
H-France Review Vol. 14 (July 2014), No. 114

William Doyle, *France and the Age of Revolution: Regimes Old and New from Louis XIV to Napoleon Bonaparte*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2013. vii + 232 pp. Notes and index. \$72.00 U.S. (cl). ISBN 978-1-78076-444-3; \$24.13 (pb). ISBN 978-1-78076-445-0.

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In this collection of thirteen essays, William Doyle examines the sale of offices, the revolutionary transformation and the Napoleonic regime. He adds to his book on venality by examining the practice's critics. In 1659, Colbert made the case to Mazarin that if the crown rooted venality out of the government, the office holders would no longer live off of the estimated 20,000,000 *livres* taken every year from the people. Freeing royal subjects from this burden would afford them additional means to pay taxes. Colbert calculated that over 20,000 magistrates who lived from offices would then add to the well-being of the kingdom by turning to trade, manufactures, agriculture and war. Moreover, since office holders generally enjoyed privileges, the abolition of venality would expand the tax base. Colbert therefore developed a plan to reimburse the majority of venal offices in three to four years.

Colbert did not contemplate the abolition of either the parlements or the office holders' right of tenure. He focused rather on the economic and financial health of the monarchy, which he hoped to improve by preventing the diversion of capital from productive investments into parasitic offices. In 1670, he claimed to have reimbursed 20,000 offices, which, if verified by historians, would constitute the greatest reduction of venality prior the Revolution. Colbert, Doyle writes, also halted the rise in the price of offices in the Parlement for the first time since 1604, though it would be nice to know whether this trend resulted from the policies to diminish venality or through the ensuing flood of offices sold to finance Louis XIV's wars.^[1] Doyle acknowledges that the wars put an end to Colbert's plans to lessen the burden of office holding on the society and economy. Although Colbert never gave up the conviction that offices and privileges ought to diminish, he recognized that large-scale warfare could not be financed without recourse to the financial expedient of venality.

Writings such as those of Colbert about the problems of venality appeared throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but Doyle notes that they ceased during the Enlightenment. Eighteenth-century authors only referred to the sale of offices incidentally. Everyone recognized venality as an appalling form of government but also appreciated the enormous sums invested in offices. It was universally accepted that the king could not suppress offices without reimbursing the owners. The whole world knew that the king could never reimburse all, or even a large number, of the incumbents. Doyle suspects that writers therefore saw little reason to take up a subject everyone assumed would endure forever.

Doyle shows that, ironically, the most perceptive remarks on venality came from Montesquieu's voice in the wilderness favoring it. That author argued in his *Spirit of the Laws* that venality was the best imaginable means of distributing public offices in a monarchy, for in a patrimonial regime of this sort, nepotism, clientage and favoritism, the whims, in a word, of the king and his courtiers were the only other means of allocating posts. At least hereditary offices protected public functions from the manipulations of the royal court.

Doyle does not discuss his decision to focus exclusively on published essays for the reading public. A consideration of the administrative documents of the monarchy would offer a fuller perspective on upper class attitudes toward venality. Doyle himself has shown in previous books the concerns of privileged elites about royal policies—reforms, office sales, administrative rearrangements, etc.—liable to encroach upon the jurisdictions of their posts. Documents in the departmental archives of the intendancies, showing the attachment of members of the bourgeoisie and nobility to their property rights over branches of the royal administration, certainly outnumber the published essays critical of venality.[2]

Relatedly and comparatively, Doyle argues that in England, Old Corruption—the distribution of jobs, sinecures and pensions to build Parliamentary majorities—served the same function as did venality in France. Both enabled rulers with limited coercive powers to take the wealth of their subjects, in a consensual manner, and increase the power of the state. Venality permitted Richelieu and Louis XIV to sustain wars on several fronts, and Old Corruption facilitated the credit rating and cheap loans behind the conquest of the British Empire.

Doyle maintains that although the public had always decried venality and Old Corruption as grotesque ways of running the government, these practices only came to an end when they lost their usefulness. Doyle argued in his book on venality that the sale of offices formed a progressively less significant means of raising revenue for war until it paled in comparison to the loans raised on the credit of the municipality of Paris (*Hotél de Ville*) at the time of the Seven Year's War.[3] In England, party politics, which by 1820 had lost the stigma of disloyalty, permitted governments to form majorities in Parliament by drawing on the convictions of partisans and, in this way, to dispense with their reliance on patronage. Party politics also made patronage harder to sustain and conceal. The Parliamentary opposition sought to detect corruption and use it to undermine the credibility of the government in hopes of winning subsequent elections. Once the opposition came to power, it too had to avoid using patronage lest it succumb to the same charges of corruption.

While Doyle offers a valuable perspective on the finances of France and Britain, his examination of the two states together in the same essay obscures fundamental differences between them. The number of offices, together with their capital value, grew into an eradicable part of the state in seventeenth-century France. The crown built up a dependent patrimonial following of nobles and clergymen whose jurisdictions ultimately depended on the king's ability to enforce them. By contrast, the landed classes of England, represented in Parliament, stifled such independent means of raising revenue. The Civil War and Glorious Revolution prevented the English kings from selling offices or commercial monopolies, or from offering patronage through the Anglican Church, and thus made it impossible for the crown to forge independent social bases of power.

