Cedric Michon, *La crosse et le sceptre: les prélats d'Etat sous François Ier et Henri VIII* Paris: Tallandier, 2008. 383 pp. Endnotes, appendices, bibliography and index. 50 €. ISBN 978-2-84734-336-6.

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Both English and French monarchies went through a phase in the first half of the sixteenth century of employing bishops and other higher churchmen, called here "state prelates," in political, administrative and diplomatic roles. This has often been remarked on, though little has been made of it. How do we explain it? It had of course always been the case that medieval bishops played an active role in government, but, in the period of the Renaissance, this increased rather than decreased. As the activity of the state grew, bishops provided a corps of technically trained personnel, usually canon or civil lawyers, who had the advantage of depending closely on appointment by the king. This may have been a relatively brief phase, however, since state prelates disappeared from their political role after 1560 in England and after 1600 in France.

A comparison between the use of prelates by the royal state in England and France during the Renaissance period is the subject of this book. The author, Cedric Michon, has the advantage of being one of the few French historians who is equally at home in the history of Valois France and Tudor England.[1] In this book he constructs an effective and meaningful piece of comparative history based on profound and extensive knowledge of the sources and the historiography of the period in both countries. He is fully aware of the fundamental institutional differences between the two kingdoms, and as a result his comparisons are particularly useful. There were twenty-one English bishoprics (to which Henry VIII added six, one of which, Westminster, was later suppressed) but one hundred fourteen French dioceses for a kingdom roughly three times the land mass. English bishoprics were thus around twice as weighty in terms of resources. They had also traditionally played a very active part in the government of the English provinces. Michon selects roughly thirty prelates (mainly bishops) in both countries whom he defines as "state prelates" with important political or administrative functions in the royal state.

Prelates, he argues, had the advantage of being multi-skilled, with bases in central and local affairs, and they could play a leading role in diplomacy. They were technocrats, cultural patrons and informal agents who amplified the role of agents of the court in the provinces. The training they received presents some interesting contrasts. Sources for the University degrees obtained by English prelates are more reliable than those for the French, but it does seem that most English state prelates progressed steadily through the universities to doctorates in civil or canon law (Cuthbert Tunstall, later bishop of Durham, was unusually rapid in his progression). They then sometimes spent years abroad in French or Italian universities. For France, Michon has identified only two prelates (Jean de Fraisse and Claude Dodieu) who progressed to the doctorate, though it seems likely that the rest obtained a degree. Quite clearly technical training in civil law was essential for activity in diplomacy. For really serious problems such as the pursuit of Henry VIII's divorce and the establishment of the Royal Supremacy in England, canon law and theology were also essential elements of training. An example of this is the activities of Foxe and du Bellay in negotiating with the Schmalkaldic League in the 1530s for Franco-Protestant co-operation, when their theological learning was crucial to attempts at reaching an

understanding. Both ran the risk of going further towards religious agreement than their master would sanction, however, and du Bellay was effectively cut off from his network of contacts in Germany from 1541 to 1544.

Such networks were clearly dependent on the king's approval. Nevertheless, networks of acquaintance and friendship among the Protestant theologians and diplomats were crucial. As cultural patrons, state prelates were often surrounded by clienteles of humanist scholars who were of particular value to the prelates who largely monopolized the French embassies in Rome and Venice, for instance. In a sense, then, all this gave a clerical dimension to the Renaissance state but in rather different ways in the two countries, reinforcing bureaucratic authority in England (Michon asserts that Henry VIII's reign went through a move to bureaucratic government which preserved household features) and the court dimension of power in France. He concludes that prelates provided the wheels for royal power in both countries.

 Another important series of contrasts and similarities is provided by the role of state prelates as agents of royal power in the provinces. Both monarchies placed reliable bishops in frontier regions (in France in Burgundy, Languedoc and Guyenne) to ensure the coordination of defense. Nothing in France quite equals the grandeur and power of the palatine bishopric of Durham with its feudal authority and judicial power designed to anchor the defense of the kingdom against the Scots. Even the vast bishopric of Winchester with its scores of clients in the Commons and £4000 *per annum* revenues is difficult to parallel in France. However, the bishops of Durham were always the king's men, and Tunstall, for instance, exercised his authority under Henry VIII as president of the Council in the North, a body which increasingly absorbed the powers of the county palatine through the 1530s. Useful parallels are established between the roles of Jean du Bellay as lieutenant general at Paris in the crisis of 1536, with all his financial and administrative firmness and ability, and that of Rowland Lee in the Marches of Wales. Lee's tenure marked a break in the tradition of royal dependence on marcher gentry for regional governance. Thus the pattern both in England and France was for the king to add to the prelates' clerical and familial authority a range of extra powers (lieutenant-general, president) especially at times of crisis.

