

WINE AND POLITICS DURING THE SESSIONS OF THE PROVINCIAL ESTATES OF BURGUNDY AND BRITTANY DURING THE LONG 18TH CENTURY

Il vino e la politica durante le sessioni degli Stati provinciali della Borgogna e della Bretagna nel lungo XVIII secolo

Jérôme Loiseau

DOI: 10.36158/sef6326b

Abstract

In contrast to the traditional thinking about the fate of assemblies of states in so-called absolutist France, this article examines the persistence and vitality of a parliamentary culture that existed prior to the French Revolution through the prism of wine and food. The focus is on the assemblies of Brittany and Burgundy from the 1660s until the end of the Ancien Régime.

Contrariamente alla concezione tradizionale sul destino delle assemblee degli Stati nella Francia cosiddetta assolutista, questo articolo esamina, attraverso la lente del vino e dell'alimentazione, la persistenza e la vitalità di una cultura parlamentare preesistente alla Rivoluzione francese. L'osservatorio scelto è quello costituito dalle assemblee della Bretagna e della Borgogna a partire dagli anni 1660 e fino alla fine dell'Ancien Régime.

Keywords: wine, food, influence, broglio.

Vino, cibo, influenza, broglio.

Jérôme Loiseau is a professor of modern history at the University of Burgundy Europe and a member of the interdisciplinary research laboratory 'Society, Sensibility, Care' (UR 7366UBE). His research focuses on the political and cultural history of institutions, particularly the history of the assemblies of the States of modern France.

Jérôme Loiseau è professore di storia moderna all'Università di Borgogna Europa, membro del laboratorio di ricerca interdisciplinare "società, sensibilità, cure" (UR 7366UBE); le sue ricerche riguardano la storia politica e culturale delle istituzioni, in particolare la storia delle assemblee degli Stati della Francia moderna.

What if the France of the Ancien Régime was not as centralized a monarchy as Alexis de Tocqueville claimed in the 19th century? In fact, not all provinces were on the same administrative footing. Some were governed directly and solely by the king's commissioners – the famous intendants of Justice, Police, and Finance, ancestors of today's prefects – and by royal officers: members of the parliaments of justice, courts of auditors, and tax courts such as those dealing with elections. In these so-called *pays d'élections*, monarchical taxes were

distributed and collected by these officers under the supervision of the intendant. This system fully supported the idea of administrative centralization. However, on the periphery of the kingdom, there were also pays where the same taxes, sometimes with different names, were paid to the king, distributed and collected by assemblies representing the three orders or estates (clergy, nobility, and third estate) of provincial society. These parliamentary assemblies, despite the monarchical revolution of the 17th century, which brought about a state demanding absolute obedience from its subjects and asserting the royal monopoly on the governance of that same state, were maintained where the king needed local elites to relay his authority and where there had long been administrative capacity and, even more so, resources to finance the relative political autonomy that this mode of administration of the kingdom implied.

For these assemblies – the main ones being those of Burgundy, Brittany, and Languedoc – consent not to taxation but to a free gift was one of the most precious local freedoms. It is true that this consent was all the easier to give since, as William Beik's groundbreaking study showed, a large proportion of taxes were actually spent in the province and largely benefited provincial *rulers*. Thus, between 1630 and 1680, 30% of the taxes agreed, distributed, and levied by the Assembly of the States were redistributed to local leaders (the high nobility and the king's officers), while 60% were spent in the province on military-related expenses. Only 10% of taxes left the province to go to the Treasury of Savings (Beik 1985). This discovery, that of the collaboration between the estates and the monarchy that Tocqueville could not have imagined, was later confirmed by the work of James B. Collins (1994) and Julian Swann (2003). Acquiescing to the king's request was seen as a clear sign that the province for which these magnates spoke had not been subjugated by the monarchy when it was attached to the crown. Until the second half of the 17th century, the amount of this donation was subject to bargaining, and the assembly did not hesitate to confront the king's commissioners in order to reach an offer acceptable to all. Thus, in 1578, the abbot of Cîteaux in Burgundy, Nicolas Boucherat, did not hesitate to ridicule Henry III's excessive demand with these words: "If you want, Sire, to have the power to impose two taxes on us in one year, you must also have the power to give us two summers and two autumns, two harvests and two grape harvests" (Drouot 1937, 136).

