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Michel ANTOINE, *Louis XV*, Paris (Fayard) 1989, 1049 p.

On 26 January 1736 a police informer in Paris reported that it was being said that Louis XV knew nothing about government. Nearly four years later, on 2 November 1739, Earl Waldegrave, the British envoy, reported that it looked as though Louis *will prefer a loitering lazy life to any ambitious views*. Next year he added, *as to His Christian Majesty, it is more for form's sake that we wait on him than anything else, for with regard to public affairs, our seeing him or not is much for the same*. The king was still a young man, but he had not been a minor for many years and was already closely associated with an image that was to persist until today, that of a pleasure-seeking man who was a somewhat unimpressive, not to say feckless, monarch. Louis XV is associated in the popular mind with women, especially Pompadour and Du Barry, and, if at all with public events, with the defeats of the Seven Years' War, Damiens' assassination attempt and the Maupeou reforms. He is commonly contrasted with the self-consciously »enlightened despots«, Frederick II, Catherine II and Joseph II. The first two are commonly referred to as great, a description that would not appear inappropriate for Louis XIV or Napoleon, but that seems completely out of place for Louis XV, despite the equestrian statue of him unveiled in 1763, as it does for his grandson Louis XVI.

Louis XV's contemporary reputation suffered because, like George I, George II and Sir Robert Walpole, but unlike Frederick II and Catherine II, he did not patronise fashionable writers; but also because many of these writers favoured, from a distance, the bold royal modernisers of central and eastern Europe, while failing to appreciate the difficulties of political management and governmental reform in the more complex societies of western Europe.

Michel Antoine offers a scholarly and important account, that is illuminated by the perspectives gained through his great knowledge of the French archives of the period and through his significant work on French administration. His research has not been eased by major lacunae in the archives: the destruction of those of the chancellery and the disappearance of most of Louis' letters. Louis XV built up a personal archive at Versailles, but it has not survived. Nevertheless, the surviving administrative records are extensive and they can be supplemented by contemporary writers who were interested in Louis' actions and personality. Antoine is therefore able to offer the biography of a man who was king for 59 years. He has not written an history of France under Louis' reign, a successor to Goubert's »Louis XIV and Twenty Million Frenchmen«, but has produced a study of how Louis XV exercised his role as king that will be essential reading for all historians of eighteenth-century France.

This is not simply a political life. There are fascinating chapters on Louis as king and man, husband, father and lover and on his artistic patronage. However, much of the book is a study of Louis as ruler in which the king is placed firmly in an administrative and political context. Antoine's positive reappraisal of Louis complements recent studies of the »enlightenment despots« which have stressed the limited nature of their achievements. While allied to Louis, neither Frederick II nor Joseph II felt that he was sufficiently firm with his domestic opponents, but their success in this respect should not be overrated and it was easy to offer advice from a distance. Louis was certainly aware that it was possible to think in terms of comparable struggles over the nature of royal authority. In 1771 he thanked Charles III for his concern at the maintenance of his authority at a time of »domestic embarrassments caused by my *Parlements* and for »his generous offer of help, if it was necessary, in coping with the disobedience of the badly intentioned«. The following year Louis saw Gustavus III's coup in Sweden as a victory for monarchical authority and compared it to his own position.

And yet Antoine shows that it would be as inappropriate to present Louis' reign simply in terms of domestic battles, whether with *Parlements* or Jansenists, as it would be think of his foreign policy simply in terms of war. Antoine describes the problems Louis faced, but it is clear that it is mistaken to view his long reign as a prelude to revolution. Antoine argues that

during the Seven Years' War ›Les multiples agressions des cours supérieures contre son autorité ont créé un front intérieur, aussi aventureux que les théâtres d'opérations extérieurs et même plus actif, car on n'y prenait point de quartiers d'hiver‹ (p. 753), but it is worth stressing that the domestic political problems the king faced were episodic in their intensity. In the case of the so-called Maupeou Revolution the virulence of the public debate is possibly misleading. The government succeeded in persuading large numbers of judges to co-operate in the new courts, and, despite the charges of ministerial despotism, did not abolish the right of registration and remonstrance and did not create a new government order. Although there were prominent episodes of dispute, there were also less spectacular practices and periods of co-operation. The *Parlements* and the Estates provided important support in the judicial, financial and administrative spheres.

Differences over political objectives and methods were scarcely unique to Louis XV's France. They should be regarded as an integral, not an extraneous, aspect of government in a society where the limited institutional expression of political issues ensured that they were contested in an administrative context. It was not simply central government that was affected by judicial resistance and covert obstruction: these were the normal methods by which the institutions of ancien régime France contested unwelcome demands from any higher authority. It is only if central government is assumed to have required and sought uncontested power and authority, that the *Parlements* and Estates can be presented as dangerous obstacles. This was not, however, the objective of a monarchy that sought to respect the law, neither was it practical in the absence of other institutions that might serve, however imperfectly, to present and represent views and interests that the central government had to consider. There was no common constitutional form for the European monarchies of the period, no ideal model to which they sought to approximate. To condemn France because the *Parlements* and Estates occupied a position that did not exist in Russia would be foolish, though, as Antoine shows in this brilliant and important book, they made the metier of kingship very difficult.

Jeremy BLACK, Durham

Martine SONNET, *L'éducation des filles au temps des Lumières*. Préface de Daniel ROCHE, Paris (Les éditions du CERF) 1987, 354 S.

Studien zur historischen Situation der Frauen kommen aus zwei Lagern: dem feministischen mit Klagen über Ungerechtigkeiten Frauen gegenüber – und aus einem objektiv um die Thematik bemühten, bei dem es allein um die wissenschaftliche Aufarbeitung des ›Sujets‹ geht. Martine Sonnets Untersuchung gehört zu letzteren. Ihre solide Kenntnis weit verstreuten Archivmaterials und ihre möglichst »ver«-urteilsfreien Beschreibungen haben ein Werk hervorgebracht, das uns recht vollständig über die institutionelle Ausbildung der Mädchen in Paris zur Zeit der Aufklärung unterrichtet. Dabei ist sie keineswegs leidenschaftslos. Ihr Buch ist durch architektonische Zeichnungen und Inventarlisten sowie durch ihre lebendige Charakterisierung von Personengruppen anschaulich gestaltet. Man spürt die Faszination, die der Forschungsgegenstand umso mehr bekam, je tiefer sie Einblick in die Dokumente erhielt.

In einer Einführung macht die Autorin deutlich, daß über die Ausbildung der Mädchen bis zum 17. Jahrhundert nur wenige Dokumente existieren und daß dies nur im Vergleich mit der Ausbildung der Jungen zu der der Mädchen Auskunft geben. Die religiösen und privaten Erziehungsgesellschaften waren darauf bedacht, die Unterschiede der Geschlechter aufrechtzuerhalten. Nur ein Sechstel aller lernwilligen Schülerinnen fand überhaupt Platz in einer Bildungsinstitution.

Im Hauptteil geht es um das tägliche Leben in den Mädchenschulen von Paris zur Zeit der Aufklärung, um Organisationsformen, Lerninhalte, die Standeszugehörigkeit der Schülerinnen. Mit zahlreichen Statistiken belegt die Autorin, welche weltlichen und religiösen Institu-