrimonial attitudes within the government structure at odds with the supposedly more modern bureaucratic ethos of the administrative monarchy. Perhaps nowhere is this more apparent than in the area of government finance. In 1973, Julian Dent made what, at the time, must have seemed a quite an extraordinary claim that 'during the years 1635–61 and 1683–1715, financiers came to dominate the financial administration of the state, parcelling it up into private fiefs in a fragmentation of authority and power redolent more of a low species of bastard feudalism than of absolutist bureaucracy'.⁴⁶ Yet his suggestion that the financial system was controlled by fiscal clientèles, of whom the most famous chiefs were those great rivals Colbert and Fouquet, has been borne out by a series of meticulous studies.⁴⁷ The army has also provided fertile ground for re-evaluation. David Parrott has argued that

⁴² For details on the actions of the Villeroy, see Mettam, *Power and faction*, pp. 198–9, and W. G. Monahan, *Year of sorrows The great famine of 1709 in Lyon* (Columbus, 1993), pp. 49–51, 59–60, 80, 168–9.

⁴³ S. Kettering, *Judicial politics and urban revolt in seventeenth-century France. The Parlement of Aix, 1629–1659* (Princeton, 1978), pp. 147–8.

⁴⁴ W. Beik, *Absolutism and society in seventeenth-century France. State power and provincial aristocracy in Languedoc* (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 48, 228–44.

⁴⁵ Beik, *Absolutism and society*, pp. 244. Kettering, *Patrons, brokers and clients*, p. 223, argues that 'the ministers of a centralizing Bourbon monarchy created their own administrative clientèles in the provinces'. D. Bohanan, *Crown and nobility in early modern France* (London, 2001), is another to stress the importance of royal patronage in this regard.

⁴⁶ J. Dent, *Crisis in finance: crown, financiers and society in seventeenth-century France* (New York, 1973), p. 20.

⁴⁷ Amongst the most important are: F. Bayard, *Le monde des financiers au XVII^e siècle* (Paris, 1988); R. J. Bonney, *The king's debts. Finance and politics in France, 1589–1661* (Oxford, 1981); J. B. Collins, *Fiscal limits of absolutism: direct taxation in seventeenth-century France* (London, 1988); and D. Dessert, *Argent, pouvoir et société au grand siècle* (Paris, 1984).

for all their absolutist reputation, the ministries of Richelieu and Mazarin left control of the French army firmly in the hands of the great aristocratic patrons.⁴⁸ As for the reinvigorated naval administration, it has been defined as 'a lobby comparable to that surrounding Colbert in the financial domain'.⁴⁹ Even the intendants can be integrated into a framework of patronage and clientèle. They were recruited from a relatively narrow section of the robe nobility, and their advancement was frequently dependent upon family or personal contacts.⁵⁰ Many of their subdelegates were officeholders and the *premier commis*, who most closely resembled modern bureaucrats, required patronage as well as talent to secure an appointment. David Parker has gone as far as to claim that 'patrimonial mechanisms of rule remained more important than bureaucratic ones'.⁵¹ Finding a generally acceptable conclusion to this argument is never going to be easy, but it is clear that any balanced assessment of the monarchical administration has to take both factors into consideration.

THE CARROT AND THE STICK

The traditional image of provincial independence being broken by the intendants has presented a particularly tempting target for revisionists, not least because earlier historians had tended to exaggerate the ability of a few dozen individuals, working alone in large and often hostile *généralités*, to act as the single-minded agents of centralisation. As William Beik remarks 'they appear more frequently in local studies as isolated, beleaguered bearers of unpopular edicts, who are threatened with denigration, pillage, and popular insurrection'.⁵² He was referring to the early seventeenth century, and doubts if they became the 'triumphant dictators of centralization . . . until very late'. Indeed, the extent to which they ever became so dominant in the *pays d'états* remains to be proven. Even the most powerful intendants had to tread warily because creating a good impression at Versailles was about

⁴⁸ D. Parrott, *Richelieu's army. War, government and society in France, 1624–1642* (Cambridge, 2001). Nor did matters change all that rapidly during the reign of Louis XIV, as Guy Rowlands, 'Louis XIV, aristocratic power and the elite units of the French army', *French History* 13 (1999), 303–31, has shown.

