

Laurie Catteeuw, *Censures et raisons d'État. Une histoire de la modernité politique (XVIe-XVIIe siècle)*

Paris: Edition Albin Michel, 2013

[ISBN 9782226209146; € 25]

ANGELA BALLONE

Scuola Normale Superiore of Pisa

The main focus of this book is the topic of *reason of state* in the early modern period. It focusses mainly on the earlier Italian treatises regarding this topic, as well as the French reception of it, and its developments within the first half of the 17th century. It analyses the period between two decisive moments for «the natural histories of political ideas» (p. 11),¹ the publication of the *Della ragion di Stato* by Giovanni Botero (1589) and that of the *Jugement de tout ce qui a esté imprimé contre Mazarin* by Gabriel Naudé (1649). Effectively tackling the very subject of her book, the author describes the concept of *reason of state* as the «opaque body of modern politics», something whose history is «obscure and familiar» at the same time (p. 7). Indeed, in the long process that saw matters of state moving from the *arcana imperii* (the secrets of power) to the public sphere, this book emphasises well-known and lesser-known aspects of that process, as well as relevant primary sources.

Structured in three sections and eight chapters, Laurie Catteeuw guides us through the development of the concept of *reason of state* from its inception in early Italian treatises (e.g. by Guicciardini) until its later developments within the French political context of the *Fronde* during the government of Cardinal Mazarin. In addition to the main introduction and conclusion, there are three mini-introductions to each of the three main sections of the book (pp. 21-25, pp. 153-155, and pp. 283-284), which point at the common line of thought behind each section's chapters. The first section analyses the emergence of *reason of state* as a subject for history, beginning with its relationship with Hobbes' image of the modern state as the Leviathan (p. 27 et sgt.), through its reaction/adaptation to the Reformation and Counter-Reformation period (p. 39 et sgt.), to conclude with its full realisation as a core aspect within the development of modern political thought (p. 53 et sgt.). After having discussed its links with the past, Catteeuw is ready to move to the second section of her book in which, on the one hand, we get a better idea of her convincing theorisation of two different *reasons of state* (that of the State and that of the Church) and, on the other hand, we begin to see how practical measures of control were implemented (e.g. censorship) to overcome the increasing detachment between temporal and spiritual matters in the daily running of early modern states. The polymorphic aspects of *reason of state* emerge more forcefully in the confrontation with the 'good' *reason of (the ecclesiastical) state*. While it worked well within the

¹ All translations of the quotes from Catteeuw's book are mine.

dichotomy of two opposite *reasons* in the last part of the 16th century, ecclesiastical censorship was unable to find a new dimension on *reason of state*. In the first half of the next century state censorship emerged as way to educate the readers in approaching *reason of state*-literature enhancing their critical judgement over political issues (p. 280). Section three of the book shows us French developments in that sense.

This work will be of interest for historians working on the early modern period broadly, but also for those looking for a more in depth knowledge of topics such as that of *reason of state*, or the delicate balance between common good and individual freedom. As historians and scholars working in the field of cultural studies, and regardless of what we think we already know about these topics, this book challenges us from its very title. In it, Laurie Catteeuw announces a discussion regarding a variety of *reasons of state* instead of just the one we may have gotten used to deal with (e.g. Machiavelli's). Furthermore, it identifies another important aspect in censorship systems as a manifold mechanism in the Counter-Reformation context of the early modern period, a period in which the development of the printing press produced a number of changes in the spreading of new ideas within the recently globalised world at the same time that more elaborate and effective methods of censorship were put into use. Toward the end of the book Catteeuw focusses on French politics during the influential governments of the two cardinals Richelieu and Mazarin.

* * *

The utilisation of the strong image of the Leviathan from the very first lines of **Chapter one** allows Catteeuw to effectively show a crucial aspect of *reason of state*: its continuous tension with the modern state and the debate about the prevalence of the interest of many over that of the individual (p. 28). Through the development of the humanism of Justus Lipsius and the recovery of the works of Tacit we are brought to see how the definition of a certain distance between politics and morality produces a more exhaustive focus on the internal psychological mechanisms of the human being (pp. 31-32). With Catteeuw's words, «by expressing the antagonism between absolute power and individual, reason of state makes manifest the process of individualisation under way. By opposing it, reason of state valorises such process and designates it as a phenomenon starting from which it determines its very self» (p. 29). To understand the history of *reason of state*, Catteeuw underlines that it is crucial to look at the Renaissance and Italian humanism (p. 32). Within these we find the pre-step of the very first treatises dealing with *reason of state*. During the phase of emergence of the Italian states, the role of individuals/mercenaries leading their armies and being 'hired' by a prince (the so-called *condottieri*) becomes crucial (p. 34). As something highly dynamic, the world becomes a context in which able individuals are seen as capable of adapting to unforeseen circumstances (p. 35). Discussing Machiavelli's definition of the much-needed capacity of adaptation that the Prince has to master, Catteeuw establishes a parallel between the qualities of this new individual born during the Italian Renaissance and *reason of state*: both are adaptable, flexible, polymorphic (p. 36).

