

RULE (John C.) and TROTTER (Ben). *A world of paper : Louis XIV, Colbert de Torcy, and the rise of the information state*. Montréal/Kingston, McGill/Queen's University Press: 1 volume, 24 cm., 829 p., il. and maps. Price: \$ 49,95. ISBN 9780773543706.

John C. Rule (1929-2013) was a respected Canadian early modern historian, with a predilection for the French foreign office at the end of the Grand Siècle (1638-1715)¹. Rule worked with *inter alia* Ragnhild Hatton (1913-1995), iconic professor of diplomatic history at the London School of Economics². The author expired before the manuscript was finished, but invited his former doctoral student Ben S. Trotter to finish the work and publish the monograph. *A World of Paper* constitutes the culmination of the author's career-long interest in Jean-Baptiste Colbert de Torcy (1665-1746), nephew of Louis XIV's most famous controller-general of finances, but foremost renowned for his unequalled mastery of diplomacy.

Rule's approach situates the impressive activity of the *bureaux des affaires étrangères*³, Torcy's administration, in the general historical sociology of bureaucracy, linking his findings to the theories of Max Weber or Peter Burke⁴. In contrast to earlier works, Rule combines both a more conceptual approach, linked to social science -of interdisciplinary relevance-, and a synthesis on French diplomacy from the Nine Years War (1688-1697)⁵ to the War of the Spanish Succession (1701-1714)⁶. The author clearly frames the proceedings of French bureaucrats and diplomats as an information process. For diplomats and bureaucrats in the Grand Siècle, letters and memoranda were not seen as 'proof to be produced when verifying a right or a claim', but 'instead records of past negotiations to be ransacked for information and precedents to be woven into arguments to drive and shape current negotiations.' (321)

Rule sees Louis XIV's state as closer to present-day public administration than the standard concept of absolutism would present (4). Bureaucratic process is at the heart of the book, giving 'insight into the early professionalization of what are now commonly called 'knowledge workers' (7) or 'informal brain trust' (170) of experts, scholars and literary figures' (10). Rule puts the emphasis on inferior levels, such as that of the *premiers commis* (12)⁷. He rightly asserts that civil servants in foreign affairs had more

¹ John C. BURNHAM, 'In Memoriam John C. Rule (1929-2013)', *Perspectives on History*, March 2013. <http://www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/march-2013/in-memoriam-john-c-rule>. Last accessed 17 March 2015.

² John C. RULE, 'Colbert de Torcy, an emergent bureaucracy and the formulation of the French Foreign Policy (1689-1715)', in: Ragnhild HATTON (ed.), *Louis XIV and Europe*, London, Macmillan, 1976, 261-288.

³ Jean BAILLOU (dir.), *Les Affaires étrangères et le corps diplomatique français; 1: de l'Ancien régime au Second Empire*, Paris, CNRS, 1984, 841 p. (Histoire de l'administration française)

⁴ See also Roland MOUSNIER, *Les institutions de la France sous la monarchie absolue : 1598-1789*, Paris, PUF, 2005, 1253 p. (Quadrige. Manuels, Histoire) ; Wolfgang REINHARD, *Geschichte der Staatsgewalt : eine vergleichende Verfassungsgeschichte Europas von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart*, München, Beck, 1999, 631 p.; Raoul Charles VAN CAENEGEM, *Over koningen en bureaucraten: oorsprong en ontwikkeling van de hedendaagse staatsinstellingen*, Amsterdam, Elsevier, 1977, 383 p. (Elseviers historische bibliotheek)

⁵ Heinz DUCHHARDT, Matthias SCHNETTGER and Martin VOGT (Hrsg.), *Der Friede von Rijswijk 1697*, Mainz, von Zabern, 1998, VIII + 340 p. (Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für europäische Geschichte Mainz. Abteilung Universalgeschichte)

⁶ Lucien BELY, *Espions et ambassadeurs au temps de Louis XIV*, Paris, Fayard, 1990, 905 p.

