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**The Burgundy Circle's plans to undermine Louis XIV's absolute state through polysynody and the high nobility**

**I**

Louis, duc de Bourgogne (1682 - 1712) was briefly Dauphin of France from April 1711 until his death from measles in March 1712. The eldest grandson of Louis XIV, Bourgogne's premature demise was immediately viewed as a lost opportunity to reform an ailing French monarchy. Surrounded by a small band of notable advisers and reformers known to posterity as the Burgundy Circle, this group had spent several years planning a reorganisation of Louis XIV's 'absolutist' sovereignty in favour of a decentralised and expanded government. While revisionist historians have made it clear that France was never fully centralised under Louis XIV and therefore not subject to 'absolutism', his kingship was defined by an aspiration for the crown to be independent in action. The accompanying crown propaganda proved so successful that the king's subjects and his European neighbours bought into the notion that the French monarch enjoyed complete control over his state. Crucially, the ancient noblesse d'épée (nobility of the sword) assumed this to be the case too, believing they had been excluded from power by Louis XIV and replaced by the newer administrative noblesse de robe (nobility of the robe). Despite the revisionist claim that many épée nobles were utilised by Louis XIV during his reign, from the 1680s a significant number felt side-lined at a time of economic, social, religious and political turmoil. Amongst them, the Burgundy Circle formed an important group of high nobles who opposed many of Louis XIV's later policies. Containing members of the court and administration, they were well placed to understand the task facing a king of France. Often rebuffed by Louis XIV when proffering assistance in matters of state, some of the duc de Bourgogne's educators engaged in a long-term strategy to indoctrinate the prince to remedy France's ills when he became king. Through a discussion of the political theory of the group's

key members, this article will reject their portrayal as promoting a reactionary revival of aristocratic fortunes, instead arguing that the Burgundy Circle aspired to enlarge and devolve government.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, it will be shown that rather than possessing a single cohesive ideology, the Circle contained several visions of a future France. To challenge elements of the revisionist view that absolutism in France was a ‘myth’, it will be first necessary to delineate the historiographical understanding of Louis XIV’s sovereignty and the perceived fortunes of the *noblesse de épée*.

## II

Absolutism has been described as ‘freedom for the monarch in practise from institutional checks on his power’; although no ‘single European model’ ever possessed a truly absolute ruler.<sup>2</sup> Such a view overturned a belief extant in historiography from the nineteenth century onwards that Europe had experienced a number of absolute rulers during the early modern period, and that Louis XIV had been the apogee of this form of sovereignty. This older interpretation was ‘an historical construction’ that depicted an ‘*ancien régime*’ France as moving towards absolutism from the fifteenth or sixteenth century.<sup>3</sup> Shaped in part by the conceptual emergence of the state as a ‘public thing’ (*res publica*) or independent entity,<sup>4</sup> absolutism was a means for the crown to gain control of the state, the nobility, and its subjects. Reacting to the internecine civil and religious French Wars of Religion (1562 - 98), this process began in earnest during the reigns of Henri IV (r. 1589 - 1610) and his son Louis XIII (r. 1610 - 43). Under the latter’s First Minister Cardinal Richelieu (1585 - 1642) especially, the French crown accelerated the process of state centralisation. Religious, military and economic pressures saw the crown concentrate power at the centre of government as the autonomy of its representative institutions (*parlements*, estates, etc.) were reduced. Richelieu and his successor as First Minister, Cardinal Mazarin (1602 - 61), sought to protect the state by enabling the king to act in any manner that was seen to be beneficial during extraordinary times.<sup>5</sup> While reacting to sixteenth century disorder and the

economic demands of the Thirty Years' War (1618 - 48), increased crown power was designed to pull authority away from the high nobility, particularly within the provinces. So asserted crown supremacy was seen as offering unity and security after fractious religious, civil and provincial hostilities, plus a need to overcome the potential threat posed by the *épée*. Emerging from this was a system that relied on intendants responsible to the royal council, and from 1643 an upper council (*conseil d'en haut*) which trusted a handful of chief ministers and robe advisers to counsel the king on matters of state. The consequence of this transformation in government was the development of a mechanism headed by an autocratic and independent king, which curtailed the nobility's power by depending on a non-*épée* administration and allowed many provincial governments to stultify.

This reading of French absolutism has been rejected as a 'myth'.<sup>6</sup> Two key objections arise in relation to the notion that the French king employed absolutism: first, the definition of the term 'absolutism'; and second, the true extent of the king's authority and power. Concerning the first objection, it has been noted that the term 'absolutism' was not contemporary and was coined only in the 1820s.<sup>7</sup> At which time its association with the absolute monarchy of Spain had meant that it accrued negative connotations, seen as the 'autocratic enemy of consent, the despotic foe of popular rights and liberties, the bureaucratic subverter of society's natural elites'.<sup>8</sup> Anachronistic historiography placed contemporary labels (or 'isms') on an ancien régime that had failed during the 1789 French Revolution due to its corruption, restrictive centralising behaviour, despotism, and (Whiggish) ill comparison with the success of the British monarchy. It is also pointed out that the pejorative term of 'absolutism' misunderstood what 'absolute' sovereignty actually meant: the established capacity in European states (including England) that made a monarch's decisions final, and their capability to employ prerogative powers in emergencies.<sup>9</sup> According to the misinterpretation, absolutism allowed Louis XIV to conceive 'himself to be above the positive laws of the land, not responsible to his people and their

institutions, although acknowledging “higher” constraints’.<sup>10</sup> This outdated depiction of French ‘absolutism’ as eschewing the constitutional apparatus of the state to gain greater (despotic) control of the state and its subjects was erroneous.

The second objection consolidated the first. Revisionist historians have shown that at no stage did Louis XIV gain independence from the other apparatus of state. Louis XIV carefully fostered an ‘illusion of strong monarchy’, purposely cultivating a ‘façade’ of absolute power, engendered for a domestic public and foreign audience through propaganda, diplomacy, war and the construction of the palace at Versailles.<sup>11</sup> Past historians made the mistake of assuming that Louis XIV needed to pursue absolutism in order to secure order following the Frondes (1648 - 53): a civil war in which a broad range of social groups reacted to the aggressive policies of Mazarin. In truth, the parlement de Paris that had risen up during the first Frondes helped to restore order in the second, and many of the leading nobles who had rebelled had been propitiated.<sup>12</sup> The crown did not possess the infrastructure, resources, communications, or widespread unity within its provincial territories to impose absolutism.<sup>13</sup> Instead the crown succeeded in promoting its policies and authority through a conciliatory tactic in which it cooperated with its provinces and their government apparatus (estates, parlements, nobility, etc.) to secure the enactment of its policy and obtain provincial loyalty.<sup>14</sup> Operating within the constitutional framework, the crown drew power into the centre but managed to retain the cooperation of the wider government apparatus and keep the nobility ‘quiescent’.<sup>15</sup> More controversial limitations on the constitutional elements of the state such as the 1673 edict that prevented the parlements from remonstrating the king’s laws prior to enactment, were passed using the king’s emergency prerogatives as the nation was at war with the Dutch (1672 - 78). Louis XIV’s reign, therefore, exhibited no innovative or revolutionary tendencies, remaining a traditional monarchy that strived for greater authority and independence.<sup>16</sup>

This perspective is not universally accepted however. A number of scholars have argued that there was an absolutist agenda in France that was largely achieved under Louis XIV.<sup>17</sup> While the need for compromise with provincial governments and the elites prevented absolutism from being all pervasive, ideologically it was an attempt to restore the structures of monarchical authority that was largely successful.<sup>18</sup> The crown's concessionary attitude allowed it to develop an inadequate state bureaucracy in order to engage in economic reform hastened by a number of European wars from 1672. More importantly, absolutism allowed Louis XIV to emphasise the crown's pre-eminence after the scarring experience of the Frondes. The Frondes taught Louis XIV some hard lessons. After the death of Mazarin in 1661 he considered it essential for him to rule alone at the apex of government (and society) without a First Minister, in complete control of state decisions. This meant the stultification of any opposition to his authority and a commitment to underlining his power over all other groups, corporations, and state machinery. Louis's drive to locate the king at the centre of government was a continuation of earlier crown policy under his predecessors, particularly at the expense of the high nobility (and *parlement de Paris*).<sup>19</sup> As Louis XIV explained in his *Mémoires*, he had no intention of sharing his authority with those of high birth no matter how difficult this was for them to digest.<sup>20</sup>