Chapter two analyses the language of *reason of state* in its development from early to more mature stages, and includes its link to ancient times. It starts by discussing the very first formulation of *reason of state*, by the Florentine Francesco Guicciardini in his *Dialogo del Reggimento di Firenze*, written between 1521 and 1525. Despite the fact that Guicciardini utilises the expression «ragione e uso degli stati» (reason and use of states), the following pages are extremely convincing in arguing that this is certainly the same *reason of state* of authors such as Machiavelli or Jean Bodin (pp. 67-71). The case discussed by Guicciardini refers to the revolt of Pisa against Florence in 1494. To that first revolt another one followed, closer to Guicciardini's time, in 1509. When he writes his *Dialogo* he does so as if it was taking place in the same year as the first revolt (p. 67). In it, four members of the Florentine oligarchy discuss whether it may be better to murder all Pisan prisoners rather than free them, as they may become the perpetrators of more revolts (e.g. the second revolt, in 1509) against their Florentine lord (pp. 70-71). Underlining this chronological setting, Catteeuw notes how «the *Dialogue* by Guicciardini brings to the fore the fact that when he was writing, Botero was included within a history that was already under way before him» (p. 68). Although this is an aspect that could bring to a number of further developments about both Guicciardini's chronological choice for his *Dialogo* and the analysis of Botero's contextualisation of his *Della ragion di Stato*, Catteeuw gives no further explanations. Instead, she moves to considering how Guicciardini typifies some of the features of later works dealing with *reason of state*. Firstly, the dialogue form and the oral context in which *reason of state* circulated before appearing in printed material (p. 70). Secondly, the fact that conversations dealing with *reason of state* ought to take place in confidential environments (e.g. in secret) because of their contentious aspects (p. 68). Finally, the importance of an attentive observation of the current situation (e.g. Machiavelli's *verità effettuale*) and the following evaluation of what would be better for the common good, in the case of Guicciardini of the Florentines (p. 71). Among the reasons that he put forward for writing his *Della ragion di Stato*, Botero refers to the popularity of (oral) discussions of *reason of state* in the European courts. By deciding to take part in these, Botero does so in a written and published form, retrieving the topic of *reason of state* from secrecy (pp. 70-71). Botero is the first promoter of a 'good' *reason of state* in which statesmen are responsible before their conscience (p. 72). The analysis of the specificity of the language to be utilised when talking about *reason of state* brings Catteeuw to argue that *reason of state* requires opacity and dissimulation because of its very nature (pp. 92-96). Due to the increased importance of the concept for the preservation of peace, Catteeuw describes a sort of controlled fruition of treatises dealing with *reason of state*, to which princes are obliged for the security of their kingdoms (p. 102).

Chapter three expands on the concept of censorship, dealing with the very root of the term. We begin reading about the Roman *census*, to move to the *census* in Bodin and, finally, to look at the calculation of the common interest of the state as a whole. Roman censors were responsible for defining citizens' contributions to the republic on the basis of their property (p. 110). Thanks to the *census*, rights and obligations were shared by citizens, thus safeguarding the survival of the republic (p.112). Furthermore, *census* measurements allowed the republic to know the extent of both human and natural resources and to plan future actions accordingly (p. 114). Therefore, *reason of state* was linked to the *census* through the common goal of defining

public interest and the realm's potentiality according to its resources (p. 117). Also Bodin gives great importance to the *census* as a measure for the liberty of people and internal peace (p. 125) because it allows charges, such as taxes, to be equitably shared among citizens, thus hopefully avoiding sedition (p. 130). When approaching censorship in the context of the Church-*versus*-State debate, Bodin differentiates between a temporal and an ecclesiastical censorship reactivating the former as a better version of censorship, above all compared with the excesses of the latter (pp. 134-137). Catteeuw's following treatment of concepts such as public interest (Bodin) and «reason of interest» (Botero) helps understand how the concepts of *reason of state* and government are intertwined and, in turn, how censorship is somehow functional to the conservation of the state (p. 149).