⁷ Camille PICCIONI, *Les Premiers commis des Affaires étrangères au XVIIe et au XVIIIe siècle*, Paris, de Boccard, 1928, 282 p. ; Jean-Pierre SAMOYAU, *Les bureaux du secrétariat d'État des Affaires étrangères sous Louis XV*, Paris, Pedone, 1971, 359 p. (Bibliothèque de la Revue d'histoire diplomatique)

freedom to act by the nature of things. Diplomatic correspondence contained 'indeterminate' responses, and, thus 'involved greater judgment' than in domestic matters (192). Information-gathering, or diplomacy-as-process, is central, rather than negotiations, or the outcomes of diplomacy. Links with spies (294) or financial milieus feeding the 'king's military-industrial complex' (10)⁸ allow to transcend a mere formal analysis, and to assert the specific contribution of Torcy's men to eighteenth-century diplomatic culture (16)⁹.

Louis XIV's bureaucracy is conceptualised in the context of shifting popular loyalty. Hierarchical loyalties were not any longer the product of medieval contract thinking, but rather of impersonal service to the State, symbolized by the person of the monarch (19)¹⁰. Versailles should not be seen as a marvel to entertain nobles, but as a genuine 'great market place', where elites 'jockeyed for the privileges, offices, and other rewards distributed by the king and his ministers' (39)¹¹. Paradoxically, loyalty to the monarch did not express adherence to a 'patrimonial system', but prepared the transition to a pure 'bureaucratic system' (22), aiming at fixed areas of competence per administration, formal hierarchies, formal training and testing of civil servants, full-time officials and a mass of written orders.

French foreign policy is situated in the pervasive Ancien Régime political culture of kinship, patronage¹² and bribery¹³. In an age where 'self-made men' were highly suspect, Rule forces the reader to think in terms of clans and lineages (226) and, displaying erudition accumulated in a whole career, delivers a tentative prosopography of all department staff related to the minister's family or political network. It is no coincidence if Jean Racine named his son 'Jean-Baptiste', after Torcy's uncle, and if the minister employed him in his turn in the *bureaux* (251). Torcy even managed to have his cousin Desmaretz appointed as controller-general in 1708 (419).

'At least 80 per cent' of Torcy's recurrent work on most weekdays consisted of reading out dispatches to Louis XIV or the other members of the *Conseil d'en haut* (380). The minister above all advised pragmatic solutions in big power politics, as in the case of the 1710-1711 talks with Britain on ending the War of the Spanish Succession (381). In court politics, Torcy was a notorious Gallican, defender of the French Church's independence (74), not a minor detail in relations with the Holy See or in the light of the *Unigenitus*-controversy. As Secretary of State for foreign affairs, Torcy supervised the nomination of bishops in Rome or inspections of religious houses in Paris by the Parliament (383). When Clement XI

⁸ Guy ROWLANDS, *The financial decline of a great power : war, influence, and money in Louis XIV's France*, Oxford, OUP, 2012, XVII + 267 p.

⁹ Frederik DHONDT, "La culture juridique pratique au Congrès de Cambrai (1722-1725)", *Revue d'histoire diplomatique* CXXVII (2013), No. 3, 271-292.

¹⁰ Joël CORNETTE, *Le roi de guerre. Essai sur la souveraineté dans la France du Grand Siècle*, Paris, Payot, 1993, 448 p. Nuancing this thesis : Guy ROWLANDS, *The dynastic state and the army under Louis XIV : royal service and private interest, 1661-1701*, Cambridge : CUP, 2002, XXI + 404 p (Cambridge studies in early modern history).

¹¹ See Mathieu DA VINHA, *Les valets de chambre de Louis XIV*, Paris, Perrin, 2009, 668 p. ; Jeroen DUINDAM, *Vienna and Versailles: The Courts of Europe's Dynastic Rivals, 1550-1780*, Cambridge, CUP, 2003, XI + 349 p. (New Studies in European History); Emmanuel LE ROY LADURIE, *Saint-Simon ou le système de la Cour*, Paris, Fayard, 1997, 635 p.