French kings had attempted to overcome the authority, independence and provincial power of the high nobility and princes of blood for generations. Yet where Louis XIV differed was his ability to efficaciously retard their challenges while side-lining their influence on government policy. By retaining their rights and privileges and offering them 'prestigious but purely ceremonial posts' at court,<sup>21</sup> Louis's lack of antagonism towards the elite made them acquiescent. Louis XIV's accomplishment should be viewed as an ability to extend his power and control over government, while resisting challenges to his authority. His absolute sovereignty was thereby political in nature; an ideology or form of rule that the French and wider Europe bought

into. It did not overturn the constitution but manipulated it to manage the organism of the state and its opposition, while centralising the government around Louis XIV.<sup>22</sup>

### III

This management of the princes of blood and the high nobility appears to have been initially successful. Buoyed by his decision not to employ a First Minister after difficult years under Cardinals Richelieu and Mazarin, the *épée* were willing to support the young king from 1661. The parlements also readily co-operated with the crown for their duties as law courts and rights and privileges were not inhibited. From 1661 to 1672 France predominantly enjoyed years of peace, permitting administrative reorganisation while embarking on economic developments under the direction of the Controller-General, Jean-Baptiste Colbert (1619 - 83). As will be discussed below, these reforms concentrated on a mercantilist policy designed to generate revenues by attracting European coinage into France at the expense of her rivals, notably the Dutch and the English. Yet from 1672 a succession of draining wars fought over the next four decades placed heavy economic and financial burdens on the state and its people; a state still convalescing from the 'Thirty Years' War and the Frondes. Colbert's earlier policies to overcome 'economic depression' by strengthening 'manufactures, commerce and agriculture' had been 'geared' towards peace, and war undermined these plans especially after Colbert's death.<sup>23</sup>

By the 1680s opposition to government began to emerge as France experienced economic and financial problems, exacerbated by the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes (1685). Louis XIV's decision to overturn Henri IV's edict (1598) granting Huguenots the freedom to practise Protestantism free from state persecution led over 200,000 Huguenots (many of them skilled craftsman) to leave France. The widespread revulsion generated across Europe by the ensuing persecution (of Protestants),<sup>24</sup> juxtaposed with fears that France's aggrandising foreign policy sought to create a universal monarchy under Louis XIV led to criticism at home and abroad. The 1680s therefore witnessed a more tangible, incipient opposition to the crown's model of

sovereignty. While censorship and prosecution made this difficult, works began to appear that questioned the direction of the French state. In *Les soupirs de la France esclave, qui aspire après la liberté* (1689), the Huguenot exile Pierre Jurieu argued that the king's loss of focus on his (divinely appointed) duty to preserve the public good had been caused by his excessive elevation in status.<sup>25</sup> Such power separated him from his people, while excessive taxation had oppressed the country through slavery and poverty exposing the rule of a tyrant.<sup>26</sup>

Louis XIV's deliberate positioning of himself at the centre of government and decision to be personally responsible for approving governmental decisions has been seen as galvanising opposition against the king. Many previous kings, such as Louis XIII, would frequently hide behind their ministers, making them become culpable for errant policies. Louis XIV's determination to become accountable at the centre of government had been originally calculated to render royal authority more effective. And during the peaceful 1660s and successes in war during the 1670s the king's position was unproblematic, as ministers continued to be blamed for minor issues. From the 1680s until his death when difficulties were more manifest, Louis attracted greater criticism to 'his own head' when he came to be seen as personally responsible for French difficulties.<sup>27</sup> The perception of some high nobles of a state in crisis, witnessed a resurgence of desire to regain their hereditary position within the French constitution and not stand apart from government.<sup>28</sup>

As state centralisation had removed the 'disobedient and politically unreliable' high nobility throughout the seventeenth century, the crown had become deliberately reliant on its ministers and the robe nobility.<sup>29</sup> Yet the *épée* felt that this had set them 'ideologically apart' from the constitution, extinguishing the important role they occupied as a balancing agent between the king and his people.<sup>30</sup> Ladorie has argued that the new pre-eminence of the robe in government led to dismay in the *épée* over the relationship between status and power amongst the nobility. For while the *épée* were still viewed as possessing the status to which the robe aspired, the robe



had acquired the power the *épée* coveted.<sup>31</sup> It is true that many of the *épée* would not have accepted roles of office deeming it to be beneath them,<sup>32</sup> but some longed for a return to the (ancient) power they had once enjoyed in the state and now saw placed in the hands of the ministers and members of the (new) robe nobility. It is also correct for revisionists to point to the *épée*'s influential role both in the provinces, the army, and at court (advising the king privately). But this unduly mitigates a deep-seated feeling they had been replaced in the state. From the 1680s some thought they did not have enough sway over the direction of government, at a time when they viewed the robe as mismanaging the administration.

Ironically, the Burgundy Circle who most vociferously pushed an agenda of *épée* re-integration in government at court possessed the only ministerial member of the high nobility. Paul de Beauvilliers, duc de Saint-Aignan (1648 – 1714), was a trusted adviser of Louis XIV and a member of the *Conseil d'en haut*. He was also a son-in-law of Colbert, and his wife's sister married his friend Charles Honoré d'Albert de Luynes (1646 - 1712), duc de Chevreuse. And while Chevreuse was not an official minister, he was a close adviser to the king who had access to him day and night.<sup>33</sup> In 1689 the two men were given the great honour of acting as governors to Louis's three grandsons: the duc de Bourgogne, his brother the duc d'Anjou (1683 - 1746), later King Philip V of Spain, and the duc de Berry (1686 - 1714). Beauvilliers and Chevreuse employed their friend, counsellor and the future Archbishop of Cambrai, François de Salignac de la Mothe-Fénelon (1650 - 1715) as preceptor, and the ecclesiastical historian Claude Fleury (1640 - 1723) as sub-preceptor. Beauvillier and Chevreuse were friends with another member of the Circle, the famous diarist and member of the court at Versailles Louis de Rouvroy (1675 - 1755), duc de Saint-Simon, who was a friend to the adult Bourgogne and a childhood friend of Philippe II, the duc d'Orléans and future regent of France (1674 - 1723). Added to this group for the purpose of this article is the abbé Charles-Irénée Castle de Saint-Pierre (1658 - 1743). A peripheral member of the Circle and not close to Bourgogne, but one who was a satellite of the

group and made a concerted effort to create plans that incorporated a shared theoretical pillar, namely the polysynody.

At this juncture it should be noted that recent research has shown that the idea of polysynody – the extended use of government councils to advise the king and expand government - was not one that originated in the Burgundy Circle. Moreover, its development in practise and as an (intellectual) concept poses questions for the extent of Louis XIV's 'absolutism'. Dupilet and Sarmant claim that polysynody was actually a part of an evolving mechanism used by the French ministry that reveals reform within Louis XIV's government during the early eighteenth century.<sup>34</sup> Polysynody was first proposed by Paul Hurault de l'Hopital, seigneur de Belesbat (d. 1706) in a letter to Louis XIV in October 1699. Drawing on the French monarchy's traditional use of extended council, Belesbat wanted to tackle administrative deficiencies that had been exacerbated by wars, the excessive tax inequality that placed the burden on the poor, and religious persecution by incorporating more voices (from a range of backgrounds) to council the king.<sup>35</sup> While Belesbat's reorganisation was declined by Louis XIV, the proposal was not a secret within the upper-levels of the ministry. The idea of a polysynody quickly found a home in the Board of Commerce (1701), which used a council including locally elected members (aldermen and merchants) to work with commissioners and Secretaries of State who relied on their expertise when framing commercial policy. Furthermore, Louis XIV's Chancellor Louis Phélypeaux (1643 - 1727), comte de Pontchartrain, began to produce plans in 1711 for government polysynody when the death of Bourgonne made a regency inevitable. Pontchartrain had been commissioned by Louis XIV to examine future options, and he developed a system of eight polysynodic councils that would aid the regency government, train future ministers and lessen the chaos of Louis XIV's death by increasing the number of advisors – like Belesbat, based on ability rather than status - in government during the regency period only.<sup>36</sup> The existence of other models of polysynody suggests several key interventions. Firstly, it illustrates

that Louis XIV's government was not a stagnant 'ministerial despotism' because it was innovating until the king's death. Secondly, the concept of polysynody was not new. It was used in Europe and evolved from the old French system as part of a long tradition of reform and reliance on wider council (in times of need). Finally, knowledge within the ministry of the polysynody may well have been shared, and it seems likely that the Burgundy Circle adapted Belesbat's reforming agenda by adding an aristocratic focus with greater general participation to augment the *bien public*.<sup>37</sup> This centrality of the public good and the permanent expansion of government by polysynody, however, demarcated a clear division between the Burgundy Circle and Pontchartrain's (ministerial) vision: which limited the duration of the project to the regency and did not wish to undermine the king's authority by reactivating the Estates-General.