However, at the end of the 16th century, a new conception of monarchy emerged. After four decades of conflict and eight wars over religion, a different monarchical culture arrived on the throne with the advent of Henri de Bourbon. The traditional republican monarchy, keen to hear the opinions and advice of the kingdom's powerful figures, gave way to the royal state, which assumed, as revealed in the articles of the Edict of Nantes issued in 1598, that the subjects of France obeyed the king and no longer the dictates of their conscience. Under Louis XIII, this absolutist shift was confirmed and amplified. It was no longer so much the monarchy that was God-given as the person of the king himself, as indicated by the celebrations of his victories, notably the capture of La Rochelle (1628), a Protestant stronghold. The emphasis on the divine origin of the royal person justified the monarch's claim to define all public affairs. For Arlette Jouanna, this process of sacralization resulted in the king being "separated from the body politic", which was consequently excluded from understanding the mysteries of the state. The monarchical monopoly on the government of the kingdom was formalized in the council's ruling of November 2, 1626, which forbade all subjects of Louis XIII from discussing anything concerning the power and authority of the king, and in that of May 12, 1631, which reserved for the king the right to speak publicly about the government (Jouanna 2014; Collins 2016). This new culture was disseminated through the writings of propagandists such as Cardin le Bret, as well as through acts of justice, as demonstrated by the executions of Marshal de Biron (1602) and the Duke of Montmorency (1632), among many others, despite their high status in the royal state.

The assemblies of the estates were obviously not immune to this absolutist shift in royal power, which demanded that they agree to its requests without questioning their relevance, let alone the pays' ability to meet them. Those that refused to stop bargaining or were unable to reach a compromise between the three orders that composed them were irrevocably suspended. This was the case, among the most important, for those of the Dauphiné (1628), Provence (1639), and Normandy (1655). On the other hand, Burgundy, Brittany, and Languedoc managed to maintain themselves by transforming their consent into a ritual of blind obedience, so much

so that on the eve of the French Revolution, the assemblies of states were essentially seen by the monarchy as a political theater where a comedy of respect for local privileges was staged by the king's commissioners. The thesis of political decline despite their maintenance in the institutional architecture of Bourbon France was formulated in the 19th century by Alexis de Tocqueville (1856), for whom the estates had been entirely “emasculated”, except for those of Languedoc, he specifies without justifying this assessment; since then, historiography has profoundly challenged this thesis (Durand, Jouanna *et al.* 2014). Nevertheless, Tocqueville was at the origin of a significant and influential historiographical trend that downplayed their work in order to emphasize the process of state centralization. However, consenting means sharing the same feelings as others, in this case making common cause with the king, which does not necessarily mean capitulating (Pierron 2021). It is precisely this nuance that is revealed by the scattered data, taken from the archives of the estates from the 1660s until the Revolution, concerning food and drink at their meetings. Embodying a policy of gentleness through the consumption of luxury goods, these banquets of the estates highlight an undeniable provincial gastrodiplo-macy that questions the capacity for action of these assemblies, thus allowing us to nuance the essential axiom of French history: its centralization under the Bourbon kings.

1. Breton tables

The Estates General always met in towns. Their convocation brings together a crowd of individuals: 100 to 120 people in the case of Languedoc, around 200 for Burgundy, and perhaps as many as 800 or 900 for the Breton estates, not counting the prominent figures of the meeting, such as the governor, the commander-in-chief, the intendant, and the first president of the parliament, who traveled there with their families and servants for periods ranging from a fortnight to several months. Holding the Estates therefore required feeding, housing, and entertaining the high clergy and nobility of the province, as well as the mayors of the main towns. All were invited by the king to celebrate the union of the province and the monarchy, that is, to take “rank and seat” in a vast ceremony embodying a mystique – the service of the king and the good of the province – based in particular on political exchange, the main vehicles of which were the deliberations meticulously recorded in the minutes of the proceedings, but also the less formal discussions that took place in the liminal spaces of the parliamentary theater, particularly during meals.

In this case, the available sources are limited, both in the state papers and in the *memoirs* of the time. Nevertheless, Madame de Sévigné's letters provide historians with a wonderful window onto the behind-the-scenes of parliamentary life in Brittany. One of these letters, and the best known on the specific subject of food, is the one she wrote to her daughter, Pauline de Grignan, about the Estates of Vitré in 1671. She tells her that, where she is invited, the food is so “excessive” that the roast dishes are taken away without being eaten. She also raves about the pyramids of fruit arranged in “porcelain” dishes, so tall that they cannot be carried over the thresholds without difficulty. She counted fifteen or twenty tables in the town – houses with open tables – where one could eat one's fill, not to mention the consumption of wine “at three or four hundred pipes”, an absolutely considerable quantity of around 200,000 liters¹. According to Chateaubriand, the marquise's testimony was taken by the Bretons as a mockery, but they did not contradict her. Another testimony, also from private writings, is provided by Jacquelot de Boisrouvray. The son of an advisor to the Parliament of Brittany, he became a clerk of the states in 1728, a few years before his death in Vannes. He wrote a journal intended for his son's political education, believing that knowledge of history was a duty of the nobility². Nearly 150 pages describe the sessions in Dinan (1716-1717), Ancenis (1720), Nantes (1722), and Saint-Brieuc (1724). These notes, which were subsequently edited to make them truly readable, contain a wealth of information on the issues at stake in the debates and parliamentary incidents, and provide with an opportunity to make moral judgments on the institution and the men who comprise it. His journal is an unparalleled source for gaining an inside understanding of this type of assembly, which was widespread in Europe under various names: *parliament*, *cortes*, *colo*, *sejm*, etc. Reading it confirms the frequency and importance of alcohol. With 10,000 bottles of Burgundy

