PART I

GOVERNMENT

CHAPTER I

POLITICS: THEORY AND PRACTICE

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EUROPE DOMINATED BY WAR

IN the summer of 1415 Henry V, king of England, invaded northern France. It might have been another of the lightning booty-raids of the previous century (the last had occurred in 1388), but once again an English force, as it withdrew, was overtaken by a French army in hot pursuit; once again, this time at Agincourt, the French suffered a disastrous defeat. The battle was to be the prelude to some forty years of warfare which brought both kingdoms in turn to the edge of the abyss. Yet the battle's importance is further highlighted by the realisation that it was one of a series which, within a period of a few years, was to spark off wars destined to become a characteristic of the new century. In 1410 Fernando, regent of Castile, had captured Antequera from the Moors of Granada, while in the same year the Teutonic knights had been routed at Grunwald (Tannenberg) by a Polish–Lithuanian coalition. In 1411 Sultan Süleyman eliminated his last dynastic rival at Kosmidion, thereby initiating the rebuilding of the Ottoman Empire, which Tamerlane's victory at the battle of Ankara, some ten years earlier, appeared to have permanently destroyed.

The list could be extended to form an unbroken line between the second phase of the Hundred Years War and the first of the Italian Wars, by way of the crusades against the Hussites and Charles the Bold's struggle against Louis XI, the Swiss, Lorraine and the Rhenish powers, quite apart from the civil conflicts in France, England and Castile. The Italian peninsula enjoyed relative peace only during the twenty or so years after the Peace of Lodi (1455), and between 1439 (the death of Albert II) and 1486 (Maximilian's partnership as ruler with his father, Frederick III of Habsburg) imperial power was unable to prevent internecine strife at the very heart of the Empire. In the east, two new powers, Muscovy and, above all, the Ottoman Empire, were putting eastern Europe to the sword.[1]

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[1] Genet (1991).

In an age dominated by war, fifteenth-century thinkers were obsessed with peace, and sought ways and means to restore harmony to Europe, identified with Christianity,[2] which, after the defeat suffered at Nicopolis (1396) was deemed in mortal danger from the advancing Turks. From Honoré Bouvet's *Arbre des batailles* and Christine de Pisan's *Livre de la paix*, by way of humanistic orations and treatises which punctuated the Italian Wars to one of the young Erasmus's first compositions, such works *pro pace* proliferated until they became a genre in their own right. The renewed outbreak of Anglo-French hostilities had aroused the Council of Constance, and Sigismund, king of the Romans, had undertaken a fruitless mission of peace (1416). Later in the century, George of Poděbrady, king of Bohemia, with the help of the humanist, Antonio Marini, was to draw up a visionary 'plan for a universal peace',[3] in fact merely a scheme for crushing the offensive of Pope Pius II (the humanist Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini) against the Czech Utraquists. This was the very same Pius who succeeded in galvanising into action some of the faithful to mount a crusade, a scheme aborted by his own death.[4]

CATEGORIES OF POLITICAL POWER

Europe comprised an involved network of rival and competitive states. In his *Mémoires* (the earliest in a genre destined to achieve rapid popularity), Philippe de Commynes, seeking to draw upon his personal experience in order to understand how 'nations' prospered or declined, depicted a ruthless world of warring princes, some wise, others foolish, surrounded by their counsellors, armed only with their knowledge of politics. The consequence in the fifteenth century was obvious; the annihilation of many minor powers, and thus the formation of a 'simpler' political map of Europe.[5] In western Christendom the great kingdoms, whose political organisation had in large measure progressed beyond the merely feudal, finally achieved stability. This had been reached in the British Isles (with the exception of Ireland), where the kingdom of Scotland was cohesive enough to withstand the lengthy captivity of its monarch, James I, and an almost endless succession of minors on the throne. France, once the English attempt at conquest had failed and the Burgundian state had collapsed, was left stronger and more united than she had ever been. Once Brittany was incorporated, if not integrated, into the kingdom in 1491, there was only one important principality left by the time of Louis XII's accession in 1498, that of the dukes of Bourbon, while the spoils from the houses of Armagnac, Anjou (Anjou itself, Barrois, Provence) and Burgundy had enlarged the kingdom. In Spain the union of the dynasties of Aragon and Castile

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[2] Hay (1968).   [3] Messler (1973).   [4] Housley (1992).   [5] Tilly (1990).

allowed the new monarchy to absorb the Moorish kingdom of Granada, deemed so precious a political asset that it was speedily and brutally enhanced by the expulsion of the Jews (1492) and of the *mudejares* (1499). Thus the first 'modern states' had attained their majority.