Some of the most interesting observations in the book concern contrasts in social standing. Much work has been done on English bishops in recent years, which tends to bolster the argument that they were a remarkably well trained and effective group; this has reinforced the idea that the pre-Reformation English Church was in good condition.[2] Michon does not engage in this debate, of course. He is concerned to establish the comparative social profile of prelates. English prelates were the sons of bourgeois or gentlemen who had attained the doctoral level at University. French prelates in the period were overwhelmingly the sons of gentlemen. In fifteenth-century England, seventeen of seventy-five bishops were noble in origin, but under Henry VIII there were only two of sixty-three (sixty-nine in all held office) appointees in this category. French bishops (who have also increasingly been subjected to modern historical study) were drawn in Francis I's reign from old dynasties with local roots, though there were a few from families of jurists (Poncher, Duprat, etc.).[3] There were some exceptional cases drawn from princely families (Jean de Lorraine, Hippolyto d'Este). Passage into the episcopate was helped by the transfer of a family's allegiance from feudal princes to the crown in the fifteenth century, and here the royal court was important. However, powerful court families did not dominate the ranks of the state prelates, who were drawn from those such as the du Bellays with deep local roots. Bishops in England, however humbly born, became peers of the realm for life, but the courtier prelate was not characteristic of England, where only six prelates issued from gentry stock (such as Thomas Thirlby and Nicolas Wotton).

Most were drawn from merchant or yeomen families, and Wolsey and Gardiner were exceptions in stemming from an even lower social level. The English church thus generally excluded from the ranks of prelates the top and bottom of the social hierarchy. In England, the episcopacy was now largely

closed to the nobility, whereas in France gentlemen predominated, with their selection exceptionally linked to political influence. Above all, in both countries no persons likely to be a threat to the king would be appointed, and the episcopate became a distinctive elite, turning members of the second and third estates into the first (or, as Michon puts it, cardinals du Bellay and Tournon changed their social order but not their class). Gardiner and Wolsey also changed their order, but it is debatable whether the sons of butchers and drapers were ever really accepted as lords.

These contrasting perceptions are worked out in two chapters which examine the prelates' very different roles in the two countries. In France, there was a sense in which the prelate was also a courtier who shared many aspects of the king's recreational life. French bishops danced, acted and hunted; some like Tournon were passionate tennis players while du Bellay is likely to have had amorous affairs. It is difficult to imagine English bishops in the same context. There were certain structural problems for the courtier prelate. In France, desirable lodgings at court were determined (as Monique Châtenet has shown) by the favour enjoyed by their wives.[4] Nevertheless, in 1549-50, there were nine cardinals and one bishop lodged at Saint-Germain-en-Laye. Some prelates built sumptuous residences near the principal royal châteaux (as did d'Este at le Grand Ferrare and du Bellay at Saint-Maur).

Relatives played a crucial role for French bishops whose families had usually been long in royal service. Jean de Lorraine, though his position depended crucially on his closeness to Francis I, had a string of brothers and cousins behind him and acted in some sense as head of the clan. Louis de Bourbon played a similar role for the house of Vendôme. Tournon and Grammont both benefitted from the presence of their families at court. Jean du Bellay, too, pushed the interests of his family, though after his brother Guillaume's death in 1543, he was unsympathetic to the needs of his younger brother Martin (perhaps having too many demands on his plate). Clientage was crucial. In a careful and fascinating study, Michon shows how du Bellay began by linking himself firmly to Montmorency, then gradually diversified his allegiance and became more autonomous from around 1536 (though the relative absence of correspondence with Montmorency in 1531-4 is almost certainly the result of the well-known survival profile of Montmorency's papers). Du Bellay perhaps paid the price by being sent off to Rome in 1547 on Montmorency's return to power. Other prelates (Hémard de Denonville for instance) always sought patronage from several sources. Throughout the period under study, prelates and minister-favourites, who Michon points out controlled the state papers in "what was already an administrative monarchy" (p. 148), needed each other. This was the case with Montmorency and Lorraine in the 1530s and Tournon and Annebault in the 1540s.

In his equivalent study of the English prelates, Michon adopts the term used by Winthrop Hudson in his study of the 1559 Settlement, "Cambridge Connection," though here transposed to the earlier decades of the sixteenth century. English state prelates, he insists, were essentially technocrats and unwelcomed by courtiers at the higher reaches of politics (though there are some parallels between the disdain for Wolsey and Gardiner and that directed towards Duprat in France).[5] As Michon reminds us, Gardiner was slapped by Dudley in a council meeting, an act unparalleled in France. When Du Bellay was attacked by Annebault, he was able to face him down by observing that the Admiral was free with his "bravades" against those who made no profession of the sword and that he, du Bellay, was also a gentleman. Generally speaking, English prelates were not involved in patronage at the highest level, with some exceptions such as the links between Sampson and Thirlby and the Howard family and Heath and the Boleyn family. Michon suggests that, despite his well-known "conservative" views, there is little evidence for Gardiner's co-operation with Norfolk against Cromwell or Cranmer.

