

David J. Sturdy. *Louis XIV*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998. Pp. xxii, 202. Cloth, \$55.00; ISBN 0-312-21427-8. Paper, \$19.95; ISBN 0-312-21428-6.

This consideration of Louis XIV is representative of a veritable cottage industry in compact volumes serving the growing market of harried students wanting to jump start a research project and teachers preparing lectures who need quick access to the background and current historiography on major topics. David J. Sturdy succeeds admirably on both counts. His thematic arrangement of the material, highlighting of interesting points of debate, useful maps and genealogical tables, chronology of significant events, and bibliographical essays on each subject constitute a handy reference work. His uncluttered prose and tight organization contribute to the work's convenience. Sturdy examines Louis XIV in relation to the history of French kingship, the government, his subjects, the religious, cultural, and intellectual life of France, and the European scene. He bases his treatment primarily upon secondary studies, with particular attention to recent works in French and English. Quotations from Louis's *Mémoires* and the writings of Colbert, Fénelon, Saint-Simon, and other contemporary observers back up his interpretations and convey some sense of the period's *mentalité*.

Sturdy's goal is to place Louis XIV in the context of his time. He presents the monarch as less an innovator or modernizer than a reflection of seventeenth-century ideas and practices and, like any other mortal, subject to the accidents of circumstance. This book, then, rejects representations of Louis as "a model of the absolute monarch, a progenitor of the Revolution, a founder of the modern centralized state, an agent of class-war, a broker of the rise of capitalism, the mastermind who determined French foreign policy over the next two centuries" and other such "guises." Sturdy contends that Louis envisioned himself *restoring* power and prestige to both France and its monarchy that had been eroded by the Wars of Religion. Louis's reforms represented a revolution in its seventeenth-century denotation of rotation back to traditional forms. Far from being "'new men' sent from Paris to impose royal will," for example, the office of intendant originated in the fifteenth century. Even the cultivation of the Sun-King imagery drew upon symbolism deployed by medieval kings.

In his conclusion, Sturdy situates his study within current debates on whether the term "absolutism" should be banished from the historical vocabulary as misleading and on what contemporaries really meant by "absolute monarchy." Here he finds a disparity between philosophy and practice of rule. Louis appears to have been successful in pursuit of absolutist ambitions only in one area: persecution of the Huguenots. Judging by recent scholarship on the impact of Louis's policies, the king's commitment to state building did demand great sacrifices from his subjects, but they in turn received the benefit of recovered social stability. Improving the material condition of his people simply lay beyond the king's powers, in spite of the energetic efforts of his finance minister, Colbert. Sturdy argues that Louis's involvement in sites

of culture and learning, the academics, was as patron, not censor. The only drawback to this navigation between the reign's propagandists and detractors, stress on Louis's similarities to contemporary leaders in his war aims, and effort to temper the Sun King's larger-than-life image, is that the drama of the reign and the king's personality become flattened.

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Roderick Floud. *The People and the British Economy, 1830-1914.* Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1997. Pp. 218. Paper, \$14.95; ISBN 0-19-289210-X.

Rex Pope. *The British Economy Since 1914: A Study in Decline?* London & New York: Longman, 1998. Pp. x, 140. Paper, \$11.95; ISBN 0-582-30194-7.

These two economic histories by Roderick Floud and Rex Pope share a number of qualities and are nicely compatible chronologically. Each book is intended for general readers and students. Each is clearly written by an obviously thoughtful and well-informed scholar. Each is crammed with factual information. Each takes a very positive view of British economic development and rejects some common criticisms of it. For instance, Floud ends and Pope begins by denying the frequently drawn image of Britain as an economic "weary Titan" stumbling out of the nineteenth and into the twentieth century.

Pope had more defending to do, of course, and presents evidence effectively to support his arguments that the pictures of British decline are quite exaggerated because they are based on unrealistic comparisons. The dominance of Britain in the nineteenth century was really aberrant and could not have been maintained. The United States is so much larger and intrinsically richer than Britain, especially as the empire was lost, that comparisons to it are hardly meaningful. When measured against more comparable European economies, Britain's did very well during most of the twentieth century, with the 1970s as a notable exception. Pope leans toward free market conservative theory and often suggests that government and labor were barriers to even greater success. He argues well, though there is little reason to think that those leaning to other theories will be convinced. A small collection of relevant documents is appended to the text, but Pope's descriptions are amazingly complete for such a short work and there seems little virtue to having these two dozen snippets. They might be useful when the book is used as a text, affording students a sense of the original materials from which economic history is written.

Floud devotes much of his work to explaining the success of the Victorian economy and how that development influenced the lives of the British people. Any teacher will be pleased with the comprehensive survey in this book. Demography,