The tendency to concentrate authority was a general one and could also be observed in those regions where other types of state pertained. At the end of the century the Italian peninsula was essentially divided into six regional states, only two of which, Savoy and Naples, had organisations comparable to those of the monarchies of western Europe. Florence, Milan and Venice were, at least to some extent, city-states, while during the fourteenth century the papal states had created a model principality which was astonishingly advanced. In the Empire, the promotion of dynastic marriages and the observance of rigid rules against the division of patrimony strengthened territorial principalities in, for example, Bavaria, Brandenburg, the Palatinate, Saxony and Württemberg. There the greatest successes were those recorded at the end of the century by the emperor-elect, Maximilian, who managed both to unite all the Habsburg territories and to realise his claims to a larger share of the Burgundian inheri-tance (Flanders, Artois, Franche-Comté and lands in the Low Countries). Maximilian, however, was always handicapped financially by the lack of a fiscal system comparable to that of the 'modern states': his status was that of supreme arbitrator in the conflicts and opposing interests of minor states. These were not simply a host of principalities; they included towns and leagues of towns, of nobles and of various communities, of which one at least, the Swiss Confederation, had achieved *de facto* independence.

On the fringes of the Empire, in Scandinavia, Hungary, Poland and, at the end of the century, even in Bohemia, yet another type of state was to be found, which might be termed 'extended', since, at times, monarchical power was embodied in a dynasty which transcended frontiers (Anjou, Luxemburg and Jagiełło); monarchies, certainly, but where royal power was curtailed by a military nobility which was the real guardian of the nation's consciousness and made these states into 'noble republics'. There the towns, from the Hanseatic Bergen to the 'Saxon' towns of the Siebenburg, were often essen-tially 'foreign', populated by Jews and/or Germans, and there, too, the peas-antry tended to retreat from liberty into a 'new' serfdom. The fact that the Jagiełło family, through its different branches, extended its power from Poland and Lithuania to Hungary and Bohemia should not lead to a mis-understanding of the real nature of these states, which were sometimes pow-erful in military terms.

The costs of war were enormous and rising, and once field artillery had become indispensable, the cost was even further advanced. Spurred on by the vital necessity to generate an ever-increasing amount of capital, in the second

half of the thirteenth century the growing 'modern states'[6] of western Europe had developed a means of raising money which guaranteed more abundant revenues than before:[7] national taxation, more or less by consent, amassed for warfare a growing percentage of their subjects' income and goods. From 1449 France was to be provided with a permanent professional army by this means.[8] This system of taxation allowed the 'modern states' to survive and prosper, despite cut-throat opposition. Taxation was the diversion of private means for the public good, and was plainly recognised as such; it was because the king protected his subjects' private assets that he could, in their own interest, ask them to contribute to their defence in time of need. As the revenues of these societies increased, so they functioned more effectively as states.[9]

It was in the 'modern states' of western Christendom that the 'internal' concentration of power developed most rapidly, since the relative efficiency of their state machinery, however modest, made it possible to compete success- fully both with those at the lower end of the power scale (the lords of the manor) and with those of middling authority (the semi-autonomous towns and principalities). Here judicial institutions, and therefore the law, played a determining role.[10] This development, which had reached different stages in every country (being far advanced in England, less so in France, much less so in the Iberian kingdoms), was more easily discernible in the 'modern states', yet was also taking place, if at a slower rate, among the territorial principalities of the Empire and in the Italian peninsula. Even so, a host of competing author- ities were left to perpetuate those seeking to legitimise and justify their very existence. These different levels of authority, superimposed one above the other, combined, with the co-existence of various types of state, to produce in Europe, in spite of the two-pronged impetus towards consolidation outlined above, an extremely complex and varied power structure.

THE ELEMENTS OF POLITICAL DIALOGUE

The 'modern states' of western Christendom were characterised by the provi- sion of substantial revenues derived from national taxation raised by consent. The *sine qua non* of this type of financial system was the existence, and the satis- factory functioning, of a certain level of dialogue between the prince and his subjects, in general by way of representative institutions. Dialogue, political intercourse between prince and subjects, was essential to the modern state, and indeed inseparable from it, since it made taxation possible by legalising it. The

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[6] Genet (1990), pp. 261–81, and (1992); Blockmans (1993).
[7] Genet and Le Mené (1987); Bonney (1995).   [8] Contamine (1992), pp. 198–208.
[9] Black (1992), pp. 186–91, discussing Guenée (1991) and Reynolds (1984).
[10] Kaeuper (1988); Gouron and Rigaudière (1988); Krynen and Rigaudière (1992).

theoretical basis of this dialogue was borrowed from law, principally Roman law (the key concepts being necessity, consent and representation), from theology (political society, the *politia*, as a mystical body of which the king was head), and from classical philosophy (the very concept of the *res publica*, the *bien commun* or commonweal). In the practice of dialogue, however, none of these elements was serviceable in its original form. Thus, just as modern states had borrowed the theoretical foundations of political dialogue so, too, they borrowed the ways and means to put the theory into practice from institutions already in existence – the Church or towns, particularly Italian city-states which had already had to prove themselves as societies and bodies politic.