What, then, was this "Cambridge connection"? In the decade 1513-23, Michon observes the careers of twenty Cambridge students who rose to the summit of royal service. There were, it is true, some Oxford scholars such as Warham, Wolsey and Tunstall. Gardiner here played a crucial role in fostering the careers of his students at a time when he did not have a reputation for religious orthodoxy. Gardiner had serious problems with the Supremacy but managed, after a period of quasi-exile as

ambassador in France, to recover some influence, and the Cambridge group gradually reconciled themselves with Cromwell. For reasons that may be related to such political disputes, however, lay technocrats were already beginning to displace prelates from the summit of power, and the upheavals of 1546-7 saw the beginning of the end of their influence. The very different modus operandi of the state prelate in England and France reflects their social origins and their degree of technical training. Both, however, gave for a time a clerical dimension to the state.

That clerical dimension is, of course, reflected in what could have been seen as dual loyalties between their masters and the Pope in both countries. How did this work in practice? Canonists had long argued that the Church should assist the state, but there was also an accumulated critique of worldliness and absenteeism. Both French and English bishops were also criticized both in their host countries and at home from time to time for their failings in diplomacy, the English because of their insensitivity to court manners and the French for their timidity. Did they experience conflicts of interest? Henry VIII professed "astonishment" in 1532 at discovering that his prelates were "only half his subjects," but this could hardly have been a sudden revelation. If in France the relationship was more serene, this did not prevent du Bellay from making frank and ironic replies to the Pope on political disputes. The major determinants in the two countries were, of course, the Concordat of Bologna and the break with Rome, but Michon finally concludes that, if there was a dual loyalty, it was not so much to the Papacy as to the privileges of the national church.

One further clerical dimension of the state is evident in finance. The Renaissance state off-loaded a significant proportion of the costs of training its technocrats onto the Church, and in both countries the Church provided a significant reserve of favor that could be accorded by the crown. In England, of twenty-one clerical ambassadors, thirteen received bishoprics, bringing in about £20,000 per annum. Francis I had 314 Benedictine abbeys held in commendam by 1540 and 114 dioceses at his disposal, while Henry VIII had twenty or so dioceses and a few hundred lesser benefices. In France, abbeys probably yielded 150,000-200,000 *livres tournois* of revenue (though it is difficult to be categorical about the figures). The forty-two dioceses held by twenty-six state prelates yielded 3-400,000 lt. This added about a third to the capacity of the state to pay its servants.

Ultimately, Michon concludes that the state prelates of his period were a special instance of the growth of the Renaissance state, though they operated in very different ways in the two countries. In France, he argues, they reinforced the courtier/aristocratic dimension of the state and in England the bureaucratic. In England, their decline was precipitate after 1540, and Elizabethan prelates gave way to aristocrats and jurists. In France, their decline took place only after the end of the Wars of Religion, and the era of the cardinal ministers in the seventeenth century saw the intensification of administrative rule, not a return to government by bishops. In both countries, specialization ultimately diminished the value of multi-purpose state servants learned in canon and civil law. Cédric Michon has done a fine job of presenting the findings of his thesis in book form, retaining much of the extensive apparatus of references which indicates the depth and range of his archival knowledge. The book will surely take its place in the historiography of the growth of the modern state.

NOTES

[1] The book is a shortened version of Michon's 2004 doctoral thesis of the same title at the Université du Maine. He has since also published a number of important articles developing his ideas. He is now engaged on a project concerning the study of royal councilors in the sixteenth century.

[2] S. Thompson, "The pastoral work of the English and Welsh bishops 1500-58" (Ph.D. dissertation, Oxford University 1984); Kenneth Carleton, *Bishops and Reform in the English Church 1520-1559* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2001); A. Chibi, *Henry VIII's Bishops: Diplomats, Administrators, Scholars and*

Shepherds (Cambridge, 2003); A. Chibi, "The Schooling of Henry VIII's Bishops: A Comparative Examination," *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte*, 91 (2000), 354-72.

[3] Including M. Edelstein, "The Social Origins of the French Episcopacy in the Reign of Francis I" *French Historical Studies*, 8 (1974), 377-92; F. J. Baumgartner, *Change and Continuity in the France Episcopate: The Bishops and the Wars of Religion, 1547* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1986); N. Lemaître, *Le Rouergue flamboyant: Clergé et paroisses du diocèse de* Rodez (1417-1563) (Paris: Le Cerf, 1968); M. Veissière, *L'Évêque Guillaume Briçonnet: Contribution à la connaissance de la Réforme catholique à la veille du Concile de Trente* (Provins: Société d'histoire et d'archéologie, 1966).

[4] M. Châtenet, *la cour de France au XVIe siècle. Vie sociale et architecture* (Paris: Picard, 2002).

[5] W. S. Hudson, *The Cambridge Connection and the Elizabethan Settlement of 1559* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1982)

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