⁴⁹ D. Dessert, 'La marine royale, une filiale Colbert', in C. Giry-Deloison and R. Mettam, eds., *Patronages et clientélismes* (London, 1992), pp. 69–83, 80.

⁵⁰ R. J. Bonney, *Political change in France under Richelieu and Mazarin, 1624–1661* (Oxford, 1976), pp. 29–111, and Kettering, *Patrons, brokers and clients*, pp. 224–8.

⁵¹ D. Parker, *Class and state in ancien régime France. The road to modernity?* (London, 1996), pp. 26–7, 173–87. Church, *Revolution and red tape*, provides persuasive evidence of how patrimonialism continued to stifle the bureaucratic tendencies within the *ancien régime* administration.

⁵² Beik, *Absolutism and society*, pp. 14–15.

more than blind obedience to ministerial diktat, it was also vital to achieve results. Respect for provincial social elites and an awareness of their interests was highly advisable, otherwise the intendant risked provoking opposition that could wreck his career. A degree of caution is therefore advisable when assessing their role, but, as Richard Bonney has argued, the intendants were still a priceless asset to the crown because of the administrative flexibility they offered.⁵³ Their powers could be increased, or quickly amended to take account of changing circumstances, and unlike governors, provincial estates or other institutions, they could be dismissed without cost.

Downplaying the authoritarian nature of the intendants is part of a broader revisionist strategy designed to recast the power of Louis XIV as more apparent than real and great emphasis has been laid upon the success of royal propaganda in dazzling both contemporaries and subsequent historians.⁵⁴ The coercive element in government has also been questioned, and Albert Hamscher's meticulous studies of the Parlement of Paris have demonstrated that Louis XIV was prepared to protect its legitimate interests in the field of the law.⁵⁵ What he did not wish to see was a repetition of the events of his minority, when the parlements had strayed into the political arena. Mettam has gone further, claiming that Louis XIV's declaration of 24 February 1673, obliging the parlements to register laws before making remonstrances, was much less restrictive than previously thought.⁵⁶ John Hurt has recently challenged this harmonious vision, arguing persuasively that in 1673 the king really did strike a severe blow against *parlementaire* pretensions.⁵⁷ By forcing the parlements to register edicts, declarations and letters patent immediately, Louis XIV curtailed the often lengthy pre-registration debates, remonstrances and obstructionist tactics that had so frequently frustrated his predecessors. Although Hurt does not dispute Hamscher's findings about cooperation on judicial matters, he describes this as the result of the successful application of Louis XIV's absolutist policies culminating in the declaration of February 1673. Moreover, Hurt has revealed the immense financial burden deliberately imposed upon the *parlementaires*, who by the end of the reign were in a sorry state 'with their offices taxed, yielding scant income, reduced in value,

⁵³ Bonney, *Political change*, pp. 442–3.

⁵⁴ Mettam, *Power and faction*, pp. 13–14, 16, 26–7, and Campbell, *Power and politics*, pp. 12–13.

⁵⁵ A. N. Hamscher, *The Parlement of Paris after the Fronde, 1653–1673* (London, 1976), and his *The conseil privé and the parlements in the age of Louis XIV: a study in French absolutism* (Philadelphia, 1987).

⁵⁶ Mettam, *Power and faction*, pp. 266–7, argues that it applied to letters patent, not edicts and declarations and it is true that the text is ambiguous.

⁵⁷ J. J. Hurt, *Louis XIV and the parlements. The assertion of royal authority* (Manchester, 2002).

heavily mortgaged, exposed to creditors and with unpaid *augmentations de gages*.⁵⁸

It is a telling reminder that revisionism should not be overdone, and that Louis XIV's government had an iron fist inside the velvet glove. The monarchy often acted arbitrarily and its relationship with French elites could also be conflictual.⁵⁹ Yet if the government had relied too heavily on coercion, the tactic would have soon proved counter-productive, as events during the reign of Louis XIII had demonstrated. Louis XIV's rule was so successful in restoring order because he also made a conscious effort to woo French elites, and the theme of cooperation is the leitmotif running through the different strands of revisionist thinking. This is particularly relevant when we turn our attention to the *pays d'états*, where recent research has revealed a far more complex relationship with the crown than was hitherto suspected.