The Burgundy Circle has been viewed as one of three cabals at the court surrounding the king at Versailles. These cabals were generational in origin: the first surrounded Louis XIV and his consort Madame de Maintenon (1635 - 1719); the second was centred on the king's son Louis, le Grand Dauphin (1661 - 1711), and the third was Bourgogne's circle. The first two have been described as larger 'hostile allies' - opposed to the Circle - containing the main power and connections which included hundreds of governments technocrats, military leaders, key ministers, leading nobles, and royal bastards.<sup>38</sup> Despite this the Burgundy Circle's position at court and proximity to both the king and Bourgogne made them a powerful group.<sup>39</sup> Not least, because unlike many of the members of the other two cabals, the Circle's members were actively preparing reform plans for France rather than jostling for positions and personal rewards. This leads to the (inadequate) historiographical debate concerning the nature of the Burgundy Circle and its subsequent ideology. Most commentators have argued that the Circle was one cohesive group possessing one unified philosophy.<sup>40</sup> For some, those around Bourgogne were peddling a reactionary aristocratic agenda that would have restored the traditional feudal rights of the *épée* but retained the absolutist monarchical system France had erected. The aim of the Circle was to

restore some of the assistance the *épée* formerly provided for the king while undermining the gathering power of the ministry.<sup>41</sup> Other commentators have rejected this reactionary interpretation and also recognised that the Circle was not made up of a unified group of individuals, but they still regard their ideology to be uniform aristocratic reform.<sup>42</sup> While it is true that all of the Circle's plans do include the aristocracy and that the idea of polysnody is prevalent throughout their works, there is actually great diversity in their theory and intentions. As will be shown below through the ideas of these members, the Circle was a loose grouping of individuals with varying perceptions on the future of French monarchy.

#### IV

The educationalists that surrounded Bourgogne as a child formed the central group of the Burgundy Circle: Beauvilliers, Chevreuse, Fleury, and the key figure of Fénelon.<sup>43</sup> Fénelon is repeatedly referred to as the leader or crucial figure of the Burgundy Circle; partly because of his leading role as Bourgogne's tutor and pedagogue, partly due to his influence over the other educationalists, and partly because of his later intellectual legacy and reputation, aided in no small degree by the publication of *Télémaque* (published 1699), which was written for Bourgogne as a boy. Indeed, much of Fénelon's legacy as a political theorist has been taken from the educational works written for the young Bourgogne: the *Fables* (1689 - 91), *Dialogues des Morts* (1692 - 95), and *Télémaque* (1693 - 94). This older generation within the Circle formed a close bond with the prince that lasted for the remainder of his life. These men continued to advise him until his death and it is believed that they would have formed part of his government had they all outlived Louis XIV.<sup>44</sup> Importantly, there is much truth in the suggestion that these educationalists essentially indoctrinated Bourgogne from a young age. Initially this was to overcome his irascible childhood temper.<sup>45</sup> But later it is dynastic motivations that played a part. When the Circle saw much advice to reform government (largely from Fénelon) rebuffed by

Louis XIV, they saw an opportunity to be more successful in their endeavours by shaping the future king.<sup>46</sup>

Fénelon's three pedagogical works set out a number of key themes that were continually revisited by the prelate throughout Bourgogne's life. These were lessons in kingship, war and commerce, plus the two state grievances of tyranny and luxury. Fénelon's king was one who concentrated his labours on the welfare of his subjects and their liberty, beyond anything else, including his own personal interest.<sup>47</sup> Permeated by virtue and duty, the king acted as a moral example to his people, supported by an understanding of his country, its laws and its history.<sup>48</sup> Such wisdom was accumulated through study, as well as an awareness of the nations' current situation. This was ensured by a king not isolating himself from his subjects in a palace or behind obsequious flatterers and ministers concerned only with their own profit. A king must not lose sight of the vicissitudes of his people or be carried away by thoughts of his own glory (*gloire*), particularly through destructive wars. It was the peaceful king who acted virtuously, becoming a friend and mediator to his neighbours rather than engaging in hubristic jingoism.<sup>49</sup> To nurture the public good a state must be peaceful and filled with plenty, 'like a garden'.<sup>50</sup> In order to achieve this, government must employ its subjects industriously through trade and agriculture to galvanise a productive (whole) nation.

This explained why Fénelon underlined the two grievances for Bourgogne of tyranny and luxury.<sup>51</sup> Tyranny was the absolute will of a king without any 'bridle' for his passions. The ability for one man to possess such power was dangerous and could not be trusted, as the individual king may focus on his own needs over the common good. Added to this concern was the danger that a king would be deceived by flatterers at court and in government. Such men would not reveal the true situation of the kingdom because they were too focused on their own advantage rather than the public good, a situation akin to Louis's government. It was thereby imperative that a king's power should be limited,<sup>52</sup> through virtuous advisers (based on merit

rather than social background), independent ministers, and the use of wider government institutions.<sup>53</sup> Fénelon was later to admit to Bourgogne that these elements of government had been allowed to atrophy by kings.<sup>54</sup> A view of history that was shared by Fleury, who pointed to medieval Germanic (Gothic) French law that ensured kings held annual meetings with the nobility, Church and third estate to discuss government. Over time and particularly in the seventeenth century the parlements and other courts had become ‘useless’ in France,<sup>55</sup> but both Fleury and Fénelon felt wider consultation was essential for the state’s health.

The grievance of luxury reflected a European debate and concern with the development of commercial society in the seventeenth century. *Télémaque’s* assault on luxury rued its damaging effects on the agricultural base of Salente (France), as the population moved to the country to engage in the trade in luxuries. For Fénelon luxury had mired individuals and the (high) nobility in indolence and effeminacy, but more importantly it threatened the stability of society and weakened the state.<sup>56</sup> In the quest for Mammon people of all classes lost sight of what was important in life, thereby overturning the type of state like Holland (Tyre) that Fénelon favoured. Such a state was open to commerce but contained no idleness, as it was industrious, sober, frugal, and run by a well-regulated administration. Fénelon’s application of classical civic virtue saw an attempt to repulse contemporary social problems using ancient thought, as he fused a classical vision of duty with Christian morality.<sup>57</sup> His vision in the pedagogical works had been influenced by the thought of his sub-preceptor, Fleury, who had put forward a Christian agrarianism that opposed the mercantilism of the seventeenth century and Colbert.<sup>58</sup> Building on Fleury’s agricultural views and belief in the need for a ruler to improve the virtue and happiness of his people,<sup>59</sup> they set out to shape the young prince’s education. In so doing, they criticised the reforms of Colbert which had focused on commercial policies. These had placed an emphasis on the requirement for exports to exceed imports in an attempt to introduce more foreign coinage into France to permit direct and indirect taxation as money circulated

throughout the state. Through the state control of commercial activity this bellicose protectionism endeavoured to monopolise limited European coinage and maximise profit: a doctrine seen by Colbert as ‘une guerre d’argent’ (‘a war of money’) or weapon of war.<sup>60</sup> The failure of Colbert’s (peacetime) policies as France engaged in European wars from 1672 instigated the (Christian) agrarianism and free trade seen in Fleury and Fénelon who saw the neglect of agriculture.<sup>61</sup> Bound up in this rejection of mercantilism was the ravages and misery caused by the Nine Years’ War (1689 - 97) intensified by French famines during the 1690s.<sup>62</sup> Fénelon’s reaction to the ostensible neglect of the public good and agricultural life was transposed to the pedagogical works, delivering a corrective for contemporary France and by effectively showing Louis XIV’s grandson how not to rule.<sup>63</sup>