and Champagne, consumption in the household of the commander-in-chief, representing the king directly, Marshal d'Estrées, during the Estates of Ancenis in 1720, amounted to 2,000 bottles per week, or around 285 per day. The assembly, as we know, was large due to the presence of the nobility, attracted en masse by the generosity of this Marshal, which, Jacquelot tells us, was very different from the hospitality of his predecessor, Marshal de Montesquiou³. The risk of drunkenness was such that the Bishop of Nantes, Monseigneur de Tressan, president of the assembly, refused that year, despite repeated requests from the nobility, to “give after-dinner speeches”, because parliamentary customs must be radically different from those of everyday life. In England, this process of parliamentary civilization was already underway, with the prohibition, from 1693 onwards, of smoking, drunkenness, eating, and drinking during sessions.

However, the most interesting point in these two accounts is that they highlight the quasi-institutional existence of Breton tables. According to Jacquelot, they were invented during the time of Charles d'Albert d'Ailly, Duke of Chaulnes, who served as commander for the king in Brittany for a quarter of a century (1670-1695). This duke was also the chief architect of the repression of the Bonnets Rouges revolt (1675) and a contemporary of the installation of the first intendant, De Pomereu, in 1689. For all these reasons, he seems to have played a founding role in a political regime that sought to control the province more effectively through force, but also through gentleness and consideration. Jacquelot clearly establishes the link between “the magnificence of his house” and the tranquility of the assembly’s sessions. It was through the luxury of food, he asserts, that the duke was able to “subjugate the nation”⁴. Marcel Marion, in his history of Brittany viewed through the prism of the Breton government of the Duke of Aiguillon (1753-1768), took care to highlight the political role of these tables by quoting a letter from the duke:

The nobility regards the commander’s house as an honest inn where they pay nothing: they have breakfast, lunch, and dinner there, and ask all day long for whatever they need or fancy: no one would dare refuse them anything for fear that their mood might affect the next day’s deliberations: it is therefore impossible at present to reduce the enormous expenditure that a commander is obliged to incur during the Estates, since it is necessary for the success of the business he is charged with conducting, and the best way to please the Bretons is to feed them well and *entertain* them.⁵

It should also be noted that the cost of these events was largely covered by the finances of the estates themselves, which recorded in their accounts the sums allocated to the commissioners and presidents of the orders that held them. This is attested in the correspondence of Madame de Sévigné and in Jacquelot’s *Journal*. In 1722, in Nantes, in addition to the table of the Maréchal d'Estrées, who was currently in command in Brittany, he counted those of the president of the nobility, the Marquis d'Ancenis, François Béthune Charost, the bishop of Nantes, Monseigneur de Tressan, the first presidents of the accounts and of the parliament, Guillaume de Becdelièvre and Pierre de Brillhac, the intendant Feydeau de Brou, the treasurer general of the states, Jean-Baptiste de la Bouexière, the two public prosecutors, the bishop of Léon, De la Bourdonnaye, and several private individuals⁶. In short, there were so many tables that the members of the assembly could attend that their number “left no days empty”⁷. The assertion of Louis XIV’s sovereignty in Brittany was thus manifested through the institutionalization of communal meals, organized by the province’s powerful figures and financed by taxes. However, this was mainly a generalization of a practice that seems to be older, as attested by the *Journal* of François-Nicolas Baudot, Sieur Du Buisson et d'Aubenay. This close associate of the king’s commissioner Jean d'Étampes de Valencay mentions the six dinners he gave in Nantes on January 5 and 13, 1637, on the evening of the vote for the free donation of 2 million livres, but also those organized by Lieutenant General Charles de la Meilleraye on December 29, 1636, and January 18, as well as two others, one of which was initiated by the president of the nobility, the Duke of La Trémouille⁸. These dinners, which always brought together bishops, seneschals, leading members of the nobility, and the king’s commissioners, were, as we can see, political gatherings whose frequency correlated with the debate on the free gift. A century later, Jacquelot also noted that the tables of the king’s commissioners in Brittany were the most lavish during the first few days, when the assembly was preparing to agree to the free gift.

In other words, tables are neither merely social feasts nor simply canteens to alleviate the real poverty of part of the Breton nobility; they are also the seductive antechamber – in the sense of distracting reason – of the political theater of states, where the king's men bewitch people with the lure of good food, just as Circe bewitched Ulysses' crew with her cheese, flour, green honey, and wine from Pramnós in order to “make them forget their homeland”⁹, the people of the states, starting with the most strategic members of the nobility: “there the traps are set in which the commissioners”, writes Jacquelot, “want us to give [...] and we never leave our homes without someone being attracted by their words or intimidated by their threats”¹⁰. In modern Brittany, eating and drinking together was therefore a tremendous opportunity for the king's party to exert political influence in preparation for the assembly's deliberations. The limitation of this observation is that it offers no precise evidence of the social aspects of these tables, focusing solely on their political role. The Burgundian case allows us to go further in describing what drinking means in a parliamentary context, because, obviously, the Bretons did not have a monopoly on wine consumption.

