

Bruno Petey-Girard. *Le sceptre et la plume: Images du prince protecteur des lettres de la Renaissance au Grand Siècle*.

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Is there a privileged relationship between French kings and the realm of letters? The images of François I<sup>er</sup>, known as the Father of Letters, and of Louis XIV in the court of Versailles suggest there is, but they are not necessarily the rule. Indeed in between those two legendary kings, there were seven others who are not necessarily associated with patronage, cultural, or intellectual brilliance. Bruno Petey-Girard's study sets out precisely firstly to elucidate the reasons for the importance of the king's duty toward artistic and literary excellence and secondly to tell the story of the relationship between a kingly patron and the realm of letters. The book thus explores the representation of the relationship between the quill and the scepter rather than their historical reality, with Petey-Girard setting aside the financial difficulties of artists or their strategies in negotiating patronage in order to concentrate on the production of images that suggest that a political leadership is (or should be) striving for aesthetic and intellectual refinement.

The common assumption is that the period between François I<sup>er</sup> and Louis XIV bears witness to a change in the attitude of power to artistic and literary creation, a change that led to a specific French tradition that supposedly financed pensions, ambitious projects, and finally led to the establishment of concrete institutions (starting for instance with the "Lecteurs royaux" up until the various academies of the seventeenth century). Petey-Girard challenges this simplistic and evolutionist narrative in favor of a much more nuanced one, revisiting the conflictual interests of learned elites and kings.

Petey-Girard's study is two books in one. The first, "Quelles théories pour une protection royale des Lettres?" (15–166), deals with the articulation and promotion of a political duty of patronage and taste. The principal argument is that letters in a humanistic project are perceived as instrumental in bringing concord and peace. The political value of letters is acknowledged: on the one hand, the profound fertility of eloquence is seen as essential to the realization of social harmony, and on the other, letters can bring peace no less than weapons. It is in this vein that in 1664 François d'Aubignac wrote to Louis XIV that "Les sciences n'instruisent pas seulement en l'art de bien commander, elles donnent aussi les regles necessaires pour bien obeir" (55): letters can teach how to command no less than how to obey. But by the mid-seventeenth century, according to Petey-Girard, authors were usually devoting themselves to aesthetic objectives alone. This displacement outside the political field allowed the emergence of the new notion of *belles lettres* (70). The *belles lettres* still promoted the princely virtues but they were now only ornamental, and no longer saw themselves as partners to the political venture. The seventeenth century is therefore a paradoxical time when on the one hand the quill has detached itself from the scepter but on the other it still desires the king's support and recognition.

The second part, "Deux siècles d'images royales" (167–588), deals with the modalities of the fabrication of all the images staging the king as protector of Letters.

It is the chronological study of the actual representation of the king as protector of artists and authors. This second part of Petey-Girard's study is more or less divided into six chapters, each corresponding to one particular reign: first the reign of François I<sup>er</sup> and the founding myth of the Father of Letters, with, amongst others, Guillaume Budé's humanist project for preaching for the king to go far beyond the contractual relationship of learned men and rulers; then Henri II, François II, Charles IX and Henri III, Henri IV, Louis XIII and the first part of Louis XIV's reign, and, finally, the personal rule of Louis XIV.

Petey-Girard shows the correlation between the image of the king as a patron, to the image of the warlike king. In theory the two are related for they give similar power to the king to achieve peace and reach fame. In practice the image of the king as protector is often marginal, discontinuous, and only possible when it is allied with its contribution to warlike efforts. But Petey-Girard shatters not only the possible myth of a continuous tradition of French kings as exceptional patrons, but also the myth of the literary elite's manipulation of one of their concerted propagandist ventures. Petey-Girard persuasively shows that literary authors are rarely overseen (or even solicited) but that they are constantly reshaping and reformulating their visions of themselves, redefining their own place and their own role in the realm, even if this interrogation usually takes place within a discourse of praise and eulogy for the king. In reality men of letters and artists are the almost-exclusive agents in the emergence or in the absence of images of the prince as protector of arts and letters. While artists expect to get financial subsidies in exchange for the prestige they can confer on the king, the royal image consequently turns out to be the locus of rhetorical strategies of increasing symbolic and economic wealth. Hence these images often tell us more about men of letters than about kings or an eventual political or cultural project.

With considerable finesse and drawing on vast scholarship, Petey-Girard carefully avoids any evolutionist narrative, always opting for tendencies, discontinuity, and subtle analysis. The price of erudition and rigor is an elegant and lucid volume of almost 600 pages, fortunately ending with an extended bibliography and an invaluable index. One might regret the absence of discussion of visual material but one of the admirable qualities of this book is the large place given to quotations in the analysis, including a wealth of non-canonical sources. The end result is a remarkable book of numerous original studies, with analyses for instance of the representations of Alexander the Great and of Augustus, alongside the interpretations of various political and literary works and political themes — for instance, Guillaume Budé, Guez de Balzac, or Antoine Macault — together with a reading of the images of political figures such as Catherine de Médicis or Richelieu and more. In brief, this extensive and innovative book will appeal not only to early modern historians of the French monarchy, but also to scholars working on patronage, on literary elites and their relationship to power and to their own literary production, as well as on the symbolism of rulership and the history of political thought.

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