After a brief separation from Bourgogne due to Fénelon’s exile at Cambrai in 1699 over the Quietism Affair, the two men re-established contact in 1701.<sup>64</sup> Over the next decade Fénelon drafted a number of works for the prince and others, predominantly fretting over the continued War of the Spanish Succession (1701 – 1714) and the requirement to cease hostilities.<sup>65</sup> This repulsion of war may have been expected from an Archbishop, but Fénelon had experienced the war and suffering first-hand at Cambrai because his diocese was on the frontline. When Bourgogne became Dauphin in 1711, Fénelon with Chevreuse composed the *Plans de Gouvernement* or *Tables de Chaulnes* (named after the chateau in which they were written) planning for the future. A return to the childhood themes is evident as they set out their vision of a reformed France. The first order of business was to end the war at all costs, even if this meant the humiliation of France.<sup>66</sup> This would be swiftly followed by a reduction in the size of the army so that France could no longer participate in European general wars, instead concentrating on alliances. State expenditure would be audited. Wasteful court expenses would be kerbed and sumptuary laws placed on luxury items in an attempt to resolve and pay the king’s debts.<sup>67</sup> To augment state revenues, a Council of Trade would be created to control commercial policy and

promote free trade, as France boosted its economy through manufactures and commerce rather than luxury and finance. In order to accomplish this, there would be a wholesale reform of the state. Assietes (small assemblies in each diocese) would be established under the Bishop, local nobility and Third Estate to collect tax. Provincial estates would be revitalised along the lines of Languedoc.<sup>68</sup> Run by the three estates, they would be given the power to ‘police, correct, and direct funds’ while adjusting taxation, enabling trade, and allowing deputies to debate local issues.<sup>69</sup> As part of this decentralisation programme, the Estates-General would be reconvened, regularly meeting so that provincial issues could be debated at a national level. The Estates-General would not only have the responsibility for reviewing finances, trade, and ‘warlike enterprises’; it and a number of polysynodic councils would advise the king and correct abuses.<sup>70</sup> The parlements would have the prestige of their office returned to them, and the nobility would be allowed to enter the magistrature and trade to assist in the rejuvenation of France.<sup>71</sup>

These plans were never enacted because Bourgogne died within five months of their creation (18 February 1712), leaving the older members of the group desolate from his loss. Yet Fénelon quickly roused himself and developed a plan for Bourgogne’s surviving son (the future Louis XV), which he believed they owed to the prince’s memory. In the *Mémoire sur les mesures à prendre après la mort du duc de Bourgogne* (15 March 1712), Fénelon’s aim was to develop a regency council while obtaining immediate peace to create internal security.<sup>72</sup> After Louis’s seventy-two year reign, Fénelon believed it to be imperative that the French people should be familiarised with a new government prior to the old king’s demise. A regency council would therefore operate alongside Louis XIV to familiarise the French people with the new form of government, assuaging the shock of losing the king and prevent the potential return of the king of Spain (Bourgogne’s brother Philippe). Louis XIV would invest the new body with the authority to run the state with the king, providing it with the legitimacy necessitated in the people’s eyes for after Louis XIV’s death. It would be headed by the duc de Berry (Bourgogne’s youngest brother) and



contain Chevreuse, Beauvilliers, Saint-Simon, as well as the ducs de Chaulnes, de Tallard, de Villeroy plus some ministers and secretaries of state. The king should immediately authorise the council in an assembly of notables and register it with the parlement de Paris, as its members swore an oath to the king and to Berry. The council would be consistent with the 'government of the nation', and perform a secondary role of taking charge of the young prince's education.<sup>73</sup> Notably, the duc d'Orléans was not to be included in the council because Fénelon felt that he was dominated by his daughter. The council working closely with the Estates-General and parlement would begin the reorganisation of government. It would continue to assist the Dauphin when he reached maturity, sanctioning France to expand from absolutism to establish wider government. Fénelon impressed the need to inculcate the idea of a regency council on the king instantly to save France from ruin.<sup>74</sup> He persuaded Beauvilliers to approach the king via Madame de Maintenon, but the king declined the idea. This terminated the ambitions of this group of educators to effect their reformation of France at close quarters, and before Louis XIV's death in 1715 Fénelon, Chevreuse and Beauvilliers were all dead.

## V

From the 1690s until the end of the Régence (1723), Saint-Simon's *Mémoires* observed the behaviour and intrigues of the court. Significantly, they expose the duc's relationship with Bourgogne when Dauphin, and reveal their preparations for the reorganisation of France and an alternate vision from Fénelon's new administration.<sup>75</sup> Saint-Simon's proximity to Louis XIV at court had left him with an uncomplimentary view of the monarch, amplified by frustration over the damage of an ineffective government. Saint-Simon placed much of the blame with the king, whom he described as 'vainglorious,' dominated by ambition, glory, and a love of war. Deeming the king to be below average intelligence, and prone to suspicion of those with 'intellect, education, nobility of sentiment, and high principles,'<sup>76</sup> he claimed that Louis chose poor ministers to avoid being overwhelmed or vulnerable. Compounding this was recognition from

the king's ministers, generals, and courtiers of his love for admiration, which they flattered to achieve their ambitions often for their own personal advantage rather than that of the state. This incompetent running of government had been further encumbered by a dependence on a limited group of self-interested ministers. They had crippled France's finances during the War of the Spanish Succession - worsened by a bad winter (1708/9) – and left the already suffering poor bearing the brunt of poor fiscal organisation.<sup>77</sup>

Saint-Simon and Bourgoigne began working on their plans to reform France soon after he became Dauphin. Saint-Simon remarked on the prince's improved confidence and popularity following the death of his father, as the two men had not got on and their respective cabals had been hostile towards one another.<sup>78</sup> Upon becoming Dauphin, Bourgoigne's meetings with Saint-Simon to reform France as king began relatively quickly. According to Saint-Simon, both men were of a similar view on the necessity to alter the monarchy and administration of France.<sup>79</sup> There was a shared desire to overthrow the structure spawned by Richelieu and Mazarin. The central target of the two cardinals had been the *épée*, who had been 'annihilated' within the state. By promoting the administrators and members of the robe the great nobles of France had been left without power as government was placed into the hands of the plebeians. François Le Tellier, Marquis de Louvois (1641 – 1691), the Secretary of State for War was especially singled out as a Machiavellian minister who had isolated the king for his own personal gain.<sup>80</sup> Typifying the poor management of the state and scheming found in the robe ministry. Saint-Simon and Bourgoigne's objective was to overcome maladministration by introducing the *épée* back into the ministry in accordance with the fundamental laws and customs of the kingdom, while removing the robe from government. With the exception of the judiciary, by degrees the robe nobility would be dismissed from the administration.

This agenda was made very clear in the *Projets de Gouvernement*. Saint-Simon highlighted Bourgoigne's readiness to rule France, and his time spent studying for his future role as king.

