

so many interpretations and judgments possible? Is it the fact that *OMAM* is a play in narrative form, consisting almost entirely of dialogue? Is it because of the range of characters, including the two leads but also the ranch owner, his son Curley, Curley's young wife, a black hand, an idealized cowboy, and others? Certainly the novel allows schoolchildren to study the Great Depression and the plight of the homeless and dispossessed, but there is more to it than that. *Of Mice and Men* has attained something like the status of folklore, and the characters live outside the text, in the classroom and the imagination.

Despite some confusing layout, and proofreading lapses (see p. 7 for missing words), the book could be of practical use to teachers and students, even though abundant material is available through open access on the Web. There is something to be said for the chronological approach, which provides a history not only of Steinbeck criticism, but of American culture.—*Jean Alexander, Carnegie Mellon University.*

**Jacob Soll.** *The Information Master: Jean-Baptiste Colbert's Secret State Intelligence System.* Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2009. 277p. alk. paper, \$65 (ISBN 9780472116904). LC 2008-051142.

In recent years, historians of early modern Europe have increasingly turned to the theme of information in society as a historiographical framework for their research. This "informational turn" has begun to yield a number of studies on how information institutions (such as libraries, archives, museums) and practices (including the collection, organization, communication, and utilization of information) contributed to the social, economic, political, and cultural processes that shaped the contours of life in European societies between the Renaissance and the Enlightenment. One topic that has attracted considerable scholarly attention is the administrative and political use of

information in early modern European states. The intersection of information practices, governmental administration, and political purposes provides the thematic backdrop for the book under review, in which Jacob Soll, an associate professor of history at Rutgers University and specialist in the political and cultural history of early modern France, presents a wide-ranging and richly documented study of how one of Louis XIV's most prominent ministers, Jean-Baptiste Colbert (1619–1683), harnessed a number of information institutions and practices into a "state information system" to support the administrative apparatus and absolutist ambitions of the French state under the Sun King.

Born into a merchant family and trained in the mercantile arts, Colbert entered into state administration at an early age and rose to prominence in the 1650s as financial manager for, and administrative factotum to, Cardinal Mazarin, the chief minister of France. From 1661 until his death in 1683, Colbert was a leading member of Louis XIV's council of state: serving as minister of finance, trade, industry, and the navy, he came to control virtually all aspects of government administration apart from military affairs. He proved to be an effective minister, putting in place policies designed to rationalize state administration, strengthen the position of the state vis-à-vis local governments and religious authorities, develop French domestic industry and commerce, promote French mercantile activity abroad, and advance the arts and sciences in France. Colbert's effectiveness as an administrator was due not only to a remarkable capacity for work and considerable skill in the art of wielding political power, but also, as Soll argues, to his adeptness at obtaining, managing, and deploying the information he needed to make policy decisions and carry out his many-sided political program. Indeed, a primary thesis of the book is that, by integrating a wide array of information sources, institutions, and practices into his administrative system,

Colbert became, in effect, the chief information manager for Louis XIV's régime or, in Soll's felicitous phrase, "the information master" of the French state.

As Soll makes clear at the book's very outset, libraries and archives played a central rôle in Colbert's information régime. The great minister of state took an active interest in these information institutions: indeed, he oversaw the development of three major library-cum-archive collections over the course of his career. In 1654, he was responsible for reconstituting the collections of Cardinal Mazarin's library, which had been dispersed a year earlier during civil disturbances associated with the Fronde—a task that, by all accounts, he discharged with ruthless efficiency. Two years later, Colbert was given administrative control over the Royal Library, which he consolidated by appointing first his brother and then his own personal librarian as keepers of the library: on his initiative, its collections underwent major expansion and, in 1666, were relocated to new quarters situated only a block away from Colbert's house in Paris. At the same time, Colbert was also amassing his own private library, the Colbertine, which was separate from, but closely linked to, the Royal Library. By the time of his death in 1683, both the Royal and the Colbertine libraries had reached immense proportions: indeed, their collections were among the largest in Europe at the time, the former comprising about 36,000 printed volumes and 10,500 manuscripts (a threefold increase from its size when he first took control of it), the latter containing no less than 23,000 printed books and 5,600 manuscripts. Soll's description of Colbert's methods of obtaining materials for these libraries reveals the great minister of state to have been an enterprising, ambitious, canny, and sometimes unscrupulous, collection developer.