Doyle highlights the surprising fact that the high command of the English army remained open to purchase. The final victory over Napoleon reinforced faith in what was at that time the last venally-officered army in Europe. Only the problems encountered during the Crimean War proved the ineffectiveness of a venal military and led to its eventual abolition in 1871. Though England's venal military would seem to resemble old regime France, it actually demonstrates a fundamental difference. The landed classes of England, having cut short the development of absolutism in the early 1640s, inadvertently opened the way for the independent army of the Commonwealth to destroy the episcopal hierarchy, the House of Lords and the monarchy, and widen religious toleration. Gentry property owners had an ingrained aversion to such radical policies. After reasserting their sovereignty in 1688, they allowed venality to permeate the military for nearly two hundred years as an obstacle to the return of a bureaucratic army of conscripts liable to escape their control.[4]

In three essays on the revolutionary transformation in France, Doyle gives prominence to the argument he originally made in 1980 in his influential synthetic work on the origins of the Revolution.[5] Whereas many scholars, after revisionism's assault on the Marxist interpretation, eagerly embraced

cultural and linguistic explanations, Doyle questions whether an alternative to the economic and social account was ever needed. The revolutionary transformation, Doyle reaffirms, resulted from contingent events rather than deep-seated causes. The Revolution itself proved transformative by opening new possibilities. The decisions to intervene in the American War of Independence, finance it without additional direct taxes, present a comprehensive reform plan to an Assembly of Notables, and pursue other courses of action which people could have decided not to pursue, resulted in opportunities to make previously unimaginable changes. Prior to 1789, for example, none of the critics of venality of office could ever have imagined bringing this fundamental feature of the monarchy to an end.

In this regard, Doyle argues against the idea that the French people had regarded the king as sacred but then ceased to do so over the course of the eighteenth century. Most people never had any knowledge of the doctrinal elements of royal holiness. They accepted the monarchy as the normal form of government and revered the king in customary ways. The *cahiers de doléances* and the rhetoric of the pre-revolution showed that Louis XVI had not been discredited by the disreputable authoritarian conduct of his predecessor. He enjoyed popularity and even majesty in the eyes of his people. In 1789, not even the monarchy's most radical subjects dreamed of abolishing it. The goal was to turn an absolute monarchy into a constitutional one. The religious issue, which resulted from day-to-day decisions taken in the Constituent Assembly, turned the Revolution against the king. Louis XVI avoided confession and attendance at masses performed by the constitutional clergy, and this religious dilemma led to his decision to flee the country after the pope objected to the new ecclesiastical constitution, galvanizing previously marginal sentiments opposed to monarchy.

Doyle argues in the final essays that Napoleon consolidated the work of the Revolution. Napoleon's reputation as the one responsible for rolling back its accomplishments comes from its confusion with Jacobinism. That regime, Doyle argues, used terror, sullied the reputation of republicanism in Europe for generations and achieved nothing of lasting value. The other regimes of the 1790s, like Napoleon's, were committed to restricting political participation to men of property. In this sense, Napoleon provided the stability pursued by all revolutionaries apart from the Jacobins. He completed the Civil Code, begun under the revolutionary administrations, by presiding over several meetings of the commission for the codification of the law and by prodding its members to complete their work. He felt secure in his ability to rule and had no fear of promoting men of ability to positions of power. Napoleon's imperial hierarchy of titles did not contradict the principle of meritocracy. He hoped his aristocracy would become more prestigious than the old one and supplant it. The new imperial titles conferred no fiscal privileges or automatic rights of inheritance. They were often held by the highest taxpayers. In conquered territories, his administrators felt pride in the Revolution and established its *départements*, uniform taxes and tariffs, conscription, Civil Code, law courts and Concordat (in Catholic areas) in the parts of Italy, Germany and the Netherlands annexed by France. In all of these ways, Napoleon sealed the destruction of the Old Regime, permanently rationalized the state, and spread this work to much of Europe and the world.

Although Doyle makes a convincing defense of the Napoleonic regime, this reviewer cannot help but observe its rather restrictive assessment of the Revolution. In this enumeration of the Revolution's legacies, Doyle does not acknowledge the radical promise of democracy, which has inspired republicans, socialists, feminists, environmentalists, civil-rights and peace activists down to this day. Yet, this observation has more to do with political inclinations than with research and analysis. On these grounds, Doyle has few rivals in the profession, and this book will consolidate his considerable and well-deserved influence on the study and teaching of the Old Regime and French Revolution.

NOTES

[1] John J. Hurt, *Louis XIV and the Parlements: The Assertion of Royal Authority* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), p. 189.

[2] William Doyle, "Introduction" and "Politics: Louis XIV" in *Old Regime France*, ed. William Doyle (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 2, 173; Idem., *Venality: The Sale of Offices in Eighteenth-Century France* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), p. 282. The attachment of the upper classes to their venal offices also appears in Sharon Kettering, *Judicial Politics and Urban Revolt in Seventeenth-Century France: The Parlement of Aix, 1629-1659* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), pp. 48-49; John Bosher, *French Finances 1770-1795: From Business to Bureaucracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), p. 307; and Lucien Lachaze, *Les États provinciaux de l'ancienne France et la question des états provinciaux aux xvii^e et xviii^e siècles: L'Assemblée provinciale du Berri sous Louis XVI* (Paris: Arthur Rousseau, 1909), pp. 353-4, 359-60.

[3] Doyle, *Venality*, pp. 99-100.

[4] Robert Brenner, *Merchants and Revolution: Commercial Change, Political Conflict, and London's Overseas Traders, 1550-1653* (1993; reprint, London: Verso, 2003), pp. 199, 218, 634, 665, 679, 689-90; Christopher Hill, *The Century of Revolution 1603-1714* (1961; reprint, New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1980), pp. 22-30, 90, 97, 112, 132, 136, 140-1, 224-5.

[5] William Doyle, *Origins of the French Revolution* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1980).

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ISSN 1553-9172

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