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Fanny Cosandey, *Le rang. Préséances et hierarchies dans la France d'Ancien Régime*. Paris: Gallimard, 2016. 491 pp. Bibliography. €28.00 (pb). ISBN 9782070105564.

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Among the more memorable scenes of Sofia Coppola's film, *Marie Antoinette* (2006), was its depiction of the young *dauphine* waiting naked for her chemise while it passed through the hands of a series of courtly women asserting their right to preeminence in the royal bedroom. Kirsten Dunst, as Marie Antoinette, voices what Coppola might well have thought were also the modern audience's sentiments about these rituals—"this is ridiculous." Yet, as Fanny Cosandey's intricate examination of such practices within her close-to-500-page work demonstrates, these concerns were by no means at the periphery of court life, but central to the political, dynastic and social machinations of courtly society. Superior rank was an expression of power, and the control of precedence rituals was part of a complex relationship between a monarch and his subjects. Given both the significance of rank and precedence for courtly contemporaries and our modern fascination with their insistence upon rights that seem at times rather petty or obscure, Cosandey's substantial monographic analysis of the subject in early modern France is a very welcome addition, indeed.

Cosandey's investigation adopts an approach that poses questions both anthropological and historical. She is interested in the rules, or *grammaire*, of rank, drawing upon a series of case studies spanning the reigns of Henri II to Louis XIV, to tease out key commonalities across the period. Excluded from consideration are other contemporary organizational systems at play in ecclesiastical, military, and diplomatic domains, which Cosandey sees as driven by other logics. The cases of interest here include consideration of the role of monarchs, precedence structures, points of tension, and the nature of dynastic and personal interventions from the elite group of courtiers, nobles of both sword and robe, who served the king in various ways. At the same time, Cosandey is attentive to the dynamic nature of precedence practices, since social and political contexts, the character of monarchs, and specific opportunities for individuals to gain through particular ceremonies were all influential in seeing matters of rank re-defined and evolve.

In the first section, Cosandey traces a brief history of ceremonial conduct in relation to the medieval French court. Drawing upon Christine de Pizan's reflections on courtly culture during the reign of King Charles V, Cosandey teases out differences from Burgundian courtly rituals. For the latter, her source is the significant but much under-utilized work, part conduct book and part *mémoires*, written by Eleanor of Poitiers, who served in the household of Isabella of Portugal at the Burgundian court. Cosandey's analysis here is insightful, but the conclusions that she draws from this work and the distinctions that she sees from the French court based upon them—that Burgundian courtly rituals were primarily domestic in orientation, focused around the table, fabrics, and precedence in processional orders—are more tenuous. Eleanor's work was written from the perspective of a female courtier and composed for other women. Although she frequently described examples involving men and women, it might be argued that her focus was on ritual arenas that preoccupied women and excluded those with which she was not directly involved. After all, she makes a strong claim through her work to personal

observation and to the memorial tradition of other women at the court before her.[1] These contexts may reflect her work's lack of attention to administrative, military, sporting or other male courtly endeavors to which she, and her female sources and readers, had less access. The same point might be made of the analysis of ceremonial matters under François I as witnessed by the maréchal de Vieilleville alone. In each case, a range of sources would provide a richer base from which to establish the meaning and nature of precedence rituals at the court over time and under varied monarchs.

With Henri II, Cosandey argues that change was afoot. This is marked firstly by an increase in documentation about rank, which may have assisted the king's immediate needs but increased the potential for disputes in the long term. She sees in a range of sources a particular emphasis at the French court on proximity to the monarch, one which outsiders perceived as disorderly and lacking in respect. However, it was part of the plan of the French monarchs to be visible to their subjects. Indeed, an insider such as Catherine de' Medici advocated just such personal contact between monarch and subject in advice to her sons, based on a model she claimed to have seen during the reign of her husband and father-in-law. Cosandey in fact examines Catherine's works among others in some detail, particularly as they sought to regulate courtly life. As works by Una McIlvenna and Caroline zum Kolk have shown, the growing size of the female household required a careful policing of ritual and moral conduct among the sexes at court.[2] Cosandey sees the politically challenging reigns of the later Valois kings as giving rise to a new intensity regarding ceremonial culture, one that foregrounded the importance of princes of the blood and also retained the monarch's ability to bestow special favors on favorites. These developments heightened both the dignity of the monarch and the significance of royal blood. Edicts and *lettres patentes* under Henri III solidified what seem to be Catherine's earlier ideas into a legislative framework that elevated the blood of France above all other nobility and established protocols for the king's, and courtly, life.