Fortified by truth and justice, Bourgoigne desired to sanctify the public good over his own interests.<sup>81</sup> Such eschewing of Louis XIV's narcissistic cult of personality manifested the influence of the Circle's educationalists on the prince. His first actions as king would be to alleviate the suffering of his people through the modification of the state, particularly its dire financial abuses. To eradicate government mismanagement, France would be divided into twelve provinces each containing its own estate comprising members from the three orders. These provincial estates would filter information to the Estates-General, which would meet every four years and contain several members from the provincial estates. The purpose of this governmental network was to gather information on the entire kingdom so it could shape the king's policy. Decisions made centrally would be returned to these provincial estates through the deputies involved in the Estates-General.<sup>82</sup> The parlements and other superior courts would both be incorporated in this process, although there was a stress on the requirement to reorganise the courts (justice) and to decrease the disproportionate size of the parlement de Paris. Saint-Simon argued for the necessity of destroying the factions dominating the parlement de Paris, a process supported by the creation of two new parlements in Moulins and Poitiers.<sup>83</sup>

The *Projets* wanted to streamline government spending by trimming wasted bureaucracy to provide much needed revenue. An immediate introduction of free trade would be maintained by a reduction of taxation levies to ease the burden on the people. Prioritising the state's debt accumulated over Louis's long reign, the Estates-General would be tasked with finding a solution for the fiscal difficulties; i.e. whether to increase taxes or declare a state bankruptcy.<sup>84</sup> Through government reorganisation its ancient apparatus would be rejuvenated, guaranteeing a wider structure at the top of the ministry. Louis XIV had limited to approximately five men the number of people he relied upon at the top of government. In the opinion of Saint-Simon and Bourgoigne this damaged France, as a king required a broader range of opinion when making policy, while also using more officials to share the workload of state. This burden would be

lightened by the introduction of seven main councils – of the Church, of foreign affairs, of war, of the marine, of finances, of dispatches, and of order – plus a number of subsidiary councils.<sup>85</sup> Led by and filled with members of the épée, a polysynody would stimulate the state by redressing its maladies and returning ‘order, decency, honour’ and dignity to the kingdom.<sup>86</sup> Fundamentally, the king would remain firmly in command of the state. He would control the finances, make all of the important decisions aided by the conseil d’état plus a few chosen ministers. So while Bourgogne’s épée-led government would be more inclusive than his grandfather’s and safeguard the superior connection of the entire kingdom, the polysynody was predominantly an advisory body at the highest level.<sup>87</sup>

Bourgogne and Saint-Simon’s reform thereby diverged from Fénelon’s plans in their purpose and capacity, although the reinvigoration of the estates and provincial government network did contain a good deal of overlap. Both strategies hoped to generate a more accurate representation of France’s affairs while trusting a larger selection of administrators to relieve the burden of office to promote the public good. But for Fénelon there was a much stronger emphasis on the enlargement of government to restrain the king’s abuse of his subjects via unlimited power. In Saint-Simon’s *Projets* the councils were less aspiring in their objectives. There was a requirement, presumably in Bourgogne, to preserve the authority of his grandfather but to use the councils as an expedient for intelligence and the organisation of the administration.<sup>88</sup> The *Projets* perhaps offer a more realistic vision of what was likely to have transpired in France than Fénelon’s *Tables* had Bourgogne reigned. Bourgogne’s input into Saint-Simon’s future France reveal a future king more in keeping with the existing state model and a modernising society. While Colbert’s mercantilism was rejected in favour of free trade to increase state revenues, the *Projets* did not discuss the prohibition of luxury; in fact luxury was not mentioned. What can be deduced from the Board of Commerce’s employment of merchants from all the main commercial centres to assist domestic and foreign trade; is that it

would be unlikely to have sanctioned sumptuary laws on luxury goods.<sup>89</sup> War was also not excluded as an option. In fact the navy was to be expanded to increase commercial activity in emulation of the English and Dutch, perhaps further undermining Fénelon's anti-luxury moral stance. As both states had profited greatly in terms of wealth and power from the development of their navies, which had benefited their trade in peace and the state in war.<sup>90</sup> Saint-Simon's *Projets* are thereby more reflective of the attempts made by Louis XIV's own ministers to reform government as seen in the Board of Commerce, as well as Pontchartrain's views.<sup>91</sup>

After the death of Bourgogne, like Fénelon, Saint-Simon did not rest upon his laurels. Once it became clear that his childhood friend Philippe II, duc de Orléans (1674 - 1723) would become regent he immediately began to impress on him the necessity of following Bourgogne's designs. He urged the Regent to move away from the use of ministers in favour of councils within his regency administration. According to Saint-Simon (and a number of historians) Orléans, as an acolyte of Fénelon bought into this polysynodic vision.<sup>92</sup> The application with polysynody persuaded Saint-Simon to accept a position in the Supreme Council during the Régence, but his optimism quickly faded when Orléans abandoned it in 1718. While there may have been a genuine interest on the part of the Regent to promote broader government, it has been claimed that using the polysynody was motivated by Orléans's own objectives. He agreed to the wider implementation of the polysynody in order that the parlements would void Louis XIV's will which had placed limitations on his control of Louis XV's education. Polysynody incorporated the parlements in Orléans's plans as well as the *épée* who filled the councils, thus providing the regent with allies against those who supported his enemies, namely Louis XIV's legitimised bastard the duc de Maine (1670 – 1736), and King Philippe V of Spain. Critically the polysynody was not given the opportunity to see how successful it may have been, and was used solely as an advisory body.<sup>93</sup> Its seven specialised councils – foreign affairs, war, marine, finance, the interior, religion and commerce – did not form part of the royal council, could not issue

decrees, and the Regent was not present at its meetings. By 1718 Orléans was able to cease the polysynodies by reverting to Louis XIV's seventeenth century sovereignty, which later moved towards the reinstatement of First Ministers under Cardinal Dubois (1656 - 1723) in the 1720s. Saint-Simon withdrew from government depressed by the final abandonment of the Circle's polysynodic ambitions for wider government, additionally dismayed by Orléans poor comparison with Bourgogne. Orléans is therefore pivotal to the history of the polysynody in France, but in a different manner envisaged by previous historians. Rather than experimenting with the innovation of a polysynody Orléans exploited an innovation already employed under Louis XIV's regime, but gave it a Burgundy Circle spin. His polysynody incorporated the high nobility to essentially buy them off cheaply as he also appealed to the parlements (via wider government) to nullify Maine as a threat. Once Orléans's position had been consolidated he abandoned the polysynodies stifling the ambitions of the Burgundy Circle as well as any innovations they or Louis XIV's ministry planned: hence Saint-Simon's disappointment.

## VI

The final member of the Burgundy Circle, who also became disillusioned with the lost promise of the Régence was the abbé de Saint-Pierre. Saint-Pierre's interest in government and economics began in the early 1690s, and influenced by both Vauban and Boisguilbert nurtured a conviction in peace, free trade and utility. To gain experience he had attended the conseil dépêches from 1702, and by 1708 was consulted by Louis XIV in the conseil d'état.<sup>94</sup> This background provided him with a strong appreciation of the apparatus of state. Guided by Fénelon, he incorporated a number of works (including *Télémaque*) into his ideas on perpetual peace and the polysynody, which advocated a move away from Louis XIV's absolutism. Saint-Pierre's most celebrated work was the *Projet pour rendre la paix perpétuelle en Europe* (1712).<sup>95</sup> Disheartened by Louis XIV's reign and the economic difficulties exacerbated by protracted war, he claimed to have been inspired by the people's suffering during the War of the Spanish

Succession,<sup>96</sup> and a desire to end future conflicts without war.<sup>97</sup> Saint-Pierre's scientific methodology has been proclaimed as a form of proto-utilitarianism,<sup>98</sup> guided by the principle of delivering happiness for the people by maximising the public good.<sup>99</sup>

Based on the duc de Sully's description of Henri IV's *Grand Dessein*,<sup>100</sup> Saint-Pierre wanted to unite European states through law by creating a peace union in which they were protected, possessed rights and could enjoy prosperity. 'Perpetual peace' was driven by the realisation that if states were not pre-occupied with war its taxation and the time it expended on fighting could be more constructively spent. Not only could the arts and sciences be greatly enhanced, but commerce would flourish. This could be exploited as the greatest vehicle to harness the energies of the people for enriching the state.<sup>101</sup> Rejecting Louis XIV's policy of war that had handicapped French trade - especially foreign trade which accounted for one third of the total income of France - Saint-Pierre followed Boisguilbert, Fleury and Fénelon in discouraging the ideas of Montchrétien and Colbert's mercantilism in favour of free trade. He noted that war offered an obvious barrier to trade, and destroyed positive state interaction. War directed subjects away from agriculture and trade and diminished the number of subjects within a kingdom. Saint-Pierre rebuffed the mercantile perceptions that France was depended upon by other states as Europe's breadbasket, and that it was able to exist through autarchy. He considered this confidence to be erroneous and dangerously conceited, trusting that France would be substantially enhanced by foreign trade.<sup>102</sup> Foreign trade in a European confederacy would not only encourage prosperity through commerce, it would ensure utility for both the state and the public (good).<sup>103</sup> Fleury and Fénelon's (Christian) agrarian-based commercial activity was shunned in favour of the greater wealth generated by the trade in luxury goods, which would bring greater prosperity to society.<sup>104</sup> Saint-Pierre's early eighteenth century scientific vision contained in numerous *Projets* grasped the universal value of peace to commercial endeavour and human association.