2. Feasts and toasts in Burgundy

Researchers have access to an impressive wealth of documentary sources in the registers of the government of the Princes of Condé, governors of Burgundy from 1630 onwards¹¹. These include the book of the Condés' expenses in Burgundy and, from 1676 – the first year of the government of Henri-Jules de Bourbon-Condé, son of the Grand Condé – not only food expenses are mentioned, but also the menus served successively and separately to the three orders, starting with the Church and ending with the Third Estate¹². Thus we know that in 1682, the table of the estates – which was said to treat the estates – consisted of nothing more and nothing less than: “eight fat capons, twelve goslings, sixteen lambs, twenty-four quails, twenty-four chickens, twenty-four squabs, eight partridges, four capons, three quarters of veal, three pieces of salted beef, six legs of lamb, thirty fricasseed and marinated chickens, thirty pigeons in compote, four veal breasts, forty-eight sweetbreads, four partridges, thirty quarters of venison, eight lambs, eight suckling pigs, twenty-four fat poulardes, twenty partridges, forty-eight quails, sixteen turkeys, forty-eight pigeons, four hams, six pork tongues, three venison pâtés, three wild boar heads”¹³. The reader learns that these foods were prepared in various ways: royal leg of lamb (with champagne, the ultimate indulgence in Burgundy!), profiteroles for the partridges, pâtés, stews, pies, and also roasts. Vegetables were limited to truffles, which were abundant in Burgundy, and mushrooms (mousserons), a few salads, and some asparagus and artichoke dishes. Fruits such as lemons and oranges were also served, but there were few pastries, only marzipan.

In the following century, information became more general, as menus were replaced by lists of food products, wines, and raw materials. The accounts for the year 1784 show greater dietary diversity. Fish was the most notable example of this; cod, fresh salmon, Rhine carp, eels, sturgeon, monkfish, and crayfish were consumed throughout the year, not just for feasts. The prince's steward, Louis-Joseph de Bourbon, governor since 1754, sourced supplies from Dijon and Alsace. Meats changed little, except for the appearance of rabbit and, above all, the rise in popularity of offal, with sheep's tongues alongside heads, feet, brains, and veal sweetbreads, not to mention beef palates. Grocery expenses suggest perhaps more refined culinary practices, with the purchase of Aix surfine oil, various vinegars (red, white), tarragon, different peppers, and colorings such as cochineal. The same refinement was evident in the pastries, as care was taken to purchase vanilla chocolate and lots of lemons and oranges¹⁴.

When it comes to wine, we have to wait until the 1784 accounts to find precise details of what was served, namely: 2,376 bottles – far fewer than the 10,000 mentioned in the Ancenis accounts, but the Burgundian assembly was smaller, shorter, and there were only three official feasts – distributed as follows: “750 bottles of Beaune 1779 couronnées, and 50 bottles to be taken to Paris, 800 bottles of wine at 40 sols, or 1,600 livres, 300 bottles of white Meursault at 30 sols, or 450 livres, 100 bottles of Batard Montrachet at 40 sols, or 200 livres, 176 bottles of Morachet couronnées, including 34 to be taken to Paris, 110 bottles of Morachet at 4 livres 10 sols per bottle, or 495 livres, 40 bottles of red Chambertin 1778, 30 bottles of white Chambertin 1781, 70 bottles of

Chambertin at 4 livres, or 280 livres, for a total expenditure of 4,525 livres¹⁵. Two-thirds of these bottles can be identified as coming from the Côte de Beaune (Beaune, Meursault, Montrachet, Bâtard-Montrachet), while wines from the Côte de Nuits, and Chambertin) are surprisingly underrepresented in the princely order. This is a matter of taste, as the prices do not distinguish between them!