Over the course of the sixteenth century, Cosandey sees considerable change in the events that preoccupied kings and courtiers, moving from entries, processions and religious ceremonies that could be viewed by a relatively large proportion of the populace to matters focused within court spaces, such as, for example, women's right to the *tabouret*. The interest of these later regulations concerning the domestic space of kings and queens, she notes, highlights yet further the inadequacy of public/private concepts as analytical tools for understanding politics at this period. By the century's end, Cosandey argues, those most interested in questions of rank were kings who, through them, saw ways to centralize power around the monarch and his family and to control an ever-increasing court expenditure. If for the Valois, focus was on the prioritization of brothers who were also heirs, Henri IV was primarily concerned to provide an appropriate status for his legitimized children.

Female regencies such as those of Marie de' Medici and Anne of Austria provided new opportunities for elites to seek advancement of their status. Thus, etiquette rituals and precedence hierarchies came under a particular spotlight for contemporaries during these periods, as regents sought to bolster their own status by elevating family members and favorites. Those disadvantaged by such manœuvres voiced their complaints about these perceived abuses and their fears that a woman's personal rule might turn rank from a system of control into one of gifts.

Such acts were not the practice of regents exclusively, for Cosandey notes that Louis XIII also manipulated ceremonial conduct to advantage his half-brothers and thus signal the supremacy of royal blood. Both Valois and Bourbons alike used the framework of precedence to advance

dynastic politics. Louis also made himself supreme arbiter of rank disputes, a position maintained by Louis XIV. Cosandey sees the latter as not so much an innovator in the area of ceremonial conduct as living the rituals of precedence more intensely than had any monarch before him. Increasingly, by this period, women's place in ceremonial rituals became an opportunity for dynastic prestige among France's nobility of the sword and a measure by which a monarch could compensate elite families. This became ever more necessary as the king turned to surround himself with a growing group of administrators drawn from the robe nobility, who sought to improve their own status through ceremonial rituals. However, Cosandey maintains that as the elite engaged with the cult of the monarchy that rank practices signaled, Louis had less flexibility to maneuver to his own benefit, since every alteration ensuring a gain to some would cause loss of status, and offence, to others. This made matters of precedence progressively more rigid and less responsive to changing social and political contexts by the end of the period.

A second section, focusing on rules and disputes, examines four cases of precedence disputes spanning the period, in order to tease out the descriptive analysis of the grammar of rank and its forms of documentation. Cosandey here understands quarrels as potential factors, as symptoms, and as aspects of change in this political system, attesting to its potent dynamism for much of the period. Each study relies on a single source that Cosandey mines to reveal the nature of challenges of rank, the personnel involved, and the outcomes achieved. Although they cannot be seen as representative, these cases do focus on varied representations of rank—from processional orders to the precise nature of clothing to be worn—and a wide range of underlying issues for regulation such as the order of precedence for differing branches of a single dynastic family, the differing status of women as daughters and as wives, or the relationships between functional, royally-appointed and other service personnel. These analyses also include the involvement of a wide range of elites.

At one level, these cases demonstrate just how important the intricate contexts and precise details of each dispute were, but Cosandey is nonetheless able to pull together an anthropological meta-analysis from their exploration. Perhaps not unsurprisingly, she finds that such factors as a family's longevity in occupying a certain status, the nature of the ritual, and the gender of the individuals involved feature in the determination of rank, criteria that by and large also validated the monarch's own position at the apex of the hierarchy. However, arguments over precedence were possible because of the flexibility built into a framework that responded to new circumstances, new rituals, and new political contexts, all of which offered opportunities for advancement and which king and elites alike could use to reposition themselves with higher status.