Beik, in particular, has offered a remarkable insight into the government of Languedoc in the seventeenth century. During the ministries of Richelieu and Mazarin, the province was rocked by periodic revolts, suffered attacks on some of its leading institutions, notably the Estates, and experienced a dramatic increase in the fiscal burden. It was, as Beik tellingly describes it, a period that demonstrated 'how badly the system could work'.⁶⁰ During the early years of Louis XIV's personal rule the situation was transformed with the establishment of order and tranquillity. The king's success was not the result of repression, 'but of a more successful defense of ruling class interests, through collaboration and improved direction'.⁶¹ According to Beik's analysis, absolutism was nothing less than the 'story of a restructured feudal society', with monarch and landed aristocracy 'exploring ways of defending their interests in a changing world'.

Louis XIV was deeply suspicious of any form of dissent and was determined to be obeyed, but he was also prepared to be generous towards those willing to collaborate. Languedoc's elites soon learned that they would be rewarded for good behaviour. The crown tolerated their control of the local fiscal system, the siphoning off of large sums into the pockets of those involved in tax collection, and the distribution of generous pensions and gifts to the powerful.⁶² Earlier sources of dispute, such as the costs of provisioning the military *étapes*, or the winter quarters of royal armies, were also subject to more sensitive treatment. Rather than try to impose

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 116.

⁵⁹ An argument that most revisionists are happy to accept, see, for example, Collins, *The state in early modern France*, pp. 1–2.

⁶⁰ Beik, *Absolutism and society*, p. 219. ⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 31. ⁶² *Ibid.*, pp. 258–78.

its decisions arbitrarily, the government revealed a genuine willingness to consult with provincial bodies and to delegate responsibility. After much initial hesitation the Estates were persuaded to contribute towards the costs of constructing the Canal du Midi, and they also participated enthusiastically in the renewed campaign of persecution against the Huguenots, which culminated in the decision to revoke the edict of Nantes.⁶³ Finally, the personal rule of Louis XIV was characterised by respect for the rights of existing institutions and for social hierarchy, something that could only profit the privileged classes, who, according to Beik, were 'basking in the sun'.

Beik's study reveals the glaring weakness at the heart of older interpretations based upon the almost inevitable confrontation between the crown and the provinces. He also reinforces one of the revisionists' most powerful arguments, namely that mutually beneficial cooperation is the key to understanding how Louis XIV calmed the unrest that had threatened to tear France apart during his minority. Beik does not seek to claim that Languedoc was typical of the kingdom as a whole, but the research of James Collins in another *pays d'états*, Brittany, reveals a similar pattern.⁶⁴ The willingness of the king to cooperate with local elites is again one of the defining features of the regime, and, as Collins describes matters, 'the compromise of Louis XIV protected the vital interests of everyone: greater security for investors in royal debt; reduced direct taxes; a more stable tax leasing environment; clear support for the traditional social, moral, and political order of the localities'.⁶⁵ As in Languedoc it was the tax-paying peasantry which lost out as a result of what he describes as a 'cozy little relationship' of noble landowners, the legal class and the crown.⁶⁶

The model of French government that emerges from recent scholarship is one in which the deft distribution of patronage, or careful management of the nobility, seems more important than the centralising drive of an absolutist bureaucracy. That clearly raises awkward questions about exactly what type of state, or society, the *ancien régime* monarchy represented, and how closely it might be related to the modern state. Scholars such as Beik or Parker, who have been seeking to provide a reinvigorated Marxist analysis of monarchical absolutism, have no qualms about describing the seventeenth-century monarchy as essentially feudal. Moreover, they have largely abandoned the classic search for evidence of class struggle in favour

⁶³ *Ibid.*, pp. 287–97.

⁶⁴ Collins, *Classes, estates, and order in early modern Brittany* (Cambridge, 1995). The work of Bohanan, *Crown and nobility*, pp. 126–50, should also be consulted.

