

*H-France Review* Vol. 9 (March 2009), No. 44

Christiane Demeulenaere-Douyère and David J. Sturdy, eds., *L'Enquête du Régent 1716-1718 : Sciences, Techniques et Politique dans la France pré-industrielle*. Turnhout, Belgium: BREPOLS, 2008. 1019 pp. Notes and index. €100. ISBN: 978-2-503-52817-5.

Review by Jeff Horn, Manhattan College.

Christiane Demeulenaere-Douyère and David J. Sturdy have brought together a wonderful collection of primary sources that sheds light on a large number of topics pertaining to the history of science, political history of the Regency and early eighteenth-century economic history. It should be part of any university library that caters to readers of French. Ably edited, clearly presented and including nineteen pages of color illustrations, this work is a worthy addition (it is volume 46) to the Collection of Studies from the International Academy of the History of Science edited by Emmanuel Poulle and Robert Halleux.

The editors have collected and annotated more than 800 pages of documents relating to a national survey intended to “faire un état des richesses minérales et naturelles de la France, et indiquer les contributions que leur exploitation pouvait apporter à l'avancement des arts et métiers” (p. 43). Ordered by the Regent Philippe II, duc d'Orléans, and conducted from 1716 to 1718 by the intendants and their local agents, the survey was overseen and collated by the Académie des sciences in the persons of two Academicians: the Abbé Jean-Paul de Bignon and René-Antoine Ferchault de Réaumur. Organized by generality, one of the chief advantages of this collection was Réaumur's relentless curiosity—especially with regard to certain topics such as iron production and steel-making (p. 48). He repeatedly prodded the intendants for further information or clarifications. Thus, the reports collected here do not represent a “once and done” approach or undigested material, thereby adding to their potential value.

As should be expected, the reports vary in quantity and quality. Some go into great detail on commercial matters (Bordeaux) or pay particular attention to agriculture (Dijon, Languedoc). Others are fragmentary (Aix-en-Provence, Maubeuge, Moulins) or include a great deal of specific information about individuals (Paris); the labor process (Amiens, Lyon) or mining (Grenoble, Navarre, Tours). In some places, Réaumur played a greater role in prodding the intendants for more information (Moulins, Languedoc) or in asking specific questions from the start (Amiens). Some reports seem somewhat fanciful or just plain unreliable. In short, the level of detail, the subjects treated, and the implications of the questions both asked and answered varied widely, but there is literally something for almost everyone interested in these themes and this period somewhere in this volume.

The introduction is well-organized and informative. Not surprisingly given the series and the interests and publishing trajectories of the editors [1], the relatively concise seventy-five page introduction situates this collection firmly with the history of science, most notably the development of the Académie des sciences. Demeulenaere-Douyère and Sturdy are at pains to emphasize the collaborative nature of the inquiry between representatives of the state at both the local and national levels and the scientific community (p. 31). The need for state intervention in the application of science to economic, particularly industrial, matters is an important theme. The editors argue that the enquête signaled not only the duc d'Orléan's desire to place science in service to the state (p. 18), but also the emergence of a

thorough-going state interest in applying scientific principles to the economy and that this effort served as a model for local government activity in the eighteenth century (pp. 56-57). Although this view seems overstated, it is useful to have the view from the vantage point of the Académie des sciences articulated so well.

Demeulenaere-Douyère and Sturdy's introduction provides some of the political context and details the factors that went into the decision to conduct a national survey. Their sketch of the tortuous manner by which the Académie implemented the enquête at least partly as a collateral aspect of the longstanding and almost completely moribund project of gathering material for and publishing a *Descriptions des arts et métiers* (that only began to see the light of day in 1761) dramatically minimizes the weaknesses and limitations of the French scientific establishment with regard to practical matters. They also downplay the significance of this administrative task for shaping and limiting Réaumur's scientific output (pp. 49-51).

Given the current concerns of the history of science, it should not surprise that the introduction reads as intellectual history. The importance of the national inquiry and its results for economic and/or labor history is alluded to cursorily without much concrete discussion (pp. 43-49). That gaping blind spot is a real shortcoming because a reader cannot finish reading the generalities that start with the letter "A" to realize that these sources have much more to say about how royal officials understood the labor process, the geography and sources of economic development, the application of water power to industry, and the state's vision of investment and the proper means of stimulating industrial innovation than they do about the state of scientific and technical knowledge during the Regency (pp. 173-174, 191).

Those interested in local or provincial history or who want to construct any sort of national economic statistics as France began to recover from Louis XIV's wars will also find these documents extremely useful, particularly when combined with other sources. Outside the CARAN, it is particularly hard to find such rich sources that cut across the spatial divides of the provinces and generalities. To have them gathered together, with good explanatory notes, in a handsome, solidly-bound and easy to hold volume is a wonderful service for other scholars. We should thank Demeulenaere-Douyère and Sturdy by ordering their book for our libraries and by making use of their painstaking efforts.

## NOTES

[1] See, most notably, Christiane Demeulenaere-Douyère and Éric Brian, eds., *Règlement, usages et science dans la France de l'absolutisme : à l'occasion du troisième centenaire du règlement instituant l'Académie royale des sciences (26 janvier 1699)* (Paris: Tech&Doc, 2002), Éric Brian and Christiane Demeulenaere-Douyère, eds., *Histoire et mémoire de l'Académie des sciences : guide de recherches* (Paris: Tech & Doc, 1996), and David J. Sturdy, *Science and Social Status: The Members of the Académie des Sciences, 1666-1750* (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell and Brewer, 1995).

Jeff Horn  
Manhattan College  
[jeff.horn@manhattan.edu](mailto:jeff.horn@manhattan.edu)

at any time and for any specific case. Neither bulk redistribution/republication in electronic form of more than five percent of the contents of *H-France Review* nor re-publication of any amount in print form will be permitted without permission. For any other proposed uses, contact the Editor-in-Chief of *H-France*. The views posted on *H-France Review* are not necessarily the views of the Society for French Historical Studies.

ISSN 1553-9172