

movement of the 1880s. Taken with other new research, it will begin to reshape our understanding of this key moment in North American history.

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Hilton L. Root — *Peasants and King in Burgundy: Agrarian Foundations of French Absolutism*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987. Pp. xi, 277.

Based on extensive research in the Archives Départementales at Dijon, Hilton Root's study of the relationship between eighteenth-century villages in northeastern Burgundy and the state challenges standard interpretations concerning the impact of royal centralization on rural France during the Old Regime. De Tocqueville postulated that early modern state formation was accomplished at the expense of the seigneur and traditional communal institutions. The village assembly, for example, was rendered powerless in the eighteenth century. Subsequent historians included capitalism in their discussion of the peasant-state relationship. Their agent of modernization, the French state, collaborated with capitalists by attacking the precapitalist organization and communal traditions of the village, provoking peasant protests that culminated in revolution. Root suggests a very different view of the Old Regime:

The documents from Burgundian villages do not support the theory that precapitalist villages were destroyed by the forces of state building and capitalism. In Burgundy, the corporate structure of the village was more developed in the eighteenth century than it had ever been. Loyal administrators had promoted collective ownership of property and collective responsibility for debts in order to extract goods and services from the peasantry. As a result of this state policy, the corporate village became a vital component of the centralized state structure (10).

Preservation of communal traditions encouraged by the crown delayed technological advance, but did not shield villages from the market economy. Indeed, maintenance of village institutions and practices increased inequality and social stratification while commercialization of common lands gave villages the wherewithal to test the legality of feudal dues. Root argues that "the growth of the state gave the peasantry both the capacity to protest and new reasons to do so" (21).

Root presents his case in seven well-documented chapters beginning with a discussion of how Louis XIV assured investors needed to finance an ambitious foreign policy that royal revenue was reliable. To increase fiscal efficiency, Louis turned intendants into permanent royal agents stationed in each *généralité* to supervise tax collection. Since a large part of revenue came from peasant villages, protection of that source involved intendants in communal affairs. Limited resources forced intendants to emphasize collective responsibility and reinforce corporate institutions guaranteeing communal solvency. Because alienation of communal lands reduced village income as well as the royal tax base, the crown acted to recover lands lost and verify communal debts. Thus, Louis became the guardian of communal property. Root concludes that "survival of the village was a result of Louis' policies...to protect his share of what the peasantry produced.... Inadvertently, Louis linked the fate of the

French monarchy to the collective traditions of the village (44). Village officials had become responsible to intendants for village finances by the early eighteenth century. Removal of the seigneur from village proceedings began with creation and sale of the office of village syndic who formed the "bottom rung" of royal administration and was answerable to the intendant. Using the case of Loppin de Gemeaux in 1756, Root shows how intendants worked with peasant communities to challenge the seigneur's role in village affairs such as his "right to convoke, or even be present at, meetings of the village assembly" (56). Assertions that seigneurial authority increased in the second half of the eighteenth century are not supported by what Root found in village archives. By appropriating the seigneur's judicial and administrative role, intendants undermined the *raison d'être* for his economic rights and privileges which villages began to challenge in court introducing "the language used on the night of August 4, 1789" (193). In his analysis of this "devastating attack launched by lawyers and peasant communities on the historical and moral foundations of seigneurial authority...", Root concludes that "the rise of the bureaucratic state, not innovative ways of collecting feudal dues, was the critical destabilizing force (203-204).

R.R. Palmer discovered in Rousseau's *Social Contract* a "gospel of revolutionary democracy" (67), but Root finds "that intendants of eighteenth-century Burgundy understood the term 'general will' and applied it in precisely the manner prescribed by Rousseau" (68) to extend royal control. Communal affairs were managed by the village assembly made up of heads of household. Eighteenth-century intendants strengthened this institution and regularized procedures to facilitate surveillance and prevent domination by special interests or cliques. Efforts of wealthier peasants to substitute a council of notables got a cold response from intendants who preferred general meetings because "one can watch a community more closely" (94). Root concludes that such policies, which promoted communal independence and cohesiveness, "were at once authoritarian and egalitarian, but were nevertheless democratic: they extended suffrage to all male inhabitants" (102-103). Disputes over village government not only reveal bureaucratic motives, but also suggest "that political change in eighteenth-century France cannot be explained in terms of a rising and irresistible democracy" (103). As village archives reveal a current of ideas similar to those of the philosophes, Root wonders whether "we should broaden the definition of the Enlightenment and speak of ideas shared in a common culture the way Burckhardt spoke of the Renaissance" (104).