Chapter four highlights the close link between Bodin's concept of sovereignty and *reason of state* (pp. 160-161), by looking at the influence of medieval jurists such as John of Salisbury and Baldus de Ubaldis (p. 163). By underlining a series of limitations to the absolute power of the monarch, such as divine and natural laws, or the fundamental laws of France such as the Salic Law of Succession (pp. 164-165), Catteeuw points out that in Botero «Medieval tradition and Roman juridical culture are joined to the Machiavellian legacy» (p. 168). Strengthening Salisbury's image of the king as «source of justice» and «living image of God on Earth» (pp. 168-169), Bodin's monarch is both the head of the state and God's subject (p. 170). With regard to positive law both monarchical power and *reason of state* call for a type of government defined by exception, with the superior law of necessity dictating the current situation which the monarch assesses himself (pp. 172-174). Following the line of thought inaugurated by Ammirato in 1594, Catteeuw remarks how for Bodin the monarch/lawgiver can enact laws as well as derogate them (pp. 174-177) by determining whether or not the state is facing an 'exceptional' situation (pp. 178-183). The monarch «bypasses the laws in order to create them» (p. 184).

Chapter five brings us into the field of religion, whereby the «demonization» of Machiavelli's or Bodin's *reason of state* leads to its «translation» into divine terms as the «reason of the Church» (pp. 199-200). Catteeuw remarks how French wars of religion had an impact on the Italian authors writing about *reason of state* (p. 201). The case of Bodin is, again, presented as indicative in this sense. In 1576 he participated in the legislative assembly of Blois, in which France's religious unity was discussed, noting in his diaries how the enforcement of religious unity over the country would have resulted in war among French subjects. Therefore, Bodin saw in the conservation of freedom of religion the necessary condition to conserve the state (p. 203). As *reason of state* is put forward as a crucial tool to preserve the stability of the body politic and peace among its members, religious powers are forced into join in the process of definition of a specific, different, language to assess current political matters (p. 208). «The voice of the Church imposes itself at the very heart of the debates spreading within society. By doing so, it defended its place in the identification of public interest» (p. 209). Furthermore, within the context of the Counter-Reformation, the «reason of the Church» (the 'good' *reason of state*) is seen as a necessary limitation to the 16th century concept of *reason of state* as unlimited (pp. 212-213). In the 1580s, at the same time that Pope Clement VIII made a direct

reference to the «ecclesiastical reason of state» opposing it to the ordinary *reason of states* (pp. 215-261), the Congregation of the Index is reorganised (p. 221). It cannot be a coincidence – Catteeuw notes – the fact that the author of *Della ragion di Stato* (1589) was a member of the same Congregation. Ecclesiastical censorship had a double function, that of prohibiting the circulation of material in favour of the spreading of ‘evil’ *reason of state*, and that of producing material in defence of ‘good’ *reason of state* (pp. 224-225). The publication of Botero’s book represents the Church’s decision to enter into the very arena in which *reason of state* was attacking its interference in politics. Botero’s intention is clearly to fight back apologists of *reason of state* with their same arguments (p. 228).

However, the balance between secrecy and publicity is a delicate one, as demonstrated by the changing attitude toward the publication of *reason of state* by an author like Bodin. **Chapter six** of the book examines the increasing tension between secrecy and publicity once the existence of two *reasons of state* is unanimously accepted. Facing the development of printing, the necessity to exercise some kind of control over it became an impelling objective (p. 238). If in his *Méthode pour faciliter la connaissance de l’histoire* (1566) he praises Machiavelli for having re-discovered the secret mechanisms of political power (p. 240), ten years later in the *Six Livres de la République* Bodin has become aware of the danger that such publication may cause among subjects who may then turn to rebellion (p. 242). In view of conserving peace among the masses, and despite the positive aspects that a debate around *reason of state* may bring at the government level, ignorance may be preferable to knowledge for the very safeguarding of the state (p. 243). Considering Bodin’s change with regards to this, Catteeuw brings to the fore the example of other authors who contribute to the definition of the tension between publicity and secrecy of *reason of state* (such as Boccalini and Daniel de Priezac). With his *Considérations politiques sur les coups d’État* (1639), Gabriel Naudé seemed to have found a solution to the problem, proceeding to the publication of his works in a very limited number of copies (twelve), balancing the need of knowing about *reason of state* in certain (limited) circles with that of keeping the main part of the public unaware of it (pp. 249-552). Naudé underlines the similarities between a good pedagogue and a good doctor, «who teaches without corrupting» (p. 257), pointing at another crucial aspect discussed in Catteeuw’s following pages: the educational aspects of *reason of state* as something aiming at creating a new reader, more sensitive to important matters of statecraft (pp. 265-270). Through the juxtaposition of Aristotle and Machiavelli in authors such as Frachetta and Zuccolo, Catteeuw effectively tackles the concept of *reason of state* as a modern *paideia* (pp. 274-275).