⁶⁵ Collins, *Classes, estates, and order*, p. 283. ⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 175.

of an analysis which posits the existence of a single ruling class working in harmony with the crown. Parker thus asserts that 'the [old regime] state does not simply serve ruling class interests but is actually an instrument in the hands of the ruling class'.⁶⁷

Without wishing to deny the important insights that the Marxist scholarly tradition has to offer, it is not necessary to be a disciple of Mousnier to have certain doubts.⁶⁸ There is a danger that a portrayal of Louis XIV's France as a feudal society, dominated by a monarchy working in tandem with a single powerful class, is both too static and oversimplified. Perhaps the greatest problem arises from the attempt to integrate aristocratic grandees, sword nobles, the robe nobility and the wider world of officeholders and financiers into a single coherent ruling class.⁶⁹ Although they undoubtedly had much in common, Beik emphasises their access 'to that most precious commodity, power',⁷⁰ they were also divided. Conflicts arose on account of, amongst other things, social status, corporate affiliation, profession, wealth and the actual extent of their political connections. It was precisely because *ancien régime* society was so fragmented that the monarchy was obliged to work with so many different social and institutional groups, whose composition varied markedly from one province to the next. Conflict amongst themselves and with the crown was endemic, and to try and conceptualise often distinct social and professional groups as a unique class seems needlessly restrictive and potentially misleading. As a result, many scholars, including this one, are happier to talk of elites as a more accurate representation of a complex society. Such an approach has the advantage of underlining the importance of balance and mutual reward in Louis XIV's ruling consensus, and of explaining the breakdown of that relationship in the eighteenth century.

There is also a danger that the revisionist argument more generally exaggerates the extent to which the monarchy was in thrall to vested interests. In part, this is the result of the strong emphasis on the *pays d'états* whose institutional structure facilitated the defence of local rights. The history of the *pays d'élections* in the same period has attracted less scholarly attention, and further research is required before we will have a fully rounded picture

⁶⁷ Parker, *Class and state*, pp. 26–7, 266.

⁶⁸ Throughout a long and distinguished career, Mousnier sought to refute a class analysis of seventeenth-century France, seeking instead to prove the existence of a society of orders. His *The institutions of France, 1598–1789*, 2 vols. (Chicago, 1979–84), provides a full exposition of his views, which have now largely fallen out of favour. M. Bush, ed., *Social orders and social classes in Europe since 1500. Studies in social stratification* (London, 1992), and R. Mettam, 'Two dimensional history: Mousnier and the ancien régime', *History* 66 (1981), 221–32, explain why.

⁶⁹ Beik, *Absolutism and society*, pp. 42–55, 335–9. ⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

of Louis XIV's government. Indeed, when confronted by a hostile European coalition after 1689, Louis XIV was forced to mobilise fiscal and military resources on a hitherto unimagined scale, a development with profound political and administrative consequences. One of the most striking results was the extension of direct taxation to the privileged classes. In his examination of the *dixième* tax levied by Louis XIV in 1710, Richard Bonney has questioned whether the monarchy's reputation for fiscal ineptitude is deserved when 'a wide-ranging new scheme of taxation could be "invented" relatively fast and, moreover, be made to work'.⁷¹ Bonney is conscious that there were social and political limits to what could be achieved, but Michael Kwass has recently made a compelling case for the argument that in the eighteenth century the privileged were far more heavily taxed than is often thought.⁷² Yet, as Kwass illustrates so ably, any benefits accruing from this success were more than outweighed by the resulting anger of the privileged taxpayers. Unlike the peasants, who had long borne the brunt of the fiscal burden, the privileged had the time, knowledge and above all the opportunity to protest, whether through simple petitions to the intendant, or by voicing their complaints in institutions such as the parlements or provincial estates, and in the process they made a vital contribution to an increasingly ideologically charged political debate.⁷³

PRIVILEGE REVISITED

A fresh approach to office-holding and privilege forms a further prong of the revisionist assault. The initial attack was directed against the concept of a reforming monarchy, vainly seeking to overcome the selfish obstructionism of privileged groups, notably the parlements.⁷⁴ That has been followed by a re-evaluation of the precise relationship between the monarchy and privilege, with historians such as David Bien, Gail Bossenga and William Doyle emphasising the complex and mutually reinforcing fiscal relationship

⁷¹ R. Bonney, '“Le secret de leurs familles”: the fiscal and social limits of Louis XIV's *dixième*', *French History* 7 (1993), 383–416.