These elements show that in Burgundy, as in Brittany, official meals were a real political tool, a matter of the utmost importance. In a society based on honor, this type of treatment elevated ranks and dignities and seemed intended to produce a form of political harmony between the king and the estates. Attested for the period when consent to financial requests became automatic, as in Brittany, one might think that these meals, held in the parliamentary context of the king's financial request to the province, were the counter-gift for the financial effort made by those who spoke for their province without being obliged to share it due to their tax exemptions. However, a closer understanding of the ritual of the *santés* leads to another conclusion, namely that these political suppers were another ceremony through which the principle of undivided monarchical sovereignty was displayed. In dealing with the estates, the king's first commissioner ostensibly manifested the king's tutelary presence among the orders, which were invited separately. In Burgundy, the king is represented by one of his cousins, a Condé, prince of the blood. Of all the governors of the Ancien Régime, they are the only ones authorized to visit their government. They therefore take their place at the table of the estates, which never happens in Brittany or Languedoc. In the latter province, there was a chair at the "head of the table". It remained empty throughout the meal. To its right was the chair of the president of the estates, the archbishop of Narbonne, and to its left was the chair of the intendant. This empty chair was that of the governor, the king's lieutenant in the province. It represented the monarchical principle that underpinned the meeting. In Burgundy, there is therefore a Condé whose role is crucial in bringing about the presence of the king. He commands the toasts, that is, the act of drinking to someone and thereby entering into communion with the image thus created. Once seated in the banquet hall of the palace of the states, each on a *perroquet*, a folding chair with a backrest, unlike the governor who sits enthroned on a chair, the guests are invited to drink to the health of the king, then the Dauphin, the Dauphine, and the governor according to a complex procedure. For the king, this involves "drinking as many glasses as one can [...] with everyone removing their hats"¹⁶. Then the governor drinks to the Dauphin, tells the president of the order, who repeats it aloud. The governor then stands up and sits down again to drink, and so on, in a cascade that sees everyone standing up and sitting down. The scenario is repeated identically for the Dauphine and the governor. For the governor, everyone drinks with their hats off but remains seated. After this ritual, everyone drinks "several more glasses each as they wish, without any rules".

The "*santés*" are therefore a genuine system in which each authority is honored through a codification that makes subtle and distinguished use of body positions, headgear, and the quantity of wine. The "toasts" are not only a regulated, albeit abundant, consumption of wine, they also represent a political language that reflects the socio-political order upheld by the monarchy (Loiseau 2017, 58). Ultimately, these feasts are an instrument of sovereignty that imposes a hierarchy between orders united only by their absolute obedience to the king. Indeed, far from promoting harmony among subjects by mixing guests, as recommended by Jean Bodin in the sixth book of *La République*, these meals preserve the separation and hierarchy between the three orders and, within each order, between the president and the members¹⁷. The feast was thus a ritual of connection to a higher power that in no way sought to promote harmony between the orders – the exclusion of the Languedoc third estate being an extreme illustration of this – but rather to teach that only the king's body could unite a perpetually divided nation. In this way, the king embodied the Burgundian republic (De Vooght 2012; Caron 1993; Lecuppre-Desjardins 2016).

The banquet of the king and the province must therefore be thought of as an unexpected ceremony of royal religion through which monarchical sovereignty is asserted and reproduced at each meeting of the estates. Drinking, eating, and ultimately communing with the king's body are the political grammar of this ceremony. From then on, refusal to attend by certain members of the estates would be a sign of political secession. While there are no examples of such behavior in Burgundy and Languedoc, this was not the case in Brittany, where meals became the subject of intense political debate during the 18th century.

3. Back to Brittany: cabbage soup and suspended tables

The death of Louis XIV in 1715 reshuffled the deck in Brittany; the late king's nephew, Philippe d'Orléans, presided over the government of the kingdom as part of a regency which, although innovative and inclusive in that it was based on various thematic councils, nevertheless remained a period of weakness for royal power. The Bretons took advantage of this and, from 1715 onwards, complained about the burden of monarchical taxation. In 1717, at the Estates General held in Dinan, Marshal de Montesquiou, the king's chief commissioner, was even forced to suspend the assembly, whose members, mainly those of the second order, expressed their hostility towards the financial demands. This political situation, unprecedented in decades, continued the following year with the revolt led by the Sire de Pontcallec (1718), one of whose slogans was the defense of Breton freedoms and, in particular, the freedom to examine in conscience – and not through a Pavlovian reflex of blind obedience to the king's word – the burden of taxation¹⁸. In his *Journal*, Jacquelot echoes this political crisis, which was experienced as the death of the province, whose legal heritage was trampled underfoot by monarchical politics. Nothing expresses this more intensely than the remains of the four gentlemen – Guer de Pontcallec, Montlouis, Le Moyné, and du Couëdic – executed in Nantes on the evening of March 26, 1720, for attempting to raise Brittany, with the support of the King of Spain, against the Regent. They are, in his words, and this is important for the time, one of “the preliminaries of a dying freedom” (Cornette 2018).