Both theory and practice needed adapting to the particular political society of each state on at least two levels. Though official parlance might well conjure up the vision of a collectivity aiming to include all adult males without discrimination, in practice dialogue was limited to a restricted political society which was actually consulted through representative institutions, the nobility and urban oligarchies,[11] but was dominated by the first whose outlook reflected the feudal and military ethic. On a different level, however, the dialogue was not restricted to these groups. The charters of manumission granted to the English rebels of 1381, the *ordonnances* which resulted from the demonstrations of the Parisian populace led by the butcher, Simon Caboche, in 1413, and the privileges granted by Mary of Burgundy in 1477 in response to the uprising by the people of Ghent[12] represented an enlargement of the political arena which already had a long history in the towns of Italy.

These trends were noted by contemporaries, who realised how rivalries were likely to lead to conflict. The tensions between the 'national' and the 'international' (Christendom, let us say) were recognised by theorists who, for example, devoted time to defining what an ambassador was in legal terms.[13] They were evident, too, in works aimed at a more general readership, witness the following conversation between an English and a French knight. To the Frenchman's remark that the Englishman was a sinner for waging an unjust war, the Englishman replied that he considered just 'everything commanded by the prince on the advice of his prelates and barons'. 'Then you are all sinners', retorted the Frenchman.[14] However, in an age when power was increasingly concentrated in the hands of the 'prince' (who might be an anointed king, a successful *condottiere* or a crafty *signore*), it needed a perceptive observer to note the differences between the societies and regimes which they governed. Fifteenth-century man marvelled at the rise and fall of 'princes', the theme of 'Fortune' enjoying an astonishing vogue. The character and magnificence of

[11] Contamine (1989); Bulst and Genet (1988).
[12] *L'ordonnance cabochienne*; Blockmans (1985).   [13] Arabeyre (1990).
[14] In Gerson, *Opera omnia*, IV, cols. 844–9, quoted by Guenée (1987), pp. 295–7.

princes, their virtues and vices, the degree of trust and loyalty they deserved, the defence, in the face of princely claims, of 'usages, customs and liberties' were the focus of much discussion. Modern state or not, it was the prince who polarised political opinions, dialogue and outlook.

THE SYMBOLISM OF POLITICS

Since the dialogue was public, and political society embraced groups whose level of culture was not high, any review of the history of political ideas and attitudes must avoid focusing too much on the 'great works' written for a circumscribed elite; as important is the study of their circulation and the intellectual milieu from which they derived.[15] The dissemination of a political message did not depend on words alone; coins, medals, seals, flags and emblems were ubiquitous and pregnant with meaning. Those celestial symbols, the French royal lilies which could be seen everywhere, were, because of their blue and gold hue (first in the hierarchy of colours), symbolic of the elect who could not be touched without sacrilege or *lèse majesté*.[16] Every king, every prince had his own 'political' church, starting with that housing the tombs of his dynasty: Westminster, Saint-Denis, the Charterhouses of Champmol, near Dijon, Miraflorès, Toledo cathedral and Batalha all testify to an identical concern. Complex iconographical schemes established therein a physical, visual, instantly perceptible link between a dynasty, its divine protectors and a whole gamut of religious and political principles.

Rites and ceremonies also played their part. Epitomising power, witnessed by an attentive audience, they became complex rituals, given tangible expression as dramatic presentations overlaid with symbolism. As both Joan of Arc and her contemporary, the Englishman, John, duke of Bedford, both fully realised, the anointing of the king of France gave legitimacy to his royalty in a visible and indisputable form. Royal progresses were occasions for celebrations. The ritual of the French king's *entrée* turned into a sort of Corpus Christi procession, when the king processed beneath a canopy exactly as did the Body of Christ, whose feast was one of the great liturgical inventions of the late Middle Ages which, what is more, had taken on civic, and therefore political, connotations.[17] In France the *lit de justice* became a more and more impressive occasion, providing opportunities for presenting the state in all its pomp, the monarch occupying centre stage.[18] Even the most complicated political theology, the concept of the king's two bodies, was demystified by being acted out in public. In a royal funeral cortège the monarch's mortal remains were accompa-

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[15] Skinner (1978), pp. x–xi. [16] Beaune (1985), pp. 233–63; see Pastoureau (n.d.), pp. 22–4.
[17] Guenée and Lehoux (1968), pp. 15–18; Rubin (1991). [18] Hanley (1983); Vale (1974).

nied by a magnificent effigy to show that, although the king was dead, he was none the less immortal, since a king never died.[19] In all these great rituals, revolving around the king's person, the spectators' role was allotted to the people. Some of these ceremonies brought the prince into very close proximity with his subjects, even the lowliest of them: on important liturgical feast days the dukes of Brabant shared their meal with hundreds of the poor and, when in Brussels at Pentecost, with the city's weavers.[20] State and civil ritual was frequently combined, thus enabling the guilds of London to play a key role in English royal progresses and ceremonies. Such dramatic events stirred the emotions and memories, and gave to those participating the feeling of belonging to a single political society.