Saint-Pierre applied this scientific approach to his promotion of government councils as he attempted to salvage the concept during the *Régence* in the *Discours sur la Polysynodie*.<sup>105</sup> Saint-Pierre's version of the polysynody possessed greater ambition than Fénelon or Saint-Simon's projects, or that of Pontchartrain. Saint-Pierre considered a polysynody was essential to remove the threat of the realm returning to the domination of one or two key ministers: a single '*Grand visir*' (Richelieu or Mazarin) or two '*Demi-visirs*' (Colbert and Louvois) that controlled the king for their own ends and power.<sup>106</sup> To prevent such behaviour, government must be enlarged so that it became more inclusive while employing the unused *épée* to head the ministry. While the system would utilise the external ranking system of the *robe* nobility, membership of the polysynody would be reliant on talent and application, making it meritocratic and open. This more inclusive organisation would subsume private interest as the councils and administrators of state were expected to work co-operatively for the public good.<sup>107</sup> The reliance on talent would generate an environment of emulation and competition. Posts would be circulated within the system, creating competition between departments and individuals to increase productivity and standards as the ministers monitored their own work and that of others. Circulation of offices enabled the ministers and administrators to acquaint themselves with all aspects of government including the provinces of the kingdom as they moved around.<sup>108</sup> Saint-Pierre's aim was to augment efficiency, knowledge and professionalism of the government to elevate the public good which had been absent under Louis XIV. Evolving beyond Fénelon's idea of the use of councils, Saint-Pierre argued that the government should elect its own representative or president every three years. Developing from the regency council after the king's minority the president, or head of the council, would supervise the business of administration directed by the king.<sup>109</sup> The enrichment of the polysynody would protect the king from usurpation or revolution, as the most politically talented members of the nobility or wider populace were engaged within the system.<sup>110</sup> The rewards and distraction of the role within the polysynody



would distract the individual from ideas of resistance to the king, and garner a spirit of service to the public good.

It has been claimed that Saint-Pierre's two works were progenitors of enlightened despotism in France prior to the existence of these rulers in continental Europe.<sup>111</sup> Consequently, Saint-Pierre preferred 'consultative despotism' to a polity limited by reason and administrators. His *Polysynodie* did not want to follow the Burgundy Circle liberalisation of government, rather its objective was to depersonalise the absolute monarch by focusing on the machine and primacy of law. In so doing, Saint-Pierre also rejected Boulainvilliers's belief in a 'group of seigneurs' rescuing French fortunes, although he did ascribe to an 'aristo-monarchie' via polysynody that would engender a top-down revival of society.<sup>112</sup> An aristocratic-led renewal of France was one of the key principles that held together a Burgundy Circle that was essentially pursuing different agendas. Its other mutual principles were the expansion of government and the use of councils (polysynody). Yet pointedly, Saint-Pierre's polysynody destabilised the sovereign authority of the king by sponsoring a mixed form of government. Irrespective of the advantages to the king (or Orléans), such an arrangement dramatically broadened government and endorsed a potentially rival leadership under a president. Working in tandem with the king, over time the monarch's power would inevitably become mitigated (to an unknown extent) by the progressions of administration. The members of the Burgundy Circle were not promoting a British model of mixed government, but both Fénelon and Saint-Pierre's views would have significantly extended participation in government to a degree that would have undermined French absolutism.

## VII

The notion that the Burgundy Circle did not wish to undermine the system of Louis XIV, in which they operated, only really pertained to Saint-Simon and Bourgogne. In all probability, this would have been the form of administration sanctioned had Bourgogne reigned as king of France. But it would still have progressed beyond the ministry's narrower polysynodic

innovation with a still heavy reliance on a limited group of (robe) ministers, who were blamed by Saint-Simon and Bourgoigne for France's ills and were to be replaced by the *épée* in government. Both Fénelon and Saint-Pierre's plans went further. Fénelon (and the other educationalists) considered the king – and not just his ministers - to be responsible for the damaging policies of his state. The monarchy that existed under Louis XIV had to be overhauled in order to mollify and restrain future kings for the public good. This would be accomplished by expanding government by broadening and consolidating the centre's connections with provincial government. Saint-Pierre went further still. His view was one that recognised the deficiencies of Louis XIV's reign and applied a scientific methodology that reconfigured government to promote utility and happiness through a quasi-modern state that would have eventually embraced mixed sovereignty. These three reforming agendas permit four concluding points. Firstly, the shared liberalising principles of the Burgundy Circle reveal that the group was not pursuing a reactionary return to pre-seventeenth century feudal aristocratic power. Secondly, despite some overlap in their ideas (notably the polysynody), the Circle did not possess one cohesive ideology; rather a set of ideas influenced by proximity to the crown and (Christian) ethical reforming considerations. These differing perspectives on the call for wider government exposed the shared sentiment that, thirdly, the *épée* were deemed to have been excluded by Louis XIV. All the members of the Circle placed varying degrees of blame on the power of the robe and the absence of the *épée* in government on the present predicament of France. Lastly, the king's ability to forge a model of sovereignty that enabled this was discerned to have emerged from the king's control and independence within the constitution. His manipulation of the constitution via prerogatives had not only side-lined the *épée* from government policy it had eroded the other ancient institutions that added balance in the state for the public good.

Contrary to revisionist claims therefore, Louis XIV's sovereignty was perceived by contemporaries to have been tyrannical and 'absolutist' in nature, regardless of his inability to

centralise France fully. However, the development of polysynody within Louis XIV's government in the Board of Commerce and as Pontchartrain's potential regency option, reveal that the French monarchy was attempting to adapt along traditional lines in accordance with other European monarchies. Consequentially this means that although the Burgundy Circle did not create the concept of the polysynody, they were utilising contemporary ideas within their own plans rather than looking backwards. Their use of the high nobility at the centre of these reforms is less of an aristocratic reaction, and more of a case of revitalising an alternative traditional path that not only placed the épée at heart of government but also widened government participation in the people through its ancient institutions. This expansion would have far eclipsed that of Louis XIV's ministry, and significantly was designed to galvanise the bien public at a time of hardship within the kingdom and administrative deficiency coupled with financial catastrophe. Such an acknowledgment of the public good had been lacking under Louis XIV and was absent within the ministry's alternative polysynodies. The employment of the aristocracy then, was not conservative it was a methodology for overturning the problems of the (robe) administration while embracing contemporary political thought in Europe.

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#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> According to the limited historiography on the Burgundy Circle, the list of members involved is rather wide-ranging. Ladurie includes prominent ministers such as Colbert's (Controller-General) nephew the marquis de Maillebois (1648 – 1721), plus another of Colbert's nephew Jean-Baptiste Colbert, marquis de Torcy (1665 – 1746), which explains why the group were also referred to as the 'Minister's Cabal' ('*cabale des ministres*'); see Ladurie, *Saint-Simon*, 214-18. Other historians incorporate prominent theorists who opposed crown policies such as Pierre le Boisguilbert (1646-1714) and the Marshall of France, Marquis de Vauban (1633-1707), see Keohane, *Philosophy and the State*, 350-57; Mettam, *Power and Faction*, 317-18, and Jones, *The Great Nation*, 24. Such men had connections with members of the Burgundy Circle, but their work was not calculated to effect the reign of Bourgogne. This is also true of Henri de Boulainvilliers (1658 - 1722) whose association with the group was extremely tenuous, hence his exclusion here. Despite some similarities concerning ideas of aristocrat-led reform of government, the Circle distanced themselves from his views; see Ellis, *Boulainvilliers*, 64. On Boulainvilliers see Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*, 74-77, 565-74; Israel, *Enlightenment Contested*, 278-85; and Hammersely, *The English republican tradition*.

<sup>2</sup> Bonney, *Society and Government*, xiii.

<sup>3</sup> See Campbell, *The Ancien Régime*, 1-5; Henshall, *The Myth of Absolutism*, 3-4, and Swann, *Provincial Power*, 7-8. According to Campbell this view was greatly influenced by Alexis de Tocqueville's *L'Ancien Régime et la Révolution* (1856).