This is the context that gave rise to the “soupe aux choux” (cabbage soup), meaning “communal supper”, which Talhouet de Kéravéon founded with eight to ten companions as an alternative pattern to the table. These men, a tiny minority of those who sit in the assembly, meet in an inn in Nantes to ostensibly demonstrate their intention “not to go to the tables in the evening”. What does their behavior say? That they prefer cabbage to roast meats, water mixed with wine instead of Burgundy and Champagne! By refusing luxury financed by provincial taxes in favor of frugality paid for out of their own pockets, these men were not displaying their particular tastes but a radical conception of civic virtue at a time when, in England, this was being reworked by Trenchard and Gordon's *Cato's Letters*, just a few years after the publication in French of Algernon Sidney's *Discourses on Government* (1702), in which he argued that the king must obey the laws. So could Talhouet de Kéravéon be a figure of classical republicanism, which is generally said to have been unknown in France, which moved from absolute monarchy to radical republic between 1789 and 1792? No doubt the virtue displayed at this supper sought to denounce the vice of Breton tables, also attacked by Jacquelot, who saw them as an instrument of corruption for those who participated in them. They expressed sentiments “most contrary to the public good”, particularly in the commissioners' constant attempts to influence debates or control delegations to the king. In short, these tables pervert the normal functioning of the Breton “constitution” that some wish to restore after decades of absolute power.

The Breton crisis following the death of Louis XIV went beyond this conflict between civic virtue as a condition for the common good and the satisfaction of the personal interests of the members of the provincial institution by expanding the powers of the estates. From 1726 onwards, they regained the autonomy they had lost in the 17th century. They regained the right to form an advisory committee between sessions, composed of two members per order, to monitor military contract awards (les étapes). In 1732, the committee was expanded to eighteen members and given authority over spending and control of funds for soldiers' barracks. In 1733, the Comptroller General of Finances, Orry, assigned it the task of distributing the capitation tax and the tithe. Between 1726 and 1733, the intermediate commission created in 1734 began to take shape. For the monarchy and its commissioners, the Bretons were no longer “as stupid as turkeys”¹⁹. They were elevated to the rank of partners to whom the king not only asked for money but also delegated new tasks. Administrative empowerment calmed the situation by incorporating goodwill. First six, then eighteen, and finally nearly a hundred deputies, renewable every two years, were granted an essential freedom, in line with the conception of the Ancients, that of participating in collective power on a constant basis. In this way, the king demonstrated his renunciation of the ideal of absolute domination and promoted a more inclusive political system, which restored meaning to the practice of the assembly. Through the freedom he granted, he renewed ties with the nobility of Brittany,

who began to attend the assembly more frequently: from 300 members in 1724, their number rose to over 900 in 1728, and in subsequent sessions, the number varied between 600 and 800 members (Rebillon 1932, 96).

As a result, tables are thriving because they are no longer seen as a place where guests are bewitched and the spirit of the institution is corrupted, but rather as the ideal setting for the *Mikropolitik* theorized by Wolfgang Reinhard, who reminds us that politics is not just about setting great ideas such as homeland or freedom in motion – what he calls “*Makropolitik*” – but also the promotion of particular interests that motivate individuals and whose satisfaction is not necessarily bad in itself if conventions are respected (Reinhard 2011, 640 quoted by Harivel 2016, 23). Tables – with their wines and profusion of food – are to the politics of the states of Brittany what the *Piazzetta del Broglio*, opposite the Doge’s Palace – now Piazzetta San Marco – is to Venetian politics of the 17th and 18th centuries: the place for informal practices, perhaps illegal but not necessarily illegitimate. The tables thus embodied the gray area of arrangements that were tolerated as long as they were not officially condemned, which happened in 1776.

The oil in the Breton political system turned sour once the mid-18th century had passed. After unsuccessfully attempting to reform the estates from above in 1767, the monarchy turned its attention in 1776 to the tables, which were more modest but perhaps also more strategic targets in order to restore calm to the assembly, where many parliamentarians refused to accept tax increases motivated by the cost of the Seven Years’ War. The decree of March 29, inspired by Turgot, maintained only four: that of the king’s first commissioner and those of the presidents of the orders. Those of the officers of the estates disappeared (Dupuy 1881; Rebillon 1932, 388). Turgot invoked the need to make savings and limited attendance at those that were maintained to around forty guests, compared to the hundred or so individuals, at the very least, who attended those of the Maréchal d’Estrées! Austerity thus descended on Brittany. But no one was fooled. The aim was to transform the tables of the estates into the king’s tables so that only one influence would be exerted, that of the commissioners, putting an end to the “secret meetings where the opposition’s maneuvers were prepared” (Pocquet 1914, 342). When this ruling was announced on October 1st, the nobility, who, like the other orders, had just heard Mass of the Holy Spirit and agreed to the free gift, rose up and let themselves be carried away by the torrent, according to the beautiful expression of Bureau de Girac, who recounted the session to the Comptroller General. As one man, they considered the regulation insulting to the assembly, shouting for more than two hours to demand, since the argument put forward was economic, the abolition of all the tables²⁰. The choice of the worst-case scenario was in fact motivated by the need not to leave the first commissioner with a monopoly on *the Breton broglio*. The nobility, in full theatrical mode, had no trouble turning the economic argument against the king. They announced a *boycott* of the commissioners’ tables to avoid the expense. The savings made would provide additional resources to “come to the aid of the people of the province”, a view shared by the other two orders²¹.

