

and incoherence" (415). In the light of this study, images of Cardinal Richelieu as the clever mastermind behind the triumph of French royal absolutism, at home and abroad, in peace and in war, may seem more part of the history of French government propaganda than as anything else.

Michael J. Braddick. *State Formation in Early Modern England, c. 1550-1700*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000. x + 447 pp. \$28.00. Review by MOLLY MCCLAIN, UNIVERSITY OF SAN DIEGO.

What connects the study of witchcraft trials to a book on the English navy? What links a history of the English civil wars with a study of the Society for the Preservation of Christian Knowledge (SPCK)? The answer, according to Michael Braddick, is the early modern state.

Braddick argues that the state is at the heart of every history of early modern England, be it social, military, political, or religious. This fact is obscured by the increasing specialization of the discipline and by the often narrow approach of historians and their graduate students. For example, it might seem as if Keith Wrightson (*Poverty and Piety in an English Village: Terling 1525-1700* with D. Levine) and Conrad Russell (*The Causes of the English Civil War*) are writing about completely different subjects. However, on closer inspection, it appears that both are concerned with the nature and use of political power. Braddick believes that "bringing the state back in" will offer some new answers to old questions. It will also provide "a fruitful way of thinking across boundaries set by our professional specialisations" (8).

To this end, the author marshals an impressive array of works on social, political, military, and religious history. His footnotes alone are worth the price of the book. He describes a variety of historiographical controversies, both past and present, and shows how often disparate narratives can be used to tell the larger story of the development of the English state.

Braddick's organizational methods are highly empirical. He divides the book into five sections. Part I provides a definition of the state and a description of the uses of political power. Parts II-V focus on four different conceptions of the state: "patriarchal," "fiscal-military," "confessional," and "dynastic," each of which is adopted by a different group of historians. He does not try to create artificial similarities among these discourses. Instead, he emphasizes their differences. For example, the issue that separates the "patriarchal" state from the "fiscal-military" state (and the social from the political historian) is the issue of change. To what extent did the English state change over time? What were the turning points? Who pressed for change? Where did innovative practices lead the state?

According to Braddick, the "patriarchal" state changed quite slowly. Social reformers were not radicals; instead, they were local officials who directed their efforts towards controlling those persons perceived to be most threatening to the established order. As a result, administrative innovations, such as the poor law and crisis measures taken in response to famine and outbreaks of the plague, were often backward-looking and, after 1640, "increasingly routine and less spectacular" (173). In some ways, the eighteenth-century administrators described by Norma Landau (*The Justices of the Peace, 1679-1760*) do not look all that different from those discussed by Paul Slack (*Poverty and Policy in Tudor and Stuart England*).

The "fiscal-military" state, on the other hand, adopted many innovative practices, becoming recognizably "modern" after 1640. Political historians often discuss change in abstract terms without identifying the individuals responsible for choosing the design of a new warship or the source of a new tax. Instead, structural changes are produced by "specialised, differentiated institutions" which appeared to be "relatively autonomous" from social interest (429). As a result, the emphasis is on the relative modernity of state forms. Not surprisingly, these historians justify their approach by pointing out that seventeenth-century writers increasingly used "a language of state—an impersonal political entity to be defended" (273).

Braddick reconciles these two very different visions of the state by reminding the reader that they are both right and wrong. Hence, the subtitle of his concluding chapter, “actions without design, patterns without blueprints.” The essential point is not the usefulness of terms like “patriarchal” and “fiscal-military,” but whether they can be understood and appropriated by historians working in different fields. For example, “conceiving of offices as social roles integrates intellectual and administrative history, and the abstract order of the state with the actual experience of political authority, thus drawing attention to ways in which ideas and values can drive political action” (431). He wants early modern English historians to read works outside their areas of expertise and to realize that they share with their colleagues a common interest in the development of the state.

If there is any flaw in this book, it is Braddick’s provincial approach. He admits that “this book is principally concerned with the impact of the state in English villages and wards” (27). As a result, he spends little time discussing the territorial expansion of England, writing only a brief survey of the literature on Ireland, Scotland, and Wales. This is surprising given the fact that sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England, like her continental neighbors, was exporting state power to the farthest corners of the world. Somehow, the early modern state evolved into “the British Empire” but it is not clear from this book how that transformation took place.

The most important contribution of this book is that it reminds historians and, most importantly, their graduate students to look for the “big picture” when they are tackling even the narrowest subjects. Why did the study of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries attract Whig historians? To what extent are we still drawn towards narratives that describe the birth of political parties, the rise of constitutional government, and the beginnings of religious liberty? Finally, how do twenty-first century ideas about women’s rights, the status of ethnic minorities, and the role of the media shape our vision of the early modern English state?