<sup>4</sup> See Mousnier, "Exponents and Critics", 119; Mousnier, *Les institutions. Tome I*, 499-500; and Skinner, *Foundations. Volume Two*, 241-54, 290-93, 358.

<sup>5</sup> Parker, *Making of French Absolutism*, 81, 84-87.

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- <sup>6</sup> See Durand, “What is Absolutism?”, 23; Mettam, *Power and Faction*, 15-16; Henshall, “The Myth of Absolutism”, 40, 46; and Henshall, *The Myth of Absolutism*, 200-210.
- <sup>7</sup> Cuttica, “A Thing or Two”, 288.
- <sup>8</sup> Henshall, “The Myth of Absolutism”, 40.
- <sup>9</sup> Henshall, “The Myth of Absolutism”, 40, 47; and Henshall, *The Myth of Absolutism*, 3, 128-29.
- <sup>10</sup> Fox, “Louis XIV”, 129.
- <sup>11</sup> See Mettam, *Power and Faction*, 15; Burke, *Fabrication of Louis XIV*, 2, 5, 6-7, 152, 158; and Sommerville, “Early Modern Absolutism”, 117.
- <sup>12</sup> Mettam, *Power and Faction*, 18.
- <sup>13</sup> See Koenigsberger, *Early Modern Europe*, 189; and Ladurie, *The Ancien Régime*, 271-72.
- <sup>14</sup> See Hamscher, *The Parlement of Paris*, 134, 197-98; Koenigsberger, “Monarchies and Parliaments”, 204; and Beik, *Louis XIV and Absolutism*, 3-4.
- <sup>15</sup> Bonney, *Political Change in France*, 435.
- <sup>16</sup> See Bonney, *Political Change in France*, 438; Beik, *Absolutism and Society*, 339; Campbell, *The Ancien Régime*, 54; Lynn, *Wars of Louis XIV*, 17-18; and Swann, *Provincial Power*, 19. Alternatively, Ladurie argued that from 1661 Louis XIV’s personal rule undertook a ‘minor administrative revolution’ which resumed developments extant during the Richelieu (Louis XIII) and even the Sully (Henri IV) periods; see *The Ancien Régime*, 130-31.
- <sup>17</sup> See Parker, *Making of French Absolutism*, 138; Bercé, *The Birth of Absolutism*, vii; and Hurt, *Louis XIV*, 196. Hurt argues that absolutism was achieved by Louis XIV via his subjugation of the *parlements* to his will through the 1673 edict.
- <sup>18</sup> See Bluche, *Louis XIV*, 124; and Parker, *Class and State*, 26.
- <sup>19</sup> See Major, “Crown and the Aristocracy”, 644-45; Bonney, *Society and Government*, 156; and Henshall, *The Myth of Absolutism*, 20-21.
- <sup>20</sup> Louis XIV, *Mémoires*, 24-25.
- <sup>21</sup> Mettam, *Power and Faction*, 20.
- <sup>22</sup> Hamscher, *The Parlement of Paris*, 202.
- <sup>23</sup> Bonney, *Political Change in France*, 432-33.
- <sup>24</sup> See Lossky, “The General European Crisis”, 195-96; Haley, “The Dutch,” 25; and Bosher, “The Franco-Catholic Danger”.
- <sup>25</sup> Jurieu, *Les soupirs de la France esclave*, 22-23.
- <sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 18-19.
- <sup>27</sup> Mettam, *Power and Faction*, 72, 177, 179, 309.
- <sup>28</sup> See Chaussinand-Nogaret, *The French nobility*, 12; and Mettam, *Power and Faction*, 72.
- <sup>29</sup> Kettering, *Patrons, Brokers, and Clients*, 232-37.
- <sup>30</sup> Chaussinand-Nogaret, *The French nobility*, 13.
- <sup>31</sup> Ladurie, *Saint-Simon*, 92-93.
- <sup>32</sup> Swann, *Provincial Power*, 8.
- <sup>33</sup> Ladurie, *Saint-Simon*, 215.
- <sup>34</sup> Dupilet and Sarmant, ‘Prélude à la Polysynodie’.
- <sup>35</sup> Dupilet, *La Régence Absolue*, 49-50. Dupilet and Sarmant point to the use of polysynody in a number of European monarchies from the sixteenth century: such as the Spanish, Austrian, Swedish and Russian; see “Polysynodie et Gouvernement”, 56-60.
- <sup>36</sup> Dupilet, *La Régence*, 54-55.
- <sup>37</sup> Dupilet points to a number of similarities between the differing accounts of polysynody between Belesbat’s proposals and that of Pontchartrain and the members of the Burgundy Circle; see *La Régence*, 55-60.
- <sup>38</sup> See Mousnier, *Les institutions. Tome II*, 86-87; Ladurie, *The Ancien Régime*, 224-25, 300; and Ladurie, *Saint-Simon*, 207-212.
- <sup>39</sup> Bluche, *Louis XIV*, 344. Bluche describes the Circle as ‘pacifists’ and ‘plotters’ (455-56, 574), who were dangerous because they would have acted as Bourgogne’s councillors when king.
- <sup>40</sup> See Chaussinand-Nogaret, *The French nobility*, 14-15; Mettam, *Power and Faction*, 50, 316; Ladurie, *The Ancien Régime*, 217; and Ladurie, *Saint-Simon*, 279. All three of these authors see the Burgundy Circle as possessing a liberal reforming agenda designed to expand government and challenge the absolutism of Louis XIV.
- <sup>41</sup> See Keohane, *Philosophy and the State in France*, 345-46; Bluche, *Louis XIV*, 556-57; Ellis, *Boulaingilliers and the French Monarchy*, 61, 63-64; Parker, *Class and State*, 156; and Jones, *The Great Nation*, 11, 24-27. Dupilet has described the Burgundy Circle’s ambition to restore the épée to government for the public good as an ‘aristocratic reaction’. In Saint-Simon’s case, this looked back to the thirteenth century ‘*Curia Regis*’, which relied on a mixture of vassal lords and clerics to advise the kings; see Dupilet, *La Régence*, 70-71.
- <sup>42</sup> See Mousnier, *Les institutions. Tome I*, 24-26, 27, 486-87; Campbell, *The Ancien Régime*, 10. Mousnier did believe that Saint-Simon’s ideas were reactionary however.