Focussing on France in the early 17th century, **Chapter seven** looks at the development of a censorship emanating directly from the State without the participation of the Church (p. 283). Catteeuw looks at how the French panorama in the printing press adapted to the broad process of discovery and development of the concept of *reason of state* analysed in the previous chapters. Censorship of printed material became a crucial tool in safeguarding the security of the State, as it appears from a report that Richelieu himself redacted with regard to the juridical aspects of his policies controlling public opinion. The report, the analysis of which occupies the following pages in Catteeuw’s book (pp. 302-309), is part of the trial against Jacques

Rondin, imprisoned in the Bastille in 1627 and accused of being the author of a libel criticising the king and his ministers (p. 302). Even though it is a short text (of just one page and half) Richelieu's report focusses on fundamental aspects of the condemnation of libels, from the Twelve Tables to his very own time (p. 305). Another text, *Des libelles diffamatoires* (1626), found in the *Richelieu Papers* is helpful to expand on the profusion of references to ancient texts presented in the short report. Comparing the references of these texts to the highly polemical context surrounding Richelieu (pp. 309-313), Catteeuw gives us a convincing source to support her argument on the closeness of *reason of state* and censorship. On the one hand, she establishes a parallel in the mechanisms of censorship implemented by the Church and the French monarchy. On the other hand, she underlines the differences between them, with the «reason of the Church» focussed on the main goal of opposing its counterpart and *reason of state* creating an effective tool (its own censorship) to safeguard its very existence (p. 320). Competition and tension between those two types of censorships are analysed through a number of examples (pp. 320-324). At the end, Catteeuw's conclusion is that by the 1630s state censorship had prevailed in France (p. 325).

The **final chapter** of this book covers the period of the *Fronde* during the government of Richelieu's successor, the Cardinal Mazarin, a period in which – Catteeuw tells us – the printing press had further evolved (p. 328). The core author analysed in this chapter is Gabriel Naudé. In his *Le Marfore ou Discours contre les libelles* (1620), this French author considers that both state and ecclesiastical censorship are unable to keep under control the great number of libels circulating (p. 330). Since the public space is obviously that in which the concept of *reason of state* has been developed, the only solution for state-censors is to openly engage in a debate those same authors that criticise bitterly the government (p. 332). According to Catteeuw, Naudé moves from a position in which state-censorship is needed to another in which the best way to limit the influence of libels is to «answer to them» in writing, «by using the plume» (p. 337). Only in this way it is possible to counter all of the pernicious accusations against the king and his ministers with rigour, in order to educate readers to differentiate between 'good' *reason of state* (that of the government) and 'evil' *reason of state* (that of the opposition) (p. 333). This theory is further developed in the other work by Naudé analysed by Catteeuw, the *Mascurat* or *Jugement de tout ce qui a esté imprimé contre Mazarin* (1649). Published anonymously, the *Mascurat* exemplifies in practice the role that Naudé gives to those loyal to the monarchs and his ministers, «to persuade and to teach rather than prohibiting and censoring» (p. 343). It explains to readers how it is important to 'tune their attention' (to «educate it») in order to recognise the «good pieces of written works» (e.g. *antimazarinades*) from the «evil ones» (e.g. *mazarinades*) (pp. 346-47).

* * *

In conclusion, Catteeuw's book is an excellent read for scholars studying the early modern period from a number of different points of view (e.g. history, philosophy, cultural studies), and one completed by a very useful critical *apparatus* of footnotes and bibliography. It effectively shows us a number of insightful connections within the changing dynamics of the relationship between State and

BALLONE

Church. Looked at overall, the main argument proposed by the author is convincingly articulated and engagingly expressed, allowing the reader to think anew on the many aspects relating to the position of *reason of state* within the public sphere.