⁷² M. Kwass, *Privilege and the politics of taxation in eighteenth-century France* (Cambridge, 2000). His work confirms a thesis first pioneered by C. B. A. Behrens, 'Nobles, privileges and taxes in France at the end of the ancien régime', *Economic History Review* 15 (1963), 451–75, and her 'A revision defended: nobles, privileges and taxes in France', *French Historical Studies* 9 (1976), 521–31. For a critique of her work, see G. Cavanaugh, 'Nobles, privileges and taxes in France: a revision reviewed', *French Historical Studies* 10 (1974), 681–92.

⁷³ Kwass, *Privilege and politics*, pp. 155–222, 311–19.

⁷⁴ W. Doyle, 'The parlements of France and the breakdown of the old régime, 1771–1788', *French Historical Studies* 6 (1970), 415–58, was especially influential in this regard.

which bound them together.⁷⁵ It is well known that the monarchy sold thousands of offices in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, raising millions of *livres* in the process. Venality was, however, about much more than selling offices because their purchasers were organised into corps and subsequently provided an irresistible target for further fundraising. The *paulette* was the most famous of these devices, with officers paying an annual fee of one-sixtieth of their official office price to guarantee the right to pass it on to their successors, a key step in the creation of an hereditary caste of officeholders which the crown could never afford to replace.

That did not prevent the state from continuing to draw money from the system. Having invested large sums in an office, and frequently the right to exercise a profession, the owners were understandably determined to protect what was now a significant portion of their patrimony. They were consequently extremely vulnerable to the extortionist tactics of the crown, which ruthlessly exploited expedients including *augmentation des gages*, and the threat, real or imagined, of creating new offices, or removing privileges from existing ones, to raise funds.⁷⁶ To protect its investment, the endangered corps was usually quick to propose an alternative, principally by offering a substantial sum to the royal treasury to buy off the threat. Once a deal had been struck, the king would magnanimously agree to confirm all of the corps' existing rights and privileges, thus providing the collateral it needed to borrow. Much the same tactics were employed against the provincial estates, town councils and even the Catholic church, and it has to be said that the system proved lucrative.⁷⁷ As Bien has demonstrated, the corps were using their own credit to raise money for the king at a rate far below what the monarchy could command on the open market.⁷⁸ Far from being locked in a life and death struggle with privileged interests, the monarchy continued to reinforce the system as it provided one of its most dependable sources of revenue.

A PROBLEM?

After a generation of revisionism, our understanding of *ancien régime* society and its institutions has been greatly enriched. The simple cliché of an

⁷⁵ See: D. Bien, 'Offices, corps, and a system of state credit', in K. M. Baker, ed., *The French revolution and the creation of modern political culture, vol. 1, The political culture of the old regime* (Oxford, 1987), pp. 89–114; G. Bossenga, *The politics of privilege: old regime and revolution in Lille* (Cambridge, 1991); and W. Doyle, *Venality. The sale of offices in eighteenth-century France* (Oxford, 1996).

⁷⁶ Doyle, *Venality*, pp. 26–57, and Bossenga, *Politics of privilege*, pp. 41–6, are rich in examples.

⁷⁷ M. Potter, 'Good offices: intermediation by corporate bodies in early modern French public finance', *The Journal of Economic History* 60 (2000), 599–626, examines the system in detail.

⁷⁸ Bien, 'Offices, corps', 106–12.

absolutist monarchy crushing opposition in the seventeenth century, only to succumb in turn to the nefarious effects of privileged opposition less than a hundred years later is largely discredited. Instead, what revisionists have demonstrated is that the government of Louis XIV continued to have much in common with that of its predecessors. What distinguished it was an ability to make old methods of rule function more effectively and the restoration of order was the result. Patronage was clearly central to the workings of the system, with the Sun King's relatively balanced distribution of royal largesse convincing the *grands* that their old rebelliousness was no longer fruitful or appropriate. In the provinces, especially the *pays d'états*, rather than falling under the jackboots of the intendants, local elites were drawn into the royal patronage network, reaping rewards of both a material and honorific nature.