- <sup>43</sup> See Kanter, “Archbishop Fénelon’s Political Activity”, 324; Ladurie, *Saint-Simon*, 218-19; and Jones, *The Great Nation*, 23.
- <sup>44</sup> See Bluche, *Louis XIV*, 453, and Ladurie, *Saint-Simon*, 414.
- <sup>45</sup> See Janet, *Fénelon*, 51; and Carcassonne, *Fénelon*, 77.
- <sup>46</sup> See Rothkrug, *Opposition to Louis XIV*, 280-85; Keohane, *Philosophy and the State*, 332-33; and Rothband, “The liberal reaction”, 264.
- <sup>47</sup> See Fénelon, *Dialogues des Mort*, 474; and *Télémaque*, 108, 214.
- <sup>48</sup> Fénelon, *Examen de conscience*, 976-77.
- <sup>49</sup> Fénelon, *Dialogues des Mort*, 287, 328-30; and *Télémaque*, 132-33.
- <sup>50</sup> Fénelon, *Télémaque*, 68-69, 140-47.
- <sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 290.
- <sup>52</sup> Fénelon, *Dialogues*, 319, 324, 403; and *Télémaque*, 59, 168, 290. Dupilet argues that Fénelon’s polysynody was designed to strengthen the king’s power rather than restrain it; see *La Régence*, 45-46. However, Fénelon very clearly targeted Louis XIV’s perceived abuse of the monarch’s power and prerogatives in order to restrain it, and prevent another Louis XIV undermining the public good.
- <sup>53</sup> Fénelon, *Télémaque*, 65, 293-96.
- <sup>54</sup> Fénelon, *Examen de conscience*, 984-85.
- <sup>55</sup> Fleury, *History of the Origine*, 1, 51-52, 105. This view of Gothic government can also be found in Boulainvilliers, *Histoire des Anciens Parlements*, 1, 12, 14-15, 103-4, 119.
- <sup>56</sup> Fénelon, *Fables*, 209; and *Télémaque*, 58, 159-60, 288.
- <sup>57</sup> See Riley, “Rousseau, Fénelon”, 82; Riley “Fénelon’s “Republican” Monarchism in Telemachus””, 78-91; Smith, *Nobility Reimagined*, 32-33, 34, 47; Hont, “The early enlightenment debate”, 380-81; and Sonenscher, *Sans-Culottes*, 211, 214-15.
- <sup>58</sup> See Rothkrug, *Opposition to Louis XIV*, 243-45; and Rothband, “The liberal reaction”, 263.
- <sup>59</sup> Claude Fleury, “Réflexions sur Machiavel”, 564-65.
- <sup>60</sup> Sturdy, *Louis XIV*, 61-62. Aggressive mercantilism and preference for tariffs to enhance national wealth had been promoted in France since the early seventeenth century; see, Antoine de Montchrétien, *Traicté de l’oeconomie politique*, 35-39. It was opposed by an associate of the Circle, Pierre le Boisguilbert, who advocated free trade as a remedy; see *Le détail de la France*, 21-22.
- <sup>61</sup> See Rothkrug, *Opposition to Louis XIV*, 22-26, 61; Keohane, *Philosophy and the State*, 160-61; and Clark, *Compass of Society*, 58-63.
- <sup>62</sup> Fénelon, *Lettre à Louis XIV*, 546-47. Bluche and Ladurie have accused Fénelon of exaggerating the impact of the war on the populace, and knowingly under-emphasising the effects of the climate on famine. They argue such indictments by Fénelon, and also in Saint-Simon’s *Mémoires*, helped to denigrate Louis XIV’s reputation; see Bluche, *Louis XIV*, xiii, 557; and Ladurie, *The Ancien Régime*, 266.
- <sup>63</sup> Fénelon disputed the idea that he was satirising the king in the educational works; see *Oeuvres de Fénelon, Tome III* (Paris, 1835), 654.
- <sup>64</sup> Fénelon’s defence of the orthodoxy of Madame Guyon’s (1648-1717) mysticism in the *Maximes des Saints* (1696) led the work to be condemned by the Inquisition in 1699. Fénelon yielded to Pope Innocent XII’s judgment, and he was effectively banished by the king to Cambrai. Bourgogne instigated the renewed contact; see Bourgogne au Fénelon, (22 décembre 1701, Versailles), *Correspondance*, 214.
- <sup>65</sup> At this time Fénelon created a perpetual peace plan in the *Supplément to the Examen de conscience* - also known as *Two Essays on the Ballance of Europe* (London, 1720) – that encouraged a European pacifistic union bonded by (Christian) brotherhood, commerce and free trade. Furthermore, as preparations to the War of the Spanish Succession gathered pace in 1701, Beauvillier unsuccessfully presented as his own thoughts Fénelon’s plan to avoid war (*Mémoire sur les moyens de prévenir la guerre de la succession d’Espagne*) to Louis XIV; see Bausset, *Histoire de Fénelon, Tome Quatrième*, 61.
- <sup>66</sup> Fénelon, *Tables de Chaulnes*, 1085.
- <sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 1088.
- <sup>68</sup> The Languedoc provided an important example under Louis XIV because it enjoyed a great deal of independence in how its estates governed the province, while aristocratic landowners played a vital role; see Beik, *Absolutism and Society*, 336-37; and Durand, Jouanna, and Pélaquier (eds.), *Des Etats dans l’Etat*.
- <sup>69</sup> Fénelon, *Tables*, 1104.
- <sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 1089.
- <sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 1101.
- <sup>72</sup> Fénelon, *Mémoire sur les mesures*, 1107.
- <sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 1112. This desire to use a regency council that voted and contained wider membership while also educating the young prince is similar to that of Pontchartrain, and appear to be independently created; see Dupilet, *La Régence*, 54-55.
- <sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 1114-15.

- <sup>75</sup> Saint-Simon did not like Fénelon. Portraying him as an intelligent man whose ambition made him manipulative; see Saint-Simon, *Mémoires*, Vol. 1, 251.
- <sup>76</sup> Saint-Simon, *Mémoires*, Vol. 5, 469, 478-79.
- <sup>77</sup> Saint-Simon, *Mémoires*, Vol. 2, 878, 880-86.
- <sup>78</sup> See Mousnier, *Les Institutions, Tome I*, 24-27; and Ladurie, *Saint-Simon*, 183-84.
- <sup>79</sup> Saint-Simon, *Mémoires*, Vol. 4, 90-99.
- <sup>80</sup> Saint-Simon, *Projets de Gouvernement*, 36-39.
- <sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.
- <sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 5-9.
- <sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.
- <sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 13-14.
- <sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.
- <sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 55-56.
- <sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 9-10.
- <sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.
- <sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 49-50.
- <sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 98-99.
- <sup>91</sup> Dupilet, *La Régence*, 56, 60-61. Elements of Saint-Simon's *Projet* and that of Pontchartrain do overlap, and Dupilet speculates that ideas were shared between the Chancellor and Saint-Simon as members of the court.
- <sup>92</sup> See Ladurie, *Saint-Simon*, 473; and Jones, *The Great Nation*, 30-31.
- <sup>93</sup> Shennan, *Philippe, Duke of Orléans*, 35-37; and Ladurie, *Saint-Simon*, 418-19.
- <sup>94</sup> Perkins, "The Abbé de Saint-Pierre", 73-74.
- <sup>95</sup> First published in 1712, Saint-Pierre completed a two-volume edition in 1713, another edition in 1717, and an *Abrégé* in 1729 as he attempted to perfect his *Projet*.
- <sup>96</sup> Saint-Pierre, *Projet*, i-ii.
- <sup>97</sup> See Drouet, *L'Abbé de Saint-Pierre*, 108; and Perkins, 74.
- <sup>98</sup> See Bernard Delmas, 'La Réforme fiscal coeur du "Perfectionnement de l'État" chez Castel de Saint-Pierre,' 125-143, and Robert F. Hébert, 'Économie, utopisme et l'abbé de Saint-Pierre,' 224-26, in *Projets de l'abbé Castel de Saint Pierre (1658-1743): Pour le plus grand bonheur du plus grand nombre*.
- <sup>99</sup> See Keohane, *Philosophy and the State*, 365-66; and Kaiser, "Abbe de Saint-Pierre", 623-24, 627-28.
- <sup>100</sup> Saint-Pierre, *Projet*, 123-25.
- <sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 239.
- <sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 260.
- <sup>103</sup> Kaiser, "Abbe de Saint-Pierre," 627-28
- <sup>104</sup> Fénelon, *Télémaque*, livres III, VII, X and XVII.
- <sup>105</sup> Saint-Pierre's persistent promotion of the polysynody and attack on Louis XIV's reign in the *Discours sur la Polysynodie* (1718) offended Orléans, and he was expelled from the *Académie française* that year.
- <sup>106</sup> Saint-Pierre, *Discours sur la Polysynodie* (Londres, 1718), 44-48.
- <sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 19-20.
- <sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 18-19, 24-27. Dupilet and Sarmant argue that the Burgundy's Circles use of a contemporary polysynody meant their ideas were not backwards looking, and helped to usher in Enlightenment thought; see 'Polysynodie et Gouvernement par Conseil en France et en Europe du XVIIe au XIXe siècle', 65. I would argue that due to the lack of public circulation of Fénelon and Saint-Simon's versions this is only really true of Saint-Pierre, and his discussion of rotated offices and widened government can be found in Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Considérations sur le gouvernement de Pologne* (1772), which later influenced the abbé Sieyès's plans for reformed French government.
- <sup>109</sup> Saint-Pierre, *Polysynodie*, 30-33.
- <sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 38-41.
- <sup>111</sup> Kaiser, 'The Abbe de Saint-Pierre', 639-40; a view opposed by Keohane, *Philosophy and the State*, 370-71, and Spector, "Who is the Author", 391-92.
- <sup>112</sup> Kaiser, *Ibid.*, 637-38. See Boulainvilliers, *Etat de la France, Tome Seconde*, vi-vii.

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