Cosandey also investigates in this section the nature of the documentary sources for understanding rank. Some parts of this analysis, and of her decisions about the range of sources to be used in the study as a whole, would have been welcome in the introduction. Here, Cosandey's interest is rather in how the increasing written and legal documentary production created a system more flexible than fixed, as cases were located, copied, and re-interpreted through the lens of time, in light of new contexts, and within arguments for new disputes for which they were re-purposed. Despite a growing corpus of texts, there was never a single definitive text, or possibility of it, as ranks changed for individuals between different contexts of each ritual, event, or space. As such, records, and interpretations of them, abounded. This call to archival precedents also necessitated the growth of a specialist class of antiquarian, genealogical, and legal experts who were proficient in doggedly, and discreetly, perusing the documentary record for pertinent material, who developed the sophisticated rhetoric required

in compiling an argument, and whose intimate knowledge and engagement with the archives is evident in the marked-up copies of documents that Cosandey pored over in her turn.

Continuing in the vein of this broad-ranging historical and anthropological methodology, the third section explores the meanings that can be drawn from ceremonial conduct and its disputes, in order to understand the structural and ideological basis of power, and the relationship of the king and his elites of sword and robe nobility. Here, Cosandey's rather light touch to engagement with theories of power, just as elsewhere with scholarship on ritual and ceremony and gender, is disappointingly evident. Durkheim, Mauss and Bourdieu are all considered within a single paragraph, with no more recent theoretical interventions discussed. Relational and dynamic concepts of power and theories of empowerment (or transformative "power-to," and further, "power-with" models) as expressed in the works of Michel Foucault, Anthony Giddens, Iris Marion Young, Nancy Hartsock and Mary Caputi among others could offer insights into the ways in which ceremonial conduct served more than simply the king, and indeed at times limited his opportunities for action.[3]

Cosandey firmly situates her study's approach as following in the footsteps of philosopher Louis Marin's 1981 work on representations of power of the monarch, specifically Louis XIV, and the later 1999 work of Gérard Sabatier that also examines Versailles.[4] One might have hoped for a more explicit exploration of both her approach and findings in relation to relevant theoretical and recent historical scholarship about early modern power in courtly settings, now conceptualized in broad-ranging ways through terminology such as political culture, cultural politics and "soft power." [5] Similarly, the careful attention to the ceremonial at the French court in works by Ralph E. Giesey and Lawrence M. Bryant, for example, warrants engagement, as might also Jeroen Duindam's challenge to Elias's grand theorization of court life.[6] Also surprising is the omission of any specific discussion of Giora Sternberg's pertinent work on courtly rituals of status and "micro-politics" of these interactions at Versailles under Louis XIV.[7] Perhaps Cosandey has some of these works in mind when she voices concerns about recent scholarly emphasis on signs to the detriment of consideration of actions and power relations: "Tout devient signe et, à cette aune, matière à analyse par reconstruction d'un univers mental qui pourtant nous échappe encore largement" (p. 257). Her desire that the work remain firmly historicized is understandable but need not give such short shrift to the perspectives of "historiens d'aujourd'hui" (none specifically cited in a footnote) whose work "à travers l'interprétation du cérémonial ou des images du pouvoir" she fears may be too far removed from the "sens que les acteurs prêtent à ce terme, et subséquemment comprendre ce qu'ils entendent faire dans l'opération" (p. 258).

Rank practices may have given an impression of the power of the sovereign, but Cosandey identifies much that disrupts this vision. Both the king and his subjects looked for opportunities to assert and increase their dynasty's status, insisting upon the political significance of rank rituals to the stability of the state to do so. She highlights how precedence claims were progressively represented for elites through legalistic terms and referred to in the language of rights rather than privileges. Monarchs may have been seeking free space to act within the framework of rank according to their needs and desire to reward favorites, but this desire was kept in check by the pressure from an engaged community who stood to gain or lose from the king's actions. His pronouncements therefore required a claim to observing "justice." To gain status supremacy over the elite, monarchs had to operate with a perceived sense of fairness.