Colbert's project of building up the Royal Library and the Colbertine was not merely an expression of bibliophilia or an attempt to enhance his royal master's,

and his own, prestige. As Soll convincingly argues, it also aimed at putting at his disposal large, centralized stores of documents to serve as an information base for the purposes of formulating state policy. The libraries under Colbert's control contained not only the humanist, religious, naturalist, and scientific books or manuscripts typically found in a well-stocked early modern *bibliotheca selecta*, but also tomes and documents dealing with legal, diplomatic, industrial, and mercantile subjects. In addition, they served as repositories for dossiers of administrative documents of all kinds, ranging from copies of legal and ecclesiastical charters to be used as ammunition in crown disputes with local governments and the Church, to detailed reports composed by Colbert's agents on the state of industry and commerce in various regions of France and books of accounts recording the fiscal condition of the state. In other words, both the Royal Library and the Colbertine functioned both as a statesman's library and as state archives, whose collections amounted to what Soll terms "an encyclopedia of the state" (p. 2).

No less important than the task of collecting a diverse body of documentary materials was that of setting them into order: indeed, Soll claims, "keeping a well-organized administrative archive and library were [*sic*] the basis of Colbert's managerial method" (p. 93). At the Colbertine, the duty of organizing and maintaining the collections fell to a scholar-librarian—initially the mathematician Pierre de Carcavy (1600–1684) and later the legal scholar and historian Étienne Baluze (1630–1718)—charged with overseeing its day-to-day operations. Taking his directives from Colbert himself, the librarian oversaw the filing of incoming documents and administrative dossiers, as well as preparing catalogs and annotated bibliographies as guides to the library's collections. Furthermore, he was responsible for providing personal reference service to the great minister of state—a task that included retrieving requested

documents, preparing summarizations of longer documents, compiling data from multiple sources and writing up reports on them, and translating Latin texts into French. In this way, Colbert treated his library as an information bureau *avant la lettre*, whose scholarly workers supplied him with the sources and information that he needed for his day-to-day work: examples of his reference requests culled from his personal papers by Soll provide a vivid indication of just how dauntingly detailed the information he sought might be.

Colbert used the libraries-*cum*-archives under his control not only as sources of information for his personal administrative work but also as instruments for projecting state interests into the realm of cultural politics. One way to do so was to open their collections to scholars who might serve as researchers for, and spokesmen of, the state. As Soll points out, the collections of the Royal Library and the Colbertine served as a research center for a constellation of scholars and scientists whom he recruited and to whom he accorded state patronage. These *érudits* were expected to produce works of scholarship that advanced scientific learning or celebrated the government policies and political goals of Colbert and his royal master: those who did not conform their work to the great minister's wishes or whose research touched upon taboo subjects had their library privileges revoked and their patronage withdrawn. Those aspects of research carried out by Colbert's scholars that were intended for public consumption were published under the aegis of the Royal Press at the Louvre, which functioned as an organ for the dissemination of state propaganda.

Colbert's use of the Royal Library and the Colbertine as resources for the scholarly manufacture of state propaganda formed part of a broader project to shape the opinions of influential cultural elites both in France and throughout Europe and, more ambitiously, to "bring the world of learning under the control of the

French state" (p. 100). Soll neatly outlines various aspects of this program, which included, *inter alia*, the establishment of a number of scholarly societies—some of which, such as the Académie des Sciences, still count among the most prestigious French cultural institutions today—and the foundation of the well-known periodical *Journal des Sçavans*, which was run by some of Colbert's protégés and sought to shape perceptions of "[t]hat which goes on in the Republic of Letters" (p. 101).

A darker side of Colbert's cultural program was his attempt to police the Republic of Letters within the French realm. This entailed heavy state regulation of the Parisian book trade, attempts to control the importation of foreign books and pamphlets, and rigorous censorship of books and pamphlets deemed injurious to the interests of the state, be it on political, philosophical, or religious grounds: adverting vignettes from the correspondence between Colbert and his learned lieutenant general of police, Nicolas de Reynie (1625–1699), Soll paints a vivid picture of the cultural politics and administrative mechanics involved in suppressing sources of information undesirable to the state in Sun King's realm.

