becomes rather obtrusive. Certainly more recent scholarship on the experience and social make-up of seventeenth-century Mennonites is much less negative.

This point leads us to the one major drawback of van Deursen's important study, one that is likely not his fault. Why did it take ten years to see the work appear in English translation? Van Deursen's excellent and balanced analysis of Dutch society deserves to have had an international audience much sooner. Research conducted by Dutch scholars on popular religion, culture and witchcraft, for example, has virtually exploded in the last decade. As a result, some of *Plain Lives*' conclusions seem outdated by the fascinating findings published since 1981.

On the whole, however, van Deursen's study deserves to be read by all those interested in understanding the world that was early modern Netherlands. Written in a highly readable and engaging fashion, marvellously blending anecdotal and scientific evidence, *Plain Lives* provides a solid evidentiary basis for arguing that the experience of early modern Dutch people diverged considerably from that of their contemporaries elsewhere. Students of European social history will find it a well-documented study proving that the experience of common people in that period was not uniformly bleak.

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David Potter. *War and Government in the French Provinces. Picardy 1470-1560*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993. Pp. xv, 393.

That war has always played a major role in the development of nation-states can be considered a truism. In fact, so widely recognized is this idea that one can easily overlook the impact of military operations during the Renaissance, when frequent conflicts between dynastic states were the norm. In his book, David Potter shows that wars might very well have moulded early modern France in more than one way. He goes as far as to say that "the initial phase of 'absolutist' state-building from the mid-fifteenth to the mid-sixteenth centuries can be seen as the engagement of state power in the construction of a war machine adequate for participation in large-scale dynastic conflict" (p. 3). Although this work does not demonstrate clearly the specificity of that period for the development of the French State — one could easily apply Potter's argument to the reigns of Philip IV or Louis XIII — its examination of the effects of war on Picardy is still very interesting.

For much of the fifteenth century, Picardy was controlled by the English or the Burgundians. Wars against England, Burgundy and the Habsburgs helped transform this region into a French province tightly checked by the central government. This process was made through the construction of a military superstructure, as the crown needed to have complete control over what was happening in border regions. The Franco-Burgundian Wars of 1470-1493 gave Picardy to the French kingdom, although no stable border was set by the Treaty of Senlis of 23 May 1493. Inducements and pressures helped Louis XI win over the allegiance of the Picards during that time.

Grants of lands, pensions, governorships and court posts were offered in large number to the nobles while the cities saw their privileges confirmed and, quite often, were freed from taxation. As the nobility was neither independent from the crown nor self-sufficient (in saying that, Potter positions himself convincingly against views expressed among others by Kristen Neuschel and Arlette Jouanna), local aristocrats were incorporated in the administration of the state, both on the provincial and the central levels. The role of the governor, a post occupied for most of this period by members of the Bourbon-Vendôme family, was important since the omnipresence of war greatly increased the size of the army stationed in Picardy. Contrary to what has been suggested by Robert Harding, Potter argues that war did not tend to limit the scope of the governor's power in the interest of the crown.

Picardy was the French province most affected by wars in the first half of the sixteenth century. This grim situation translated into murders, house-burnings and pillaging. But these circumstances did not alter the province's fidelity to the crown or to France. As Potter points out, "the most surprising result of this appraisal is that there was not more evidence of rebelliousness on the part of a population which was the most heavily affected by war" (p. 231). The author suggests that this might be explained in part by massive tax reductions granted by the crown. This is not entirely convincing, however, as Potter fails to take into account illegal levies made by the troops. One could argue that the large number of soldiers stationed in the region made revolts quite hazardous or that a change of allegiance to the Habsburgs could not guarantee peace and prosperity to the population. It might be said also that the population was used to war, an argument that could counter Jeremy Black's recent statement that the endemic character of violence in early modern Europe could explain the large number of conflicts during that period.

In 1559, the Treaty of Cateau-Cambrésis finally settled many disputes on the nature of Picardy's boundaries. According to Potter, it was the earliest attempt to define, or perhaps even discover with a large degree of clarity a French boundary. Of course, this exercise did not free the region from future wars. As early as 1595, the province was the theatre of yet another conflict between France and Spain. Potter's study stops in 1560, which prevents him from examining over a longer term the fidelity of the Picards and their province to the French crown. The Wars of religion and Spain's involvement with them changed the nature of the conflict between the two realms, but it would be interesting to study the war of 1595-1597 in Picardy with all the insights brought forward by Potter in his interesting book, rich in archival sources. Such a work would give us information on the solidity of the superstructure built by earlier kings to bind Picardy to France.

Potter's study deals mainly with administrative history. The absence of "politics" from it is somewhat perplexing. Potter shows, for example, that the French kings had to offer jobs or privileges to the nobles and the municipalities to have them join the party. But what was the message — if any — associated with these gifts? Were the Picards invited to join a realm, a nation, a State, or did they become simply the clients of one person: the French King? To answer that question would give us some interesting information about the degree of national consciousness in France at the turn

of the sixteenth century, and would tell us much about the transition from the feudal to the modern state. This raises a bigger question: must the modern state be examined through its new institutions, as Potter seems to imply, or through the message and the ideology that lay behind those institutions? The answer lies probably somewhere in the middle, as administrative history cannot be totally separated from political history.

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David Quint. *Epic and Empire: Politics and Generic Form from Virgil to Milton*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993. Pp. x, 433.

Attempts to construct a genealogy of the epic from Virgil to Milton have often led to ahistorical narratives sustained by formalistic readings of individual poems. While such readings are valuable for their rigorous textual analysis, their tendency to privilege the text over context elides the cultural matrix in which overtly political works are produced. On the other hand, efforts to uncover the politics of a given poem are frequently reduced to tracing topical allusions: this approach isolates the text from its literary history, from the intertextual web so crucial to the study of epic. Negotiating between these critical positions is David Quint's *Epic and Empire: Politics and Generic Form from Virgil to Milton*, which combines close attention to the formal qualities of the genre with an astute awareness of the politics informing individual texts. While Quint's study of what he figures as the two rival traditions of epic poetry — the Virgilian epic of imperial conquest and the Lucanian epic of vanquished republican or antimonarchical forces — focuses predominantly on narrative form, his focus is sharpened by an examination of what Fredric Jameson calls the "ideology of form," that is, the political meanings and contexts embedded in form.

Quint's attention to the relation between politics and generic form is manifest in his insightful reading of the *Aeneid*, a text which "encodes" and "transmits" an imperial epic tradition. Drawing upon the two types of narrative offered by the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, that of epic and romance, Quint notes that the *Aeneid* establishes a generic hierarchy, for the first six books are modelled on the *Odyssey*, while the last half of the poem recuperates an Iliadic narrative which drives towards ideological closure. Throughout the first half of the poem the Trojans seemed doomed to repeat their role as losers, as is evident in their endless and aimless wandering. Drawing on Freud's concept of the "repetition compulsion," which states that the victim of an earlier trauma may either neurotically re-enact his victimization over and over again or replay the original situation in order to recreate and master it, Quint notes that Aeneas' initial regressive wandering betrays the former obsessive repetition of the past. In the last half of the poem, however, Actium functions as a replay of Troy, a replay, moreover, which undoes the past and transforms Aeneas from a romance wanderer to an epic conqueror. Thus the *Aeneid* invests narrative form