

Charles T. Lipp. *Noble Strategies in an Early Modern Small State: The Mahuet of Lorraine.*

Changing Perspectives on Early Modern Europe 14. Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2011. viii + 250 pp. \$85. ISBN: 978-1-58046-396-6.

A modest work about the career strategies of several generations of a modestly successful family in service to the moderately successful rulers of a second-rank European state, published by a lower-tier university press, this “under the radar” book delivers more than one might expect, even to a reviewer who has spent time in Lorraine’s archives. Based upon the extensive family archive of the Mahuet clan, who were ennobled in 1599, Lipp traces their vicissitudes through five generations, ending when their state was permanently absorbed into France after 1737. Appendices provide genealogical tables (146–50) and general information about Lorraine’s *anoblis* (152–68), including decennial tabulations of five different methods for acquiring noble status. In one part, the Barrois (from which the Mahuets came), it was possible for eighty-six men with a mother but not a father of noble status to “repossess” (*reprise*) noble rank; over half of these instances occurred after 1700 (156). This information can be used to compare and contrast the renewal of Lorraine’s nobility under three long-lived dukes: Charles III certified 8.8 per year from 1560 to 1609, but the process atrophied under the equally long-lived Charles IV, who averaged under four per year from 1625 to 1675, before the last

independent duke, Leopold I, created almost eleven new nobles per year from 1697 to 1729.

The real core of Lipp's account, chapters 2 and 3, revolves around the fourth generation of Mahuets, represented by an elder brother, Marc-Antoine (1643–1717), who acquired major responsibilities at the ducal court in exile of Charles IV, and a younger brother with legal training, Jean-Baptiste (1649–1721). When their small state experienced long periods of occupation and virtual incorporation into Louis XIV's France, both brothers adopted unusual strategies in order to maintain and eventually improve their family's social position. Lorraine's dukes barely survived themselves by serving the Habsburg emperors (exactly as Savoy's dukes had done a century earlier) who eventually got them restored in 1698 (as they had restored Savoy in 1559). Marc-Antoine, compelled to return in 1679, kept an extremely low profile while his younger brother quickly acquired high offices under the French occupiers and managed to preserve the bulk of the family estates. Lorraine's dukes finally returned, enabling Marc-Antoine to benefit from imperial privileges that raised him above other Lorraine *anoblis* without vaulting him among the hundred families comprising Lorraine's *ancienne chevalerie*. And he helped his younger brother transfer smoothly to prominent legal offices in the restored system. A novelist would love this plot.

The only false note in the book is struck in its fourth chapter, when the focus shifts to a second son of the following generation, Jean-François (1680–1740), a rare Mahuet who entered the church. The story unrolls through the repetitive whines of a second brother who had been compelled by Lorraine's duke to resign as *Grand Prévot* of St. Dié in 1725. His surliness threatened family interests to the point of making him the real target for the *vingt coups de pied au cul* recorded at the peak of the crisis by his furious older sibling Charles-Ignace (1679–1760: 129). Four years later Charles-Ignace helped broker a deal with his successor through the mediation of Dom Augustin Calmet, Lorraine's well-known monastic historian, who then did his best to suppress the relevant evidence (132). Jean-François eventually regained his former position at St. Dié in 1737, the year Lorraine lost its autonomy permanently. This is stuff for Voltairean comedy.

Like the Mahuets themselves, Lipp loses momentum in the eighteenth century, when Lorraine's ducal house turned eastwards as the duchy itself tilted westwards. The next generation of male Mahuets disappeared into minor positions in the French army and most of their sisters remained unmarried; Charles-Ignace failed to get two of his sons made knights of Malta because their pedigree was insufficiently noble (136). Meanwhile, Lipp overlooks the spectacular leap in status by the house of Lorraine after Leopold's heir, François-Etienne, married the greatest heiress in Europe in 1736. He first exchanged Lorraine for a larger and more prestigious Grand Duchy in Italy before becoming Kaiser Franz Stefan I in 1745. His last direct male descendant, Otto von Habsburg-Lothringen, died recently at 98.

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