Colbert's sustained efforts at suppressing purveyors of suspect literature were closely related to two other features of his informational policy that loom large in Soll's narrative: surveillance and secrecy. As a matter of course, Colbert sent out administrative agents to the provinces to observe local demographic, fiscal, commercial, industrial, ecclesiastical, and judicial conditions and to communicate this information to him in detailed reports: as Soll shows, the great minister of state took an active interest in instructing his charges on what to write about in their reports and how to write it and did not fail to criticize them if they failed to meet his exacting standards. Such systematic attempts to gather detailed information were used not only for administrative purposes but also for political ends: over the course of his narrative, Soll presents

several examples of Colbert's use of his agents to spy upon, or assess the weaknesses of, political opponents and rivals. Much of the information that Colbert's networks of agents and informants procured for him was hidden away in the archives of his library collections. Indeed, Colbert sought to restrict public access to any state documents that did not support the interests of the régime: for this reason, the documentary universe of the Royal Library and the Colbertine was a universe closed to all save trusted members of Colbert's administration and his coterie of state-supported scholars.

There can be little doubt that, under Colbert, Louis XIV's France was rapidly moving in the direction of becoming a full-fledged information state, jealously keeping its centralized documentary base far from the public sphere that it otherwise sought to control through propaganda. The great minister of state's death decisively slowed this momentum. During Colbert's tenure in office, the centralization of the government's documentary base had been intimately intertwined with the concentration of extensive administrative powers in his hands, and he had expected his eldest son, Jean-Baptiste, the marquis of Seignelay (1651–1690), to succeed him in his functions: indeed, as Soll's account reveals, Colbert put Seignelay through a strenuous regimen of training in the art of managing administrative paperwork to mold him into an information master after his own image. After Colbert's death, however, Louis XIV sought to forestall the formation of a ministerial dynasty by reducing Seignelay's administrative portfolio to oversight of naval affairs alone—a move that entailed transferring management of the Royal Library and, more significantly, control of the Ministry of Finance, to other high-ranking government officials. The posthumous dispersal of Colbert's various ministerial functions among several different high officials brought to an end his vision of a centralized state administration overseen by a single, powerful official.

The end of Colbert's administrative régime also had consequences for the centralized state information system that he had created. One was a relative decentralization of French state archival culture, as different ministers built up separate archives for their specific ministries: the administratively insalubrious effects of this fragmentation of France's state archives would continue to be felt for the duration of the *ancien régime*. Another was that the Royal Library and the Colbertine ceased to serve as central nodes in a single, large-scale information system: the former fell to the control of the secretary of war, who preferred to use different institutional mechanisms for his information-gathering and -processing activities, while the latter continued to serve first as a working administrative library for Seignelay and, after his death, as a private library for the Colbert family until 1732, when its collections were sold to the French crown. In a turn of historic irony, what was once dispersed has, to a large degree, been reassembled in modern times: today, the remnants of the Royal Library, the Colbertine, and many—though not all—of Colbert's personal papers form part of the collections held by the Bibliothèque de France.

The foregoing paragraphs provide only a partial synopsis of Soll's richly textured study and so do not do full justice to the wide range of themes and topics that he has interwoven into his masterful analysis of Colbert *qua* information master. Nevertheless, they should suffice to indicate the book's general relevance for readers interested in the history of libraries, archives, and information practices in general. As a work of history, *The Information Master* has many virtues. Throughout the book, Soll strikes an exemplary balance between broad historical synthesis and attention to individual historical details. His extensive knowledge of cultural trends in early modern Europe allows him to situate Colbert's information system within a broader historical context by adducing parallels

from the information practices of other European states: by noting differences as well as similarities, he is able to bring out the specific features of Colbert's system. He also impressively marshals a wide array of primary sources—particularly published and unpublished papers from Colbert's archives—to provide specific examples of the information practices he is analyzing: these examples are, as a rule, well chosen and to the point. As regards style of exposition, Soll has constructed a narrative whose structure is generally clear and well articulated—no small achievement given the multifaceted nature of the subject he is treating: furthermore