

he took part in Churchill's war cabinet as home secretary and later as lord president. He seemed to me a grand, even Olympian figure, a supreme civil servant but detached, unoriginal, dry. Members of the war cabinet passed each other notes about him. They called him "Il Pomposo," but never to his face. In fact, as Ruane shows, Anderson understood very early that the best way to safeguard a world threatened by nuclear weapons was to institute international control over them via the new United Nations. He advocated telling Russia about the A-bomb well before the end of World War II. Churchill would not listen.

Ruane also analyses the role of "the Prof," Churchill's scientific advisor, the unpleasant Professor Lindemann, later Lord Cherwell. Lindemann always believed Britain should develop an independent nuclear capacity. He had greater influence on Churchill than Anderson did.

Perhaps the author could have done more with the inherent drama of his subject and with his character sketches. Perhaps he could have more fully developed the poignant, not to say tragic, aspect of Churchill's last crusade. Perhaps he could have looked more closely at the peace movement, which was just beginning, in the early 1950s, to gather its forces and to articulate its position. But he focuses intentionally on Churchill. He has identified a lacuna in the vast literature about a very great (if flawed), much-studied man, and he has filled it admirably, producing a thoroughly researched and carefully constructed historical monograph.

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**Administrer les menus plaisirs du roi: L'État, la cour et les spectacles dans la France des Lumières.** By *Pauline Lemaigre-Gaffier*.

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It is a fair guess that most historians or their readers have only heard of the French king's *menus plaisirs* once. And this is from the name of the first meeting place of the Estates-General in 1789, the *Hôtel des Menus Plaisirs* at Versailles. It always seems one of the minor piquant ironies of the French Revolution that the men who would do away with absolute monarchy and all its ways should have convened at the headquarters of its least defensible frivolities—for surely that was what *menus plaisirs* meant? Far from it, argues Pauline Lemaigre-Gaffier. The words, she demonstrates, denoted far more in ancien régime terminology than the king's private and petty ways of entertaining himself. *Les Menus*, as the department was colloquially known, was entrusted with mounting much of the public display of the royal court, from what the king and his family wore, to how they traveled, how the rooms and spaces in which they operated were decorated and furnished, and how great public ceremonies like the coronation or royal marriages and funerals were organized and performed. Its remit was to present the spectacular ritual of absolute monarchy to the gaze of its subjects. This included some areas that at first sight seem surprising, such as superintending the two state theater companies, the *Comédie française* and the *Comédie italienne*, but this was perhaps logical enough for a department whose whole purpose was to orchestrate the theater of monarchy. In this context the stage was seen as a reflection of the crown's prestige, "serving the court and Paris," and in a later formulation, "serving the king and the public."

Nominally part of the wider Royal Household (and most of its archives are to be found in those of the *Maison du Roi*), the *Menus* was headed officially by the First Gentleman of

the Bedchamber—of whom there were four, serving in annual rotation. Always great lords and intimates of the king, the First Gentlemen were well placed to protect their budgets and sustain formidable turf wars with complementary departments, such as the *Bâtiments du roi* or the *Garde-meuble*, which had custody of essential props on which ceremonial organizers depended. Even in 1789 itself there was a bitter quarrel between the *Menus* and the *Garde-meuble* over the design of the dais on which the king was to sit. Inevitably, however, the rotating First Gentlemen could be protectors but scarcely full-time managers of such a “plastic” and “polyvalent” department, as Lemaigre-Gaffier characterizes it. This task fell to the tenured holders of the venal office of *Intendant contrôleur-général de l’Argenterie et des Menus Plaisirs*. This office, too, was like so many others split up into three for obscure and distant fiscal reasons but could be consolidated into fewer hands. Most of its functions in the later eighteenth century were exercised by Denis-Pierre-Jean Papillon de la Ferté (1727–94), who left a journal of his activities providing quotable material that adds welcome life to the mass of financial and administrative detail presented in the text. In the Terror he paid with his head for his association with the royal court, but at the Restoration the *Menus* were revived under the supervision of his son. Papillon was an empire-builder. Not only did he fight off the attempts of Necker to subject his department to the general slimming down of the court in 1780; over the same decade he extended its oversight of the two state theater companies to the Paris opera, sensing the increasing public taste, led by the Austrian queen herself, for music on the stage. The physical reach of his empire was substantial. The *Menus* kept a depot close to every royal palace, and in Paris, so that the trappings of royalty could be drawn upon wherever the king went. It had a substantial library to house records of how things had been and should be done. Thousands of decorative artifacts needed to be kept in store for possible use, with permanent staff to maintain and deploy them as necessary, including designers, carpenters, painters and gilders, and textile artisans looking after tapestries, drapes, and ceremonial clothing. So far as was possible the *Menus* liked to produce its displays in-house, but inevitably it was also a constant purchaser of materials and services, which made it an important player in the manufacturing economy of Paris at least. The cost of the whole operation was substantial and swelled enormously over the eighteenth century. The 2,615,920 livres spent by the *Menus* in 1786 was twenty-six times greater in real terms than the amount it had disbursed in 1698. Much of the book is devoted to analyzing where the money went, how its spending was authorized, and by whom. It makes for some dry administrative history—but in an area largely unexplored previously. It is offered by the author as a classic example of an ostensibly chaotic ancien régime institution that in practice worked quite efficiently and achieved some impressive results. Nowadays this seems to be the conclusion of increasing numbers of scholars who work on aspects of the prerevolutionary state, determined not to view it as previous generations tended to do through the filter of a revolutionary tradition mainly interested in highlighting its shortcomings and irrationalities. Court studies have also emerged from under that shadow as a serious area for investigation rather than a source of juicy gossip about the private lives and feuds of worthless aristocratic celebrities. This book is an impressive contribution to that maturing field, fruitfully exploring the essential material underpinnings of the public facade of absolute monarchy.

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