As the Bretons discovered to their cost in 1675, opposition to the king was dangerous and unprofitable, and a willingness to wield both the carrot and the stick meant that when Louis XIV launched France on another cycle of wars no less costly than those of 1635–59 there was no repetition of the unrest seen during the Fronde. Many of the most influential revisionist texts are, therefore, happy to conclude midway through the reign of the Sun King, having answered in their own distinctive ways the question of how a previously disorderly kingdom was pacified.⁷⁹ Yet it was after 1688 that the monarchy faced its sternest test, and so far there has been little analysis of how the new 'absolutist' consensus met the challenge,⁸⁰ nor has the development of that relationship in the eighteenth century been scrutinised in any depth. A detailed history of the Estates General of Burgundy cannot hope to provide a definitive answer to these questions alone, but it does offer a valuable means of analysing the evolution of the relationship between the centre and the provinces, opening up wider debates about the nature of French government and society.

HISTORIANS AND THE PROVINCIAL ESTATES

The study of representative institutions in early modern Europe has a long and distinguished history and it continues to be the focus of stimulating debate.⁸¹ Much ink has been spilt disputing whether or not estates were

⁷⁹ This applies to the works of, among others, Beik, Bohanan, Bonney and Kettering cited above.

⁸⁰ One exception is Collins, *The state in early modern France*, pp. 140–6, 163–72, who has argued that 'The great period of reform and change under Louis XIV came not early in the reign, under Colbert and Louvois, but at its end', *ibid.*, p. 146.

⁸¹ The academic journal *Parliaments, Estates and Representation* provides a good example of continuing interest.

medieval relics, blocking the path to more modern political and administrative systems, or beacons of light in the absolutist darkness pointing towards a parliamentary future. Disputes about the role of the French provincial estates have been no less passionate. In 1844, Thomas fulminated:

the struggle of the memories of the past against the victorious influences of the present, the struggle of a decadent provincial administration against that of the monarchy in all its force, that is what I have seen everywhere in Burgundy under Louis XIV.⁸²

The Estates were the principal target of his ire, and to his credit Thomas was well aware that they had retained considerable power; he simply considered that regrettable. In his study of the Estates of Languedoc published at the end of the nineteenth century, Paul Rives declared:

when this administration so envied by the *pays d'élections* is examined closely, the legend disappears leaving a sad reality. Certainly the Estates formed a safeguard for the province, but a very weak and fragile one; powerless before the royal authority and often an obstacle in face of the legitimate demands of public opinion.⁸³

François Olivier-Martin later reached similar conclusions: 'the provincial estates, already badly suited to the conditions of the sixteenth century had become by the eighteenth century irreparably archaic, so that come the great crisis of the revolution, their decrepitude was immediately apparent'.⁸⁴

The Estates of Burgundy have frequently provided historians with a tempting example of supposed decadence. To be fair, despite his Whiggish attachment to the onward march of the forces of centralisation, Tocqueville was aware that the *pays d'états* could not be integrated comfortably into his grand schema. Instead, he inserted a rather cumbersome footnote, praising the administration of the provincial estates of Languedoc.⁸⁵ Unfortunately, he seems either to have missed or ignored the earlier work of Thomas, and claimed that 'true provincial self-government existed only in two provinces, Brittany and Languedoc. Elsewhere the estates had become mere shadows of their former selves, ineffectual and inert'.⁸⁶ Tocqueville may have been inspired by the opinion of the marquis d'Argenson, who in the 1730s had written that 'the Estates of Languedoc are episcopal and the best for the public good; those of Brittany are noble, mutinous and jealous; those of

⁸² Thomas, *Une province sous Louis XIV*, p. iv.

⁸³ P. Rives, *Étude sur les attributions financières des états provinciaux et en particulier des états de Languedoc au dix-huitième siècle* (Paris, 1885), p. 67.

⁸⁴ F. Olivier-Martin, *L'administration provinciale à la fin de l'ancien régime* (Paris, 1988), p. 309.

⁸⁵ Tocqueville, *Ancien régime and revolution*, pp. 229–39. ⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 229.