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Review of: Paola Volpini, *El espacio político del letrado: Juan Bautista Larrea magistrado y jurista en la monarquía de Felipe IV*

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Paola Volpini. *El espacio político del letrado: Juan Bautista Larrea magistrado y jurista en la monarquía de Felipe IV*. Trans. Jesús Villanueva. Madrid: Ediciones de la Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, 2010. (Original Italian version: *Lo spazio politico del letrado: Juan Bautista Larrea magistrato e giurista nella monarchia di Filippo IV* (Bologna: El Mulino, 2004). 236 pp.

Juan Bautista Larrea was a jurist who rose through the ranks to become a member of the Council of Castile during the years when the Count-Duke of Olivares was Philip IV's chief minister. He studied and taught at the University of Salamanca, where his early networking took place. From there he went to the Chancillería of Granada, and eventually to Madrid. This book, a portrait of a *letrado* and his "political space," describes how one intelligent and cautious man sought to balance the demands and properties of royal power and royal justice; how he threaded political needles between Olivares, the bankers, and the nobility; and what he had to say about all this in two volumes of published *Allegations*, or short treatises, preceded by a casebook published after his years in Granada. He died in 1645, the same year as Olivares, though he survived his master on the job.

The first three chapters are somewhat chronological, ending with Larrea's death. The rest of the book is thematic, exploring his involvement in a variety of overlapping areas: the role of the magistracy, the sale of offices, the obligations of the crown's financiers, the Cortes, and the role of the nobility. In each one, instances are described in which Larrea had to argue a position vis-à-vis the crown or other juntas and councils. With the sale of offices, for example, Larrea had to balance the crown's excruciating need for revenue with the professional integrity of the governmental and judicial posts being sold. Which was more important for the monarchy? To what degree does demand for obedience (which Olivares often did not get) undermine the monarchy more than bolster it? How should the crown dissimulate the failings of its closest servants?

Larrea, to be honest, does not seem a particularly interesting man. Sometimes he went one way, sometimes he went another, but he does not seem ever to have strayed very far in either direction, managing to defend both corporative interests and Olivares. That could well be the point of this book, and the reason for Larrea's survival, of course. In one instance, the crown's attempts in the 1630s to wrest from the high nobility their ownership of certain *alcabalas*, Larrea sued the lords despite an apparent royal interdict against such suits, but wiggled out of a tight spot on technicalities, leaving everyone more or less happy,

or at least equally unhappy. The episode captures one of the crucial dynamics of the Spanish Hapsburg monarchy, and Volpini provides an intriguing glimpse of how Larrea essentially defended his own disobedience. He had chosen to follow certain laws and not others, he told the crown, always moved by duty, always acting in the king's best interest.

The *Allegations* are in Latin, a language I confess I do not read, and as nearly every section of this book relies on long, untranslated quotes from the treatises, much of the book was lost on me, which I regret. There is no index, which also reduces the book's utility for scholars of the monarchy. The book comes with a CD, which gave me hope, as I thought I would be able to search the text that way, but I was unable to open the text, perhaps because I use a Mac. The CD does provide, however, pdf files of the Latin *Allegations* and some other texts by Larrea, which will be useful for anyone studying the monarchy of Philip IV.

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