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The French Idea of History: Joseph de Maistre and His Heirs, 1794–1854 by Carolina Armenteros

Review by: David W. Bates

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éralités played an important role) was, for the most part, maintained until the end of the ancien régime. As Hamscher says, “The system functioned remarkably well and served the public good” (440). To be sure, scholars have not totally neglected the way the courts functioned (see, in particular, the acts of the Dijon colloquy on relations between justice and money, *Justice et argent: Les crimes et les peines pécuniaires du XIIIe au XXIe siècle* and *Les juristes et l’argent: Le coût de la justice et l’argent des juges du XIVe au XIXe siècle*, both ed. Benoît Garnot [Dijon, 2005]), but they have lacked the overall view and the global presentation offered by Hamscher’s study.

During the period in question, the monarchy’s financial contribution to the workings of justice tended to be fairly tightly restricted, at least where ordinary criminality was concerned (this was less true of the pursuit of what were considered to be more serious crimes and major criminals). That fact tends to show that justice was less and less a priority for the royal state, perhaps (and this is my own personal interpretation) because it no longer seemed necessary to make justice the prime instrument of an obedience and a consensus that appeared to be largely acquired. In short, growing indifference might be seen as a proof of earlier success! Whatever the case, the situation lasted after the Revolution and into our own times, making the administration of justice in France a poor relation of the state budget in comparison with other European countries: in 2006, the budget for justice in France corresponded to €53 per inhabitant, as compared to €90 in the Low Countries, €600 in Germany, €70 in Italy, and . . . €30 in Greece.

To be sure, the financing of civil justice, which accounted for the greater part of the judges’ activity (perhaps around 90 percent) is not considered in this study, but it is probable that, more often than not, civil justice was self-financing, thanks to receipts from fines and repayment of expenditures. As for seigneurial and municipal justice, the main occupation of which was to judge ordinary affairs, the ones most closely connected with people’s everyday lives (and we now know, thanks to recent research projects, that these did not undergo a decline, as was long thought to be the case), they hardly appear in this book, which is quite logical because they required little if any state money.

Thus, it is above all the royal courts of justice of modern France (from the parlements to the courts of the *baillage* or the *sénéchaussé*, including the presidential courts) that Hamscher’s painstaking observation permits us to see from a new viewpoint as we follow the role of the monarch in the financing of the courts’ penal activity. This book, with its vast and solid documentation, and which is always interesting and often innovative, thus makes a useful contribution to a better knowledge of how justice functioned under the ancien régime, a period that today is undergoing endless rediscovery in ways that become increasingly detached from historiographical formulas inspired by the Enlightenment and uncritically transmitted by all too many historians.

BENOÎT GARNOT*

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The French Idea of History: Joseph de Maistre and His Heirs, 1794–1854.

By *Carolina Armenteros*.

Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011. Pp. xiv+361. \$59.95.

Carolina Armenteros’s innovative and provocative study of Joseph de Maistre goes beyond previous attempts to reclaim the complexity of counterrevolutionary thinking for intellectual history. She argues that Maistre and his followers were not only engaged in a

* Translated for *The Journal of Modern History* by Lydia G. Cochrane.

novel rethinking of human history but were in fact indispensable figures for the development of a uniquely French concept of history in the early nineteenth century. Armenteros wants to diminish the role of German historical thought in this period while suggesting strongly that Maistre, the archenemy of the Enlightenment and Revolution, was the key intermediary linking eighteenth-century ideas and the work of individuals such as Auguste Comte and Henri de Saint-Simon. The strategy is clear: by placing Maistre at the center of this transition, Armenteros isolates a crucial (if previously undetected) role for theological metaphysics at the heart of some of the most influential secular theories of human progress. This is a rather difficult argument to make, and though I do not think it is very well established in *The French Idea of History*, Armenteros's close reading of Maistre leaves no doubt that he is closely connected to the key conceptual turn marking postrevolutionary historical thought in Europe.

The book's first chapter, on Maistre's intellectual relationship to Rousseau (and, by extension, to Enlightenment thinking in general) tries to argue that eighteenth-century figures, despite their interest in history, were limited by their "abstract" view of collective development. The key innovation of Maistre's work was, supposedly, its protostatistical quality. By emphasizing the concreteness and specificity of human organization in history, Maistre was able to discover the idea that both "normality" and deviation were products of an underlying Providence that was working itself out in historical time, foreshadowing the interest in accident and contingency in later statistical models of regularity. However, Armenteros repeatedly makes the unsubstantiated claim that Maistre was the very first to introduce such a historical concept. There is very little engagement here with the richness and diversity of Enlightenment thought: conjectural history gets no attention, Montesquieu's work is not very well examined, and early revolutionary ideas are slighted. However, the goal is clear in this chapter—namely, to see Maistre's "return to metaphysics" (i.e., theology) as the only "solution" to the dire separation of the physical and the human sciences in the Enlightenment. The actual story of transition and influence here is exceptionally murky. The *Idéologues* in France, who held sway during the Directory and the Empire, are often invoked but never directly engaged, so Armenteros misses the opportunity to elucidate the multiple strands of influence animating sophisticated historical thinking after the Terror.