Things were different on the Italian peninsula.[21] There, princes, lacking the authority derived from feudal roots, had to turn to their advantage those festivals and ceremonies through which, in an insecure world, cities affirmed their identity. When the doge of Venice lit a candle on the high altar of St Mark's basilica on 25 April each year, he was demonstrating both the sacred nature of his office and the close ties between the city and its patron saint. All Italian cities had similar kinds of festivals at all levels of society, the carnival being a particularly flourishing ritual with its emphasis on 'the world turned upside down', hence on egalitarianism.

By introducing changes into the traditional processions in Florence, Lorenzo the Magnificent undermined the republican order by downgrading the position of the patricians, the pillars of society, as well as by encouraging the carnival's excesses. Since, in a non-feudal society, it was pointless to stress the 'contract' between the prince and his subjects, a different theme was emphasised: the mystery and secrecy surrounding his authority, the source of both his strength and wisdom, testimony and consequence of his wisdom. Hence was devised a subtle interplay between the *vita activa* and the *vita contemplativa*, a concept still in its infancy among the monarchies of western Europe. The object of Mantegna's carefully thought out symbolism in *The Gonzago Court*, painted in Mantua between 1465 and 1475 and undoubtedly based on a scheme taken from Pliny's *Panegyricus* to Trajan, was to show that the prince alone was the embodiment of good government, while at the same time he retained an enigmatic quality, the prerequisite of that government, which could not be revealed to his subjects.[22]

[19] Kantorowicz (1957), pp. 422–3.   [20] Uyttebrouck (1992).
[21] Muir (1981); Trexler (1980); see Klapisch-Zuber (1985).   [22] Arasse (1985).

TEXTS AND SPEECHES: POLITICAL THEORY AND PRACTICE

It would be a mistake to believe that only educated elites read and understood texts; in the same way the pictures, gestures and spoken words known to us are indicative of more than a mass oral culture. Some rituals showed evidence of erudition. The *entrée* of Charles VIII into Vienne in 1490 demonstrated how images and concepts taken from Italian humanism were being introduced: Hercules personified the French king liberating the garden of Atlas from a serpent resembling the dragon, 'that wishes to reside in Brittany'.[23] Conversely, other works had a popular appeal. Lollardy and Hussitism gave birth to a vernacular literature targeted less at converts themselves than at those responsible for their systematic instruction. In 1450, English rebels had at least two notaries draw up copies of their demands, and it is known that Sir John Fastolf sent a servant to obtain one. Even rebel princes conducted advance publicity in the form of letters and proclamations. Political propaganda was becoming a well-established practice, with its own techniques, of which one was the use of the written word. Political prophecy, often irrational, helped to stir up the debate about government; astrology was a princely enthusiasm, and the proliferation of mystics bearing supposedly divine messages, of whom Joan of Arc was the most remarkable, was a characteristic of this age.

Speeches, in particular sermons, could convey unequivocal declarations of political thought. At the start of an English parliamentary session, members were treated to a speech-sermon by the chancellor, usually an ecclesiastic,[24] while those attending the opening of the French estates general might hear allocutions from such distinguished persons as Jean Juvénal des Ursins.[25] Nor was the practice unknown whereby the *Reichstag* would be addressed, such as it was by the pope's representative, Nicholas of Cusa at Frankfurt in 1442.[26]

The 'political speeches' thus delivered, sometimes in the heat of debate, often expressed political ideas.[27] Some, such as those of Jean Gerson, were written down and circulated; a version of the address given by Jean Petit to justify the assassination of Louis of Orleans on behalf of John, duke of Burgundy, was later to be included in Enguerrand de Monstrelet's chronicle.[28] These, and many others, reveal close links with theoretical texts which, without being direct descendants of political ideas, bear witness to the vigour of their circulation. 'In the first place the sovereign people created kings by its vote', pronounced Philippe Pot, echoing 'a king exists by the will of the people' (*rex*

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[23] Guenée and Lehoux (1968), pp. 295–306.   [24] Chrimes (1936).

[25] Juvénal des Ursins, *Ecrits politiques*, II, pp. 409–49.

[26] *Deutsche Reichstagsakten*, XV:2, pp. 639–46 and 874–6; XVI:2, pp. 407–32 and 539–43; see also Angermeier (1984); Isenmann (1990).   [27] Masselin, *Journal*, pp. 147–57.

[28] Guenée (1992).