Other complications for kings were entailed by the challenge of regulating what could be considered the familial heritage of the dynasty and what was a highly visible form of divinely-

ordained power. Recognizing illegitimate children, princes of the blood, as well as other offshoots of the family line, not to mention descendants from these individuals, as celebrations of royal blood required precedence in rituals befitting their status and clarification about the heritability of rank. Furthermore, as the king created new administrative positions, differing notions of public service and its relative status emerged between the robe and sword nobility, which required integration into and changes to ceremonies of rank. Those holding offices on the king's behalf had to be recognized by an appropriate status that his prestige demanded. Such functionaries reinforced the monarch as the center of the political system but complicated a framework founded upon the importance of elite blood. Cosandey's argument here is that monarchs were caught between the desire to control ceremonial ritual as sovereign authority and to elevate royal blood, which in practice often pulled in diverging directions.

The final part, "Société," suggests an opening outward of the analytical gaze, but Cosandey's exploration in these chapters is still firmly within the world of the court. Her lenses for analysis here include the sheer wealth of things, events, materials, and ceremonial rituals concerning which matters of rank were raised and resolved. Individuals were inventive about the wide-ranging possibilities for personal and dynastic advancement that could be represented in processional orders, fabrics and the cut of one's cloth. Challenges within families about what status could be transmitted and through whom, the order of precedence for elder and younger siblings and across dynastic branches likewise highlight what is a key point of this section, and of course the entire monograph—rank mattered. It not only was a symbolic expression of power and honor but also held vital political and financial consequences both positive and negative. Some ceremonies required a considerable outlay of funds to carry out, and legal and research costs to assert one's "rights" could also be costly. There were similarly material implications including basic comfort—the right to sit rather than stand in a particular ceremony or space; or to arrive in a carriage. There were thus multiple assessments to be made of the value of rank and the costs of asserting it, and these determinations differed among individuals and elite families.

Cosandey devotes an important chapter to the complex situation of women's specific roles within rank frameworks and their changing location through life in such rituals as daughters, wives and as heirs. While contemporary theory presented a simplistic picture of women as dependent upon fathers and husbands for their status, in practice this view was complicated from the very top of the hierarchy by the royal family itself. Asserting the significance of royal blood demanded that a king's daughters and wife shared in the sovereign's dignity. For royal daughters, the power of that blood could be recognized and re-asserted at different life stages. Thus, in widowhood, she might revert to the status of her father if it were higher than that of her husband. Similarly, a queen shared the status bestowed by her husband's rank, making appointments and precedence within her household a key hub for courtly power regulation. Interestingly, in practice, Cosandey finds that such positions that stemmed from the queen, and which should thus have been extinguished with her death, became quasi-heritable gains, since such positions commonly passed in matrilineal forms of inheritance that reflected female honor politics and largely bypassed both male heredity patterns and male-authored official accounts of rank alike.

In her concluding chapter, Cosandey returns to a more sharply historical presentation of the key points of her study. Despite the work's efforts to tease out broad-brush characteristics of rank ideologies and practices, much to do with precedence rituals and the disputes surrounding them needs to be understood at the level of context-specific details. Nonetheless, Cosandey emphasizes the importance of written documentation under Henri II as solidifying hierarchies

yet ushering in potential for contestation. She identifies a turn over the period towards a more juridical understanding of rank, as a legal and largely heritable, good, or at least as something that could be pursued through legal documentary forms and language. Yet the king remained the ultimate arbiter, although he was not unconstrained by the many interested parties whose status was at stake with his every pronouncement. Rank was a system that demanded firmness but not rigidity. Sovereign authority was vital, but so too was flexibility and responsiveness to changing circumstances. By the reign of Louis XIV, the monarch was definitively detached in rank from other nobles, cocooned by the tenets of absolutism and the preeminence of royal blood. However, ultimately, a system founded upon the value of history, longevity, and heritage could not be transformed too profoundly.

