

*Enlightened Reform in Southern Europe and its Atlantic Colonies, c.1750–1830*, ed. Gabriel Paquette (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009; pp. xviii + 404. £55).

This is an excellent collection of essays both for the historical problem it raises, which is the nature of the concept of enlightened reform, and the answers it provides. The contributors are all experts in their respective fields, and their articles reveal rigour and an innovative originality in the way they combine to produce a cohesive treatment. The volume also provides an up-to-date bibliography and, taken as a whole, the essays it contains demonstrate the present position on the idea of 'enlightened reform' as well as opening up new paths for research. Contrary to what the title might suggest, the scope of the volume is not simply geographic but it takes as its focus the states in South Europe—France, Spain, Portugal and Italy—all of which were linked by different bonds: dynastic (the Bourbons reigned over Paris, Naples and Madrid), political, cultural, and even religious (understood both as Catholic orthodoxy, and as a more or less strong presence of Jansenism). Moreover, the colonial dimension, if it was obviously preponderant in the 'composite monarchies' of Spain and Portugal, had great significance in France as well. The chosen periodisation presents a very 'long' eighteenth century which takes as its turning-point the Seven Years War (1757–63). This is the right choice. That war brought to light at least two aspects of domestic policy, as well as international relations, which were not plainly visible until then. Coinciding with its conclusion, a period of transformation of the political framework had begun in the Bourbon states, which at least in the 1760s had as its pivot the advent of a new relationship between church and state, with the expulsion of the Jesuits and the reforms that followed. In addition, the French defeat in the East revealed that the ideology of the desired *doux commerce* was by now simply an illusion; and that commerce, as Voltaire clearly stated, had to be regulated the English way—that is to say, with the use of weapons both against native populations and European rivals. 'Patriotic cosmopolitanism' (p. 6) can also be understood against this background.

Placed in this context, is the concept of enlightened reform still a useful tool for the understanding of eighteenth-century society, and, if so, in what sense? From these essays, there emerge four axes which characterised the political and social dynamics of those societies and against which the concept of enlightened

reforms can be measured. In the first place reforms were devised and realised—when they were—mainly by the State, which then acted as their ‘incubator’; secondly, at the same time, a public opinion formed in those societies, in different modes and at different times, which supported, corrected and sometimes imposed those reforms; thirdly, the reforms had essentially political and economic objectives; finally, the limits of the reforming process emerge clearly. The relationship between state and society which the reforms served to highlight is discussed with regard to the action of the Spanish government in the American colonies in C. Albi’s ‘Derecho Indiano vs. the Bourbons’ Reforms: The Legal Philosophy of F.X. De Gamboa’, C. Noel’s ‘In the House of Reform: The Bourbon Court of Eighteenth-century Spain’, and M. Lucena-Giraldo’s ‘The Limits of Reform in Spanish America’, all of which emphasise the distinction which existed between the intellectual currents of the Enlightenment and the regalist will to establish a stronger, even despotic, governmental power. This distinction is also found in two more essays: J. Robertson’s ‘Enlightenment, Reform and Monarchy in Italy’ and M. Calaresu’s ‘Searching for a “Middle Class”? Pagano and the Public for Reform in Late Eighteenth-Century Naples’, for whom the Enlightenment was ‘an intellectual movement’ (p. 32), possessing an autonomous character and the centre of which lay in the new public opinion taking shape in Europe as well as outside (as can be seen in J. Dym, writing about Guatemala’s magazines, and in L. Villalta, analysing the interpretation of Montesquieu in Brazil). Enlightenment intellectuals wanted to be independent conveyors of public opinion, without being counsellors of the prince; yet they also established connections with power. The case (studied by P. Røge) of Mirabeau *frère* and Mercier de la Rivière, who went to govern the French colonies in America, makes clear how the different languages of the Enlightenment and of regalism were able to find different points of contact.

Approached in this way, these essays demonstrate the interconnectedness of processes of reform and the Enlightenment. On the one hand, therefore, the Enlightenment cannot be reduced to a set of ‘communicative practices’ (p. 11); but nor, on the other hand, should it be seen as merely the pursuit of new forms for tax authority, because it also included the formation of structures of sociability, the leading of the struggle against the clergy, strategies in education, and infrastructural projects (roads, harbours, etc.). Therefore this new strategy of Enlightened reform was the opposite of *raison d’état*, because public opinion and governmental power were not at odds. But what was the field on which Enlightenment reformists and bureaucracy were able to establish a dialogue? It was not represented only by the reforms. At stake was the idea of the State itself. The book, from this point of view, operates within the conceptual framework of J. Elliott’s great essay (1992) on composite monarchies. However, this theme might perhaps have been addressed more explicitly. This is not so much a criticism, as one of the possible openings which can be proposed by the reading of this volume. In other words, what was the *ancien régime* State, within which those élites lived and those reforms were devised? The sovereignty of composite monarchies was defined as a territorial and composite public right, in which various territorial, social and institutional components combined through negotiation and privileges. But during the eighteenth century the changes in the structures of that State began to be felt. On 11 April 1771 Mme D’Epinay wrote to Galiani that the French constitution was ambiguous by its very nature, because it was divided

between the power of the king and that of the *parlements*. If the king won, then despotism would ensue; if the *parlements* gained ascendancy, the king would have no power—as in the case of the English king. *Tertium non datur*. In either case, the original constitution would change. The turn towards absolutism appeared to be the aim of the Bourbon monarchies, the Spanish one in particular. But the problem that this raised was not just Spanish but general. Gabriel Paquette's question is therefore of the utmost relevance: 'to what degree did enlightened reform, particularly in its Iberian and French manifestations, emerge from or reflect the colonial experience?' (p. 8). One answer can be found in Raynal and Diderot's *Histoire des deux Indes* (1770, 1774, 1780). Raynal, who established relations in Paris with the group of Aranda and Campomanes, praised the many initiatives of the reform process. Diderot, in contrast, made more radical remarks on them. His new idea of sovereignty did not rely on compromise among parties and privilege; it relied on the individual, with his/her need for equality, virtue, freedom and happiness. Compromise between citizens and institutions was now considered to be corruption; intermediate powers were seen as irrational structures; privilege was judged to be incompatible with the common good. In the light of such an idea of the sovereignty of the people, which revolved around the individual/nation dichotomy, the *ancien régime* State of composite monarchy had now become unacceptable to Diderot, be it the new despotism or the old balance among the parties. The Enlightenment tried to open a new path in the dialogue between government and the new social forces. Reflecting on the case of South-American colonies did not lead these Enlightenment writers to consider a case incompatible with European culture, as Montesquieu had said, but a reconsideration of the history and prospects of their own *civilisation* in Europe.

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