¹² Peter R. CAMPBELL, *Power and politics in Old Regime France, 1720-1745*, London, Routledge, 1996, XII + 420 p.

¹³ E.g. 114 on bribery at the 1697 Polish Diet in support of the Prince of Conti, French prince of the blood.

(1649-1721), hard pressed by the bullying emperor Joseph I (1678-1711), decided to reevaluate the papal currency in order to boost his revenue in administrative payments due for episcopal appointments, Torcy refused to compensate the Holy See (383).

Torcy's long relationship with Louis XIV offers a privileged perspective to draw a portrait of the monarch. Rule underlines that the king never forgot to remind Torcy of the difference in social status and power between them: the minister was sometimes left out of audiences with foreign envoys, a treatment 'intended to show Louis's superiority, keep his foreign minister humble, or take out his anger on him (presumably because of his more even temper) for his weariness with having to woo ("faire la cour") his other ministers' (378).

Member of the Colbert-dynasty, the young Torcy was prepared by his father and his father-in-law Simon Arnauld de Pomponne (1618-1699), Secretary of State from 1671 to 1679 and member of the *Conseil* until his death. Torcy obtained a doctorate in theology at the Sorbonne in 1680, catalogued the books of his father, Charles Colbert de Croissy (1625-1696) and took the oath as *avocat* in September 1683 (51). To the astonishment of foreign observers, both Torcy and the marquis of Barbezieux (1668-1701, scion of the Le Tellier-dynasty) were both under thirty during the Nine Years War (133). The young minister had a significant part in the French schemes of partition of the Spanish succession¹⁴. Abandoning the monarch's 'legal rights' (95) to the Spanish throne was the only way to arrive at a structurally stable European state system. Surprisingly, Rule does not see the consensual discourse that brought the king to this renunciation, as an expression of legal argumentation¹⁵.

Managing foreign policy required control of all potentially damaging information flows, including the most private. Elisabeth Charlotte of the Palatinate (1652-1722), *Monsieur's* second wife, whose indiscreet correspondence often thwarted official diplomacy¹⁶, loathed Torcy as a 'toad' and compared him to 'stinking eggs and rotten butter [...] better off on the gallows than at the court' (137). In fact, the subject of Madame's reproaches had a blacklist of suspect persons at court, whose correspondence had to be gone through personally. Torcy's fanatic supervision brought Madame de Maintenon, Louis XIV's morganatic wife, to insert insults in her letters, well knowing the minister would read them personally (388). Finally, conduct of foreign policy did not only consist of negotiations and information gathering. The minister actively pursued a policy of propaganda to convince European public opinion¹⁷ of Louis's motives¹⁸.

¹⁴ Arsène LEGRELLE, *La diplomatie française et la Succession d'Espagne, 1659-1725*, Paris, Pichon, 1888-1892, 4 vols.

¹⁵ E.g. 122: 'for the higher good of European peace, regardless of legal rights to Spain'.

¹⁶ Dirk VAN DER CRUYSE, *Madame palatine: princesse européenne*, Paris, Fayard, 1988, 748 p.

¹⁷ E.g. the availability of the *Gazette d'Amsterdam* from 1691 on.

¹⁸ Joseph KLAITS, *Printed propaganda under Louis XIV: absolute monarchy and public opinion*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1994, XI + 341 p.; Markus BAUMANN, *Das publizistische Werk des kaiserlichen Diplomaten Franz Paul Freiherr von Lisola (1613-1674)*, Berlin, Duncker & Humblot, 1994, 418 p. (Historische Forschungen, 53)

Torcy's administration controlled domestic *généralités*¹⁹ and the regional courts of law (*Parlements*, 146)²⁰. The Secretary of State ruthlessly managed interior affairs and did not refrain from tougher means to assert royal power against local revolts²¹ or heresy, inflexibly suppressing Protestantism (445). His staunch Gallicanism and application of the Edict of Fontainebleau (1685) should not obscure the hierarchy in Torcy's priorities: he strictly guarded the boundaries between secular and ecclesiastical matters, rolling back episcopal usurpations of royal power (449). No less than 39 bishops resorted under the secretary (447).