Cosandey's work is very much an internal study of thick description from a relatively small source base. The organization of this almost 500-page work (which unfortunately lacks an index) means that many issues and findings are raised repeatedly, albeit in some different contexts. At the same time, there is little connection made to the wider empirical and theoretical scholarship on rank and power that could inform its various conclusions. This is something of a lost opportunity to insert the study's findings into a wider conversation and to situate them in broader early modern and historiographical terms. Duindam's 2003 work comparing Versailles to the court in Vienna already took us some of the way, but it would be valuable to push further how practices at the court of Versailles, as identified in this and Sternberg's recent work, sit in the wider context of contemporary European systems and hierarchies.[8] The bibliography contains little material outside of the French language (although the absence of one pertinent, recent study of Russian rank systems is acknowledged). Some editing to allow for more engagement with this wider field, especially beyond France and French-language materials, would have been very valuable. Overall, however, this is an important study that will no doubt be influential in establishing key insights about its topic for years to come.

NOTES

[1] Susan Broomhall, "Gendering the Culture of Honour at the Fifteenth-Century Burgundian Court," in *Women, Identities and Communities in Europe, 1400-1800*, ed. Susan Broomhall and Stephanie Tarbin (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), pp. 181-93.

[2] Caroline zum Kolk, "Catherine de Médicis et sa maison. La fonction politique de la maison de la Reine (1533-1589)," Thèse de doctorat, Paris VIII, 2006; idem, "The Household of the Queen of France in the Sixteenth Century," *The Court Historian*, 14, 1 (2009): 3-22; Una McIlvenna, *Scandal and Reputation at the court of Catherine de Medici* (London: Routledge, 2016).

[3] Some examples are Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, 2nd edition. (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1983), including Foucault's "Afterword: The Subject and Power," pp. 208-228; Anthony Giddens, *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration* (Cambridge, U.K.: Polity, 1984); Iris Marion Young, *Throwing Like a Girl and Other Essays in Feminist Philosophy and Social Theory* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990); Thomas Wartenberg, ed., *Rethinking Power* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1992); Nancy Hartsock, *Money, Sex, and Power: Toward a Feminist Historical Materialism* (Boston, Mass.: Northeastern University Press, 1983); Nancy J. Hirschmann and Christine Di Stefano, eds, *Revisioning the Political: Feminist Reconstructions of Traditional Concepts in Western Political Theory* (Boulder, Col.: Westview Press, 1986); Mary Caputi, *Feminism and Power: The Need for*

Critical Theory (Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2013). A useful overview to feminist interventions can be found in Amy Allen, “Feminist Perspectives on Power,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2016 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2016/entries/feminist-power/>>.

[4] Louis Marin, *Le Portrait du roi* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1981), edition of 1987 cited in the text; Gérard Sabatier, *Versailles, ou La Figure du roi* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1999).

[5] Two recent examples of such approaches are Nathalie Rivère de Carles, ed., *Early Modern Diplomacy, Theatre and Soft Power: The Making of Peace* (Houndmills: Palgrave, 2016) and James Daybell and Svante Norrhem, eds., *Gender and Political Culture in Early Modern Europe* (London: Routledge, 2016).

[6] Ralph E. Giesey, *Rulership in France, 15th –17th Centuries* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004); Lawrence M. Bryant, *Ritual, Ceremony and the Changing Monarchy in France, 1350–1789* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2010); Jeroen Duindam, *Myths of Power: Norbert Elias and the Early Modern European Court* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1995).

[7] Giora Sternberg, *Status Interaction during the Reign of Louis XIV* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

[8] Jeroen Duindam, *Vienna and Versailles: The Courts of Europe’s Dynastic Rivals, 1550–1780* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2003).

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