The following chapter surveys Maistre's epistemology, and Armenteros does a terrific job of showing the ways in which the Savoyard brought together many different strands of philosophy in forging his own unique position. Less clear is the relevance of this to the larger argument of the book. Similarly, the third chapter presents a rigorous contextualization of Maistre's major work on the papacy, showing clearly how important knowledge of the Russian setting is for understanding this text and its place in Maistre's career. Yet it ends with a rather grandiose assertion that the key religious and historical themes of later nineteenth-century thought can be traced to Maistre and hence were "partly Russian in origin" (155). Overall, the first part of the book (which focuses on Maistre) is at once pleasingly erudite in its interpretation of Maistre's intellectual world and consistently maddening in its exaggeration of his influence. And, like many Maistre scholars, Armenteros too often lapses into overtly partisan language when describing his achievements (see, e.g., 214).

The second part of the book tracks the development of historical thought in France from 1798 to 1854. While I want to emphasize that the discussion in these chapters is instructive, fine-tuned, and often captivating, the substantial argument linking Maistre's early writing with the complex historical approaches in this period is quite weak. Armenteros notes that "after 1798," the year Maistre's *Considerations on France* was published, the French bureaucracy adopted a new social, statistical method that replaced older "ter-

ritorial” models of administration. She is, of course, right to note the new interest in social organization in the wake of revolutionary turmoil. Yet she is rather unconvincing when stating (and the reasons for her claim are transparent) that another “ideational factor was at work: a statistical Providentialism that keenly resembled Maistre’s, and probably derived from it” (220). This claim seems to be based only on temporal coincidence, as far as I can tell. That said, later chapters on the relationship between Christian historical thinking in France (exemplified by figures such as Maistre, François-René Chateaubriand, and Pierre-Simon Ballanche) and the ideas of Comte, Saint-Simon, and Pierre-Joseph Proudhon are more than intriguing.

In the end, the orientation of the book is, I believe, skewed in order to make Maistre (and his peculiar brand of Providentialism) the singular origin of “our shaken yet enduring conviction that reflecting on history, retrieving historical facts, and practicing history as a discipline can improve us as human beings” (324). To my mind, Armenteros’s book would have been much more successful as a historical argument had it been organized according to its own internal logic. That is, the material here implicates Maistre, alongside many other thinkers, in a broad and heterogeneous European turn in thinking about history, violence, and the future of humankind.

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Civilizing Habits: Women Missionaries and the Revival of French Empire.

By Sarah A. Curtis.

Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010. Pp. x+373. \$74.00 (cloth); \$29.95 (paper).

Philippine Duchesne, Émilie de Vialar, and Anne-Marie Javouhey, the women at the center of Sarah A. Curtis’s outstanding book, were “enablers of empire” (270), and their stories, originating in provincial France, spanned the globe. *Civilizing Habits* opens new directions in French colonial history, drawing attention to the importance of the early nineteenth century in establishing the patterns of France’s modern imperial goals and placing women religious at the center of the colonial project.

The French Revolution “unleashed a great wave of creativity in women’s religious life” (96), marked particularly by the invention of the *congrégation*, in which sisters bound by vows dedicated themselves to active service, primarily nursing and teaching. Old Regime nuns living in cloistered communities could not have imagined the postrevolutionary world in which small groups of sisters departed for distant lands to build hospitals and schools. The *congrégation* was also innovative in its centralized governance structure: an order’s *supérieure générale* managed personnel, chose sisters for missions, directed budgets, and often came into conflict with episcopal authority. As *congrégations* spread globally, their leaders acted, in Curtis’s apt analogy, like CEOs of multinational corporations.

Civilizing Habits has three sections, each devoted to the work of one woman. The first focuses on Duchesne, the only one of the three to have taken vows before the Revolution. As a member of the postrevolutionary Religious of the Sacred Heart, Duchesne believed that she was called to evangelize among Indians, and she took the Jesuit “black robes” and Marie de l’Incarnation as her role models. After opening girls’ schools in Louisiana and Missouri, she finally established a mission school among the Potawatomi Indians in 1841. Curtis then moves to the Mediterranean and to the career of Vialar, who founded the Soeurs de Saint Joseph de l’Apparition. Although Vialar’s vocation originally called her to care for poor children in her home in southern France, she and three sisters crossed the