The inevitable blurred lines between warfare and foreign policy gave rise to competition and jealousy (23)²². In December 1710, during the darkest days of the conflict on the Spanish Succession, the French victory at Brihuega and Villaviciosa was announced first by Torcy, and not by the War Secretary, thanks to the superior organisation of his information network (214)²³. Rule thinks these situations of 'confusion' or 'overlap' are rather eternal and universal (31). At the internal level, the secretary of state had to collaborate with both the controller-general of finances and the chancellor, both of whom had competing information networks at their disposal, covering the whole of France (13). Torcy claimed contentious cases before provincial law courts as dependent of his own competence (442) and issued decisions of justice himself²⁴, often in 'an abundance of mundane domestic business', quite remote from top-level diplomatic negotiations (459). If necessary, Torcy spied on local officials.

Rule rightfully argues secretaries of state had a more active role than the mere executing of the royal will would suggest (141). Their offices interpreted norms and applied them to specific cases, on the basis of their accumulated practical experience and judicious use of precedent. The author stresses the importance of foreign languages, and, most of all, Latin, which still dominated legal exchanges in the Holy Roman Empire and was privileged for the authentic versions of treaty texts (58). University training was short and of mediocre quality (64), which implied that most civil servants had to be trained on the job and acquire knowledge through experience. The *premiers commis* and technical experts used by Torcy were often respected members of literary societies or the *Académie Française* (193). The minister himself leaned on abbots Renaudot (1646-1720) and Dubos (1670-1742) or Nicolas Clément (1647-1712), head of the Royal Library. This network procured him *inter alia* the writings of Davenant (1656-1714) and Locke (218). Within a week after publication in London, Daniel Defoe (1660-1731)'s writings were translated into the minister's collection (336).

¹⁹ Provence, Dauphiné, Lyonnais, Champagne, Berry, Limousin, Saintonge, Angoumois, Bearn, Navarre, Bigorre, Nébouzan, Bretagne (143).

²⁰ Torcy had a special adviser for these matters, Michel Sermenté, *avocat* at the Parliament of Paris (279).

²¹ E.g. the anecdote on Michel Bégon, intendant of the La Rochelle generality, who was sent a packet of blanco *lettres de cachet* in April 1694, to arrive at a quick suppression of a peasant uprising (441).

²² E.g. Villars's complaint that Torcy was writing to his lieutenants-general, bypassing his competence as governor of Provence, 444.

²³ A similar point is made on page 416, concerning the parallel negotiations going on in Holland (1707-1708), but the author fails to add the necessary emphasis.

²⁴ E.g. issuing a *lettre de cachet* against a widow for scandalous behaviour, at her relatives' request.

Torcy exhorted his diplomats to acquire a historical perspective on international relations and negotiations (320) and founded an *Académie Politique* himself²⁵. He was at the basis of the French diplomatic archives, pursuing an unfruitful effort undertaken by his father in 1681. Clément was asked to acquire the basic tools for keeping documents: tables for volumes and extracts of correspondence, structuring a mountain of paper for later use²⁶. Very interestingly, Rule notes that Torcy cut off living the archives using the Peace of Rijswijk (1697) as a watershed (329). Papers dating after 1697 were kept in Versailles. From late 1709 on, the minister could store his archives in the Louvre, in the heart of ‘Paris, the information capital’ (328). Torcy’s initiative marked an effective watershed: only since the reign of Louis XIV were civil servants’ papers automatically part of public records. The *bureaux*’s collections were regularly expanded, e.g. when archivist Nicolas-Louis Le Dran (1687-1774) bought up Cardinal Mazarin’s papers in 1732 (333).