Crown efforts to reform French agriculture along English lines in the second half of the eighteenth century were blocked by intendants and villages. Hardly the agents of modernization, intendants opposed restriction of communal rights, partition of common lands and enclosure because such measures would undermine the basis of their authority, increase rural poverty and threaten communal solvency which had become the basis of royal credit. "The close relationship between fiscal solvency and the preservation of communal properties emerges clearly from the intendant's preference for the leasing of communal lands to the highest bidder..." (133), but "As communal rights became commercialized, they provided the capital that guaranteed the continued existence of communities" (140) and provided funds for collective action such as lawsuits. Partition of communal lands was opposed by wealthier peasants who monopolized them while neither rich nor poor peasants saw anything to be gained by enclosure. "The stagnation of agriculture in Burgundy", Root observes, "is an example of what happens when fiscal policies determine social and economic development" (218). Fiscal priorities forced the revolutionary government to reverse

efforts to dismantle the corporate village, and soon, it, "like the monarchy it had replaced, had become the protector of village properties and rights" (240).

Root's provocative study of the peasant-state relationship in eighteenth-century Burgundy makes an important contribution to the on-going debate over absolutism. Broader implications of this well-written monograph will be of interest to political, administrative, social and economic historians. The work is enhanced by a full bibliography, ample notation and an index.

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Eric W. Sager — *Seafaring Labour: The Merchant Marine of Atlantic Canada, 1820-1914*. Kingston, Montreal; McGill-Queen's University Press, 1989. Pp. 352.

For over sixty years, F.W. Wallace's classic study, *Wooden Ships and Iron Men*, has dominated the history of Atlantic Canada's merchant marine. That ascendancy has now been challenged by Eric Sager, whose experience with Memorial University's Atlantic Canada Shipping Project has become the basis for a revisionist perspective on our east coast "age of sail". In Sager's hands, the focus shifts from the ships to the men of Canada's high seas wooden, sail powered fleet. Simultaneously, the author makes a deliberate effort to rescue the sailors from the hostile stereotype created by Wallace and his disciples, a stereotype which suggests that these men were so sunken in drink and violence as to constitute a quasi-criminal class, isolated from the mainstream of the Canadian experience. Sager's reinterpretation is built around the notion that these "working men who got wet" participated in the process of industrialization which transformed the work place and working relationships for Canadian labour, both on land and at sea. Thus for Sager, sailor behaviour derived not from sloth and decadence, but rather from an entirely rational concern to protect themselves from the threat of hostile change.

In contrast to Wallace, who viewed wooden ships as being a rather static and simple expression of pre-industrial technology and organization, Sager argues that these vessels were "proto-factories", undergoing continual evolution of design and possessing a highly complex division of labour in their work force. Responding primarily to the challenge of falling ocean freight rates, builders and owners radically transformed the character of our high seas wooden fleet through the last third of the nineteenth century. Scrambling to salvage profits through increased productivity, they experimented with a host of innovations in everything from hull size and rig design to building materials and vessel routing. The effort paid off, in the sense that Atlantic Canada's wooden ships remained competitive with the foreign metal hulled steamers, in the international carrying trade, into the early twentieth century. Unfortunately, this success story imposed high costs on our merchant mariners.

Crew size diminished, the work load increased, real wages remained depressed, isolation from home and family grew and the risk of injury or death from disease and accident became ever greater. At the same time, labour relations deteriorated, as captains and mates, under mounting pressure from owners to make every voyage profitable, demanded more and more effort from the shrinking mass of ordinary and