Let us return to the Venetian comparison to better understand the implications of the 1776 ruling. According to Maud Harivel’s research, in 1695 the Serenissima passed a very strict law against *broglio*, which sparked a debate among clerks and lawyers, giving rise to the expression *broglio onesto*. The expression refers to political behavior that is accepted within an informal sphere and that the patricians strive to put into practice²². By reducing the number of tables, Turgot can be seen as seeking to achieve the same objective of policing political debate in order to make it more honest, that is, more subject to the word of the king’s men. However, the reaction of the orders led to the elimination of any possibility of preparing minds and votes before entering into the theater and withdrawal to the chambers. The brand-new commander-in-chief, the Marquis d’Aubeterre, a military man and former ambassador to Vienna and Madrid, complained about this to the Comptroller General Clugny de Nuits, who had replaced Turgot, pointing out that “he is reduced to dining and supping like a poor ambassador in Venice”²³. The comparison is worth noting because it suggests that the Marquis, himself a former ambassador to Vienna, Madrid, and Rome, viewed his position in the manner of a diplomat. The reactions to the decree of March 1776 literally prevented him from fulfilling it. The decree had the effect of depriving him of a convenient negotiating space in line with the recommendations of François de Callières, who, at the beginning of the century, had advised all ambassadors “that their magnificence should be apparent in their carriage, livery, and other equipment; that cleanliness, abundance, and even delicacy reign at his table, that he often

gives parties and entertainments to the principal persons of the court where he is and to the prince himself²⁴. In the face of this misfortune, Aubeterre chose to put on a brave face, pointing out that despite the resolution of the Estates, some of their members were coming to his house to greet him, proof that the parliamentary work of the Estates could not do without these other places of deliberation, which were these open tables. In 1784, Calonne, the new Comptroller General of Finances, chose to reverse Turgot's decision and restore them in their entirety, as if, in the end, politics could not do without this kind of sociability, which today is known as gastrodplomacy, based on beverages, food, and expertise, all considered instruments of influence.

Ultimately, the introduction of wine and good food into the political world of the two great assemblies of the Bourbon kings of France reveals that Breton tables ultimately have little in common with Burgundian feasts, apart from the primary consumption of wine and food. The tables prepared the work of the assembly, while the feasts were a way of thanking the members of the assembly for their goodwill. The tables are the scene of Breton political autonomy, as evidenced by the monarchy's desire to control them, while the feasts offered by the Prince of Condé demonstrate the monarchical power's hold over the members of the estates. Food brings together and distinguishes two political climates: one – that of Burgundy – still marked by the weight of honors to be rendered to the guests of a banquet ordered by the king, and the other, that of Brittany, where political honesty is under debate due to the existence of several places integrating political games and particular interests, sometimes divergent but sharing the same source of funding. Between these two functions, wines are an obvious common ground. Their versatility allows them to accompany each of the two political situations outlined above. By these actions, they are an undeniable marker of a history that deserves further exploration.

Notes

- 1 Letter from Madame de Sévigné to Madame de Grignan, August 5, 1671, in *Lettres de Madame de Sévigné, de sa famille et de ses amis*, Paris, Dalibon, 1823, vol. VIII, pp. 172-173.
- 2 François Jacquelot de Boisrouvray, *Journal inédit d'un député de l'ordre de la noblesse aux États de Bretagne pendant la Régence (1717-1724)*, in *Archives de Bretagne, recueil d'actes, de chroniques et de documents historiques rares ou inédits*, ed. G. de Closmadeuc, Rennes, Société des Bibliophiles Bretons, vol. XIII, 1895.
- 3 *Ibid.*, p. 60.
- 4 *Ibid.*, p. 152.
- 5 National Archives (hereafter A.N.): H 347 cited by Marcel Marion, *La Bretagne et le duc d'Aiguillon, 1753-1770*, Paris, Thorin, 1898, p. 9.
- 6 François Jacquelot de Boisrouvray, *op. cit.*, p. 169.
- 7 *Ibid.*, p. 151.
- 8 Dubuisson-Aubenay, *Journal des États de Bretagne tenus à Nantes en 1636 par Dubuisson-Aubenay*, *Bulletin de la Société archéologique et historique de Nantes et de la Loire-inférieure*, vol. 67, 1927, p. 368, p. 371, p. 374 and 375.
- 9 Homer, *The Odyssey*, Canto X, 210-243.
- 10 François Jacquelot de Boisrouvray, *op. cit.*, p. 151.
- 11 A.N.: H1-748-123, minutes of the ceremony (1764-1789).
- 12 Musée Condé (M.C.), ms 1390 and 1391, *Recueil des pièces sur l'administration de Bourgogne de 1647 à 1702 formé par Henry-Jules de Bourbon, duc d'Anguien, gouverneur de Bourgogne*, vols. I and II, 17th^e – XVIII^e century; ms 1392-1397, *registre général des actes relatifs au Gouvernement de Bourgogne (1671-1722)*.
- 13 *Ibid.*, ms. 1390 (1mi.276), fol.282.
- 14 Côte d'Or Departmental Archives, *registre général des actes relatifs au Gouvernement de Bourgogne*, 1 Mi 344.
- 15 A.D.C.O., *registre général des actes relatifs au Gouvernement de Bourgogne*, 1 Mi.344.
- 16 *Ibid.*: «only those who drink stand up and remove their hats, and we do not all drink at once as we do at the king's table», fol. 283 et seq.
- 17 «The wise Symposiarch will kindly intertwine a playful person between two wise people, a peaceful person between two quarrelers, and between the Sophists a temperate person, the old chatterbox next to a young apprentice, the poor person eager to join the rich liberal, the angry and sudden person between two cold and stale people. And in doing so, he will not only avoid the boredom of some and the jealousy of others, which is not easy to escape when it comes to rank, [but] such a beautiful order will also result in a sweet and pleasant harmony between each other and all together», Jean Bodin, *Les Six Livres de la République*, Jacques Du Puys, Paris, 1577, Book 6, chapter VI, p. 769 et seq.
- 18 Joël Cornette, *Le Marquis et le Régent. Une conspiration bretonne à l'aube des Lumières*, Paris, Tallandier, 2008
- 19 François Jacquelot de Boisrouvray, *op. cit.*, p. 198.
- 20 A.N.: H.389, letter from Bareau de Girac to Mesnard, October 1, 1776.
- 21 *Id.*, letter from Bareau de Girac to Mesnard, October 4, 1776, fol. 63
- 22 Maud Harivel, *thesis, op. cit.*, p. 40.