It is hard to discard the impression that the book was completed rather quickly. On the one hand, many theoretical assumptions are insufficiently applied in the more elaborate material chapters (e.g. the story of wartime negotiations, 1705-1710, pages 406-428²⁷), or, on the other hand, superfluous²⁸. Some assertions, conversely, would have deserved more elaboration, e.g. the statement on page 439, according to which the arrival of Louis de Pontchartrain (1643-1727) as chancellor (1690) inaugurated a shift from a more ‘judicial-based’ style to a more bureaucratic approach, ‘animated less by men of judicial background, but increasingly, especially at the bureau level, by functionaries trained in administrative procedures’, or the subsequent affirmation of increasing state intrusion after 1690 (440), *inter alia* by imposing solutions from Versailles, rather than allowing local courts to decide quarrels (452). Would this amount to royal disregard for ‘law’ in general, as the author suggests, or, quite the contrary, to the autonomous use of public law for administrative purposes, to the detriment of private law-based argumentation²⁹ ?

²⁵ Remarkably, this initiative is treated rather quickly (366-367). See Guy Thuillier, *La première École d'Administration. L'Académie politique de Louis XIV*, Genève, Droz, 1996, XVI + 200 p. (Hautes études médiévales et modernes, 75)

²⁶ A method similar to that of early treaty compilers, whose works would become standard references in negotiations, see Georg Friedrich VON MARTENS, “Discours Préliminaire. Sur les différents recueils de traités publiés jusqu'à ce jour”, in: Georg Friedrich VON MARTENS, *Supplément au Recueil des principaux traités*, Göttingen, Dieterich, 1802, vol. 1, iii-lxxii.

²⁷ This part mainly suffers from a lack of recalling military events which structured the talks, and does not add new information compared to Lucien Bély’s work, or that of Geertruida Stork-Penning (Het grote werk: *vredesonderhandelingen gedurende de Spaanse successie-oorlog 1705-1710*, Groningen, Wolters, 1958, (Historische Studies; 12)), who links up better with internal political divisions. Rule is caught in the conundrum of his book, in the sense that his theoretical path-dependency is unsustainable, causing anecdotic digressions. The latter, however, are often incomplete and hard to understand without knowledge of supplementary contextual factors.

²⁸ E.g. Mentioning ‘Contingency theory’ to state that ‘the department’s bureaus emerged as fluid and pragmatic arrangements matching available individuals to the tasks at hand’, or the use of the term ‘non-state actor’.

²⁹ Albert RIGAUDIERE, *Histoire du droit et des institutions dans la France médiévale et moderne*, Paris, Economica, 2010, 893 p. (Corpus Histoire du droit); Martin LOUGHLIN, *Foundations of public law*, Oxford/New York, OUP, 2010, XII + 515 p.

The Regency following Louis XIV's decease is only portrayed in general terms, often based on older literature, leading incidentally to factually erroneous assertions³⁰. Stressing Torcy's continuing importance as postmaster-general and the enduring resilience of his personal network (211) is of course entirely justified³¹. The suggestion of a power shift from the formally competent *Conseil des affaires étrangères* in the Polysynody-system³² to the *premiers commis* is equally plausible (149)³³.

