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Alan James, *The Navy and Government in Early Modern France 1572-1661*. London: The Royal Historical Society, 2004. ix + 198 pp. Appendices, bibliography and index. \$80.00 U.S. (hb) ISBN 0-86193-270-6.

Review by David Buisseret, The University of Texas at Arlington.

This short monograph follows a logical plan. The first two chapters explain the nature of the French navy before 1626. The next three chapters set out the way in which Richelieu changed this service after 1626, and the final three chapters explain what the consequences were. Before 1626, there was very little coherence in the French Crown's naval policy, for the two admirals, of the Atlantic and of the Mediterranean, operated quite independently of each other. Indeed, the French fleet in the Atlantic, often Huguenot in sympathy, frequently operated independently of the Crown, and was for a time one of the main financial assets of Henri of Navarre.

When that Henri came to the throne in 1589, he was well aware of the need for naval power, and successfully re-established the French galley-fleet in the Mediterranean, a development covered rather briefly in this book. When Sully went to meet the new English king, James I, in 1603, he discovered to his chagrin how feeble French naval power was in the Channel, and thereafter had little doubt that it would be desirable to establish an Atlantic fleet of *vaisseaux ronds* (as opposed to the Mediterranean galleys). But little was achieved outside the Mediterranean before 1626.

After Richelieu then became *grand maître, chef et surintendant général de la navigation et commerce de France*, many historians have believed that radical changes quickly took place. But our author, rather like David Parrott for the land forces, insists that no such speedy transformation was possible. As he succinctly puts it on page 105, in reference to the galley fleet, "Richelieu was...interested in guaranteeing the proper functioning of the fleet by personally dominating its traditional hierarchy and the financial foundations on which it rested." It is easy to see that such a domination rested essentially upon personal contact rather than on radical institutional change.

The stages of Richelieu's work are described fully. Engineers were dispatched to Normandy, to Picardy and to Provence, with the aim of discovering where the best sites for naval ports might be found. Such an assessment would cover not only the geography of the coasts, many of which were lacking natural harbors, but also the previous history and disposition of the local inhabitants. Eventually, Richelieu concentrated his work on Le Havre, Brest, Brouage and Toulon, all sites already developed by his predecessors. New installations were built, and ships were commissioned for them. At times James emphasizes the continuing reliance on the Dutch (p. 12), but elsewhere he seems to bring out the way in which French shipbuilders rose to the occasion (p. 112 etc.).

At every step, Richelieu had to take account of the political and economic realities within which he worked. He entirely lacked the sort of authority enjoyed by modern totalitarian rulers, who (like Hitler in the 1930s) could at the stroke of a pen bring down ancient rights and long-standing perquisites; he had to work slowly and patiently with well-entrenched local nobles, assemblies and officials, particularly in provinces like Brittany and Provence, which were at the end of long and tardy lines of communication. All the same, James concludes, Richelieu did manage to establish a naval force that largely remained intact during the distracting years of the Fronde. Dr. James shows in this book how in spite of the traditional obstacles Richelieu had done something to keep pace with the Dutch and the English. All the same, James concludes, Richelieu did manage to establish a naval force that largely

remained intact during the distracting years of the Fronde. Perhaps James underestimates the work already accomplished at Toulon by Henri IV; he certainly does not accept Colbert's self-serving assertion that everything needed to begin in 1661, and shows in this book how, in spite of the traditional obstacles, Richelieu had done something to keep pace with the Dutch and the English. Concerned as it is with maritime affairs, this book has nothing to say about the life-and-death struggle being waged on the frontier near Paris against the formidable armies of the Spaniards. It is this, of course, which explains why so little attention, relatively speaking, could be given to maritime affairs.

As befits a publication of the Royal Historical Society, this volume is sturdily presented and lacks obvious errors. It would have been good if the list of "unpublished primary sources" had described these sources as well enumerating them, so that the reader could see the nature of the contribution made by each library or archive. It also seems to this incurably visual reader that this is a book calling for images; could there not have been maps to show the sites investigated by the engineers, for instance, together perhaps with one or two of their drawings? Or images showing the nature of the vessels constructed under Richelieu's guidance? Without such maps and images, the book can seem a little dry, and to impede the reader's understanding and imagination of developments that are textually described with clarity and conviction.

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