23 A.N.: Letter from the Marquis d'Aubeterre to Mesnard de Cornichard, October 4, 1776, H.389, fol. 71-72.

24 François de Callières, *De la manière de négocier avec les souverains*, Chapter III, «Des qualités et de la conduite du négociateur», Amsterdam, 1715, p. 23.

References

Caron M.Th.

1996 *17 février 1454: le Banquet du Voeu du Faisan, fête de cour et strategies de pouvoir*, «Revue du Nord», vol. 315.

Durand S., Jouanna A, Pélaquier É, Donadieu J.P., Michel H.

2014 *Des États dans l'État. Les États de Languedoc de la Fronde à la Révolution*, Geneva, Droz.

Jouanna A.

2014 *Le pouvoir absolu. Naissance de l'imaginaire politique de la royauté*, Paris, Gallimard.

Swann J.

2003 *Provincial Power and Absolute Monarchy. The Estates General of Burgundy, 1661-1790*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

Beik W.

1985 *Absolutism and Society in Seventeenth-Century France. State Power and Provincial Aristocracy in Languedoc*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

Collins J.

1994 *Classes, Estates and Order in Early Modern Brittany*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

2016 *La monarchie républicaine: État et société dans la France moderne*, Paris, Odile Jacob.

Cornette J.

2008 *Le Marquis et le Régent. Une conspiration bretonne à l'aube des Lumières*, Paris, Tallandier.

De Vooght D.

2012 *The King Invites. Performing Power at a Courtly Dining Table*, Brussels, Peter Lang.

Drouot H.

1937 *Notes sur la Bourgogne et son esprit public au début du règne d'Henri III (1574-1579)*, Dijon, Bernigaud et Privat.

Dupuy A.

1881 *Le régime parlementaire de la Bretagne au 18^e siècle. Les états provinciaux en 1776*, Rennes, Catel.

Harivel M.

Entre justice distributive et corruption : les élections politiques dans la République de Venise (1500-1797), doctoral thesis in history, supervised by Simona Slanicka and Jean-Claude Waquet, University of Bern and École Pratique des Hautes Études, 2016.

Lecuppre-Desjardin E.

2016 *Le royaume inachevé des ducs de Bourgogne (XIV^e-XV^e siècles)*, Paris, Belin.

Loiseau J.

2017 «*Les festins du roi. Alimentation et politique à l'occasion des États provinciaux dans la France des XVII^e et XVIII^e siècles*», *Banquets, gastronomie et politique dans les villes de province (XIV^e-XX^e siècles)*, sous la dir. de Philippe Meyzie, Bordeaux, Féret.

Pierron J.Ph.

2021 *Le chemin trouble du consentement. Du consentement formel au consentement existentiel*, «Les cahiers de la justice», Paris, Dalloz, n. 4.

Pocquet B.

1914 *Histoire de Bretagne*, Rennes, vol. VI.

Rebillon A.

1932 *Les États de Bretagne de 1661 à 1789*, Paris, Picard.

Reinhard W.

2011 *Die Nase der Kléopatra. Geschichte im Lichte mikropolitischer Forschung. Ein Versuch*, «Historische Zeitschrift», vol. 293.