Minor flaws do not prevent that the richness of anecdotes and revealing thick descriptions, based on primary archival sources, are a great addition to our knowledge of the louisquatorzian system. Rule emphasises the central part played by loyalty to the State. This should count as a warning to historians eager to over-emphasise religious or ideological motives. On page 92, elaborating 'Torcy's Preparation for and Rise to Power', Rule describes a discussion in the *Conseil d'en haut*, reported in the minister's *Journal*. The dukes of Burgundy (eldest grandson of Louis XIV and prospective heir, 1682-1712) and Beauvillier (1648-1714, member of the 'clan des dévôts') urged the French king to abstain from deals with the Ottoman sultan. Torcy, by contrast, considered their obsession with a clear conscience ridiculous and pathetic with respect to the far more serious issue of the ongoing War of the Spanish Succession. The minister did not share Louis's solidarity with the chased Catholic king of England, James II (1633-1701). The latter's supporters insatiably leaked information, clumsily executed plans for invasions or revolts, and were useless as allies (400). This adds credibility to the French thesis that recognition of James 'III' (1688-1766) as his father's son in the society of princes did not amount to a recognition of his internal sovereignty in Britain³⁴, but served merely aulic purposes.

Rule's work will become indispensable for any researcher or student interested in both the conduct of foreign affairs and public administration in Old Regime France. This overview has the colossal merit of adding a thick description of the period 1688-1715 to already considerable previous literature³⁵. Situating the *bureaux's* action in a broader spectrum, encompassing relations with the papacy, internal administration and information gathering for a wide array of purposes, is a revealing and valuable asset.

³⁰ E.g. Franco-British reconciliation in 1718 (126), whereas it had already set in by late 1716 (Frederik DHONDT, *Balance of Power and Norm Hierarchy. Franco-British Diplomacy after the Peace of Utrecht*, Leiden/Boston: Martinus Nijhoff/Brill, 2015, 72-105 (Legal History Library, 17; Studies in the History of International Law, 7)).

³¹ Torcy was forced to resign as postmaster-general on 21 October 1721, to the benefit of Cardinal Guillaume Dubois, the Regent's main minister (DHONDT, *Balance of Power*, 247).

³² Charles-Irénée CHASTEL DE SAINT-PIERRE, *Discours sur la polysynodie*, Londres, J. Tosson, 1718, VII + 129 p. ; Alexandre DUPILET, *La Régence absolue : Philippe d'Orléans et la polysynodie*, Seyssel, Champ Vallon, 2011, 436 p. (Époques)

³³ Rule asserts that Antoine Pecquet sr. (1666-1728), the most influential advisor of the Regency, limited the Council's meetings to twice a week in the Louvre, delegating consistent parts of diplomatic correspondence to the *bureaux*.

³⁴ E.g. Gaspard DE REAL DE CURBAN, *La science du gouvernement*, Paris, Les libraires associés, 1764, t. 5, 93-94.

³⁵ E.g. Guido BRAUN, *La connaissance du Saint-Empire en France 1643-1756*, Paris, Oldenbourg, 2010, 911 p. (Pariser Historische Studien, 91); Jean-Philippe CENAT, *Chamlay, le stratège secret de Louis XIV*, Paris, Belin, 2011, 203 p. ; Charles FROSTIN, *Les Pontchartrain, ministres de Louis XIV : alliances et réseau d'influence sous l'Ancien Régime*, Rennes, PUR, 2006, 597 p. (Histoire) ; Emmanuel PENICAUT, *Faveur et pouvoir au tournant du grand siècle, Michel Chamillart : Ministre et secrétaire d'état de la guerre de Louis XIV*, Paris, École des Chartes, 2004, X + 518 p. (Mémoires et documents de l'École des Chartes) ; Jean-Claude WAQUET, *François de Callières : l'art de négocier en France sous Louis XIV*, Paris, Éd. Rue d'Ulm, 2005, 288 p.

Rule's book brings early modern bureaucracy to life, starting from numerous but often only partially conserved records³⁶. This synthesis displays all available information, from organisational charts (196), maps (186), ceremony at ambassadors' audiences at Versailles (356-358) or in Torcy's private home in the Rue Vivienne in Paris (359), to the physical arrangement of council meetings (379) and the detailed account of a department head's day in office (440).

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³⁶ E.g. graphs of monthly payments for the year 1714, 284-285; no names of *commis* mentioned in the accounts, only of their supervisors (310-311).