



Roy L. McCullough. *Coercion, Conversion and Counterinsurgency in Louis XIV's France.* Leiden: Brill, 2007. 261 pp. \$128.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-90-04-15661-6.



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Published on H-War (April, 2008)

Infighting over New Taxes in Louis XIV's France

The seventeenth century saw much disturbance in France as the central government tried to achieve two aims: to impose a new financial management system and to break provincial and religious dissent. Although a variety of publications have documented various peasant revolts, they have not examined the royal response to the situation. The publication of *Coercion, Conversion and Counterinsurgency in Louis XIV's France* aims to correct that imbalance.

In the book's opening pages, Roy L. McCullough quickly embarks on presenting his theme, plunging readers into the world of imprisonment for debt, appointment of various officials charged with collecting revenues, punishments for avoiding government men, and the seventeenth century in general. It is a headlong charge, and it assumes a body of knowledge that some readers may not have. For example, McCullough indicates that punishment for corruption included a sentence "to the galleys for a period of nine years," and, on the same page, he states that a law had to be passed banning the imposition of tax levies on Sunday, as all a collector had to do was wait at the local church until the recalci-

trant turned up (p. 20). He assumes that the reader knows what a galley was and how it was used—a rowed ship of war, manned (in this case) by sentenced criminals. And, he also presumes that readers are aware that attendance at the local church in towns and villages in those days was—although not a legalized practice—one that would, if avoided, arouse significant negative local discussion. Since this book includes many such assumptions, it is not for the fainthearted, for those without a significant body of historical knowledge under their belts, or for general readers. As part of the History of Warfare series, McCullough's work suggests that it is to be read by scholars only.

Even though McCullough makes such assumptions, he also employs an easy, yet academic style, incorporating direct quotations liberally yet usefully. The level of analysis on the subject matter is scholarly and brings the reader to the heart of the discussion. For example, when McCullough turns to the destruction of several parishes that had not complied with the announced taxation measures, he points to specific directions for protecting pregnant women; the forced, but short, marches

to new towns; and the quantities of food provided for those turned out by the new orders. This examination results in a level of interest that in a much drier context would result in a far less interesting account.

In summary, *Coercion, Conversion and Counterinsurgency in Louis XIV's France* extensively delineates the reign's tax collection measures, punitive or otherwise. It offers a description of royal attitudes toward revolts: an important and accurate portrayal, which outlines the ingrained attitudes of those in authority that today seem so alien but were then unquestioned. The work further illustrates the prevalent authoritarian attitudes toward Protestant dissent, and the measures employed to

counter, stifle, and crush such rebellions. This study usefully and thoroughly charts how these events grew in the telling and retelling to create a widely believed myth, one without foundation, in McCullough's view. At one level, the book is an interesting read expounding aspects of day-to-day life several hundred years ago. But more important, it succeeds in its campaign to demonstrate that the armies of Louis XIV have been the subject of much exaggeration of both their abilities and their commitment to coercing the population of late seventeenth-century France into new ways. I imagine that *Coercion, Conversion and Counterinsurgency in Louis XIV's France* will become a corrective reference for the period.

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Citation: Dr Tom Lewis. Review of McCullough, Roy L., *Coercion, Conversion and Counterinsurgency in Louis XIV's France*. H-War, H-Net Reviews. April, 2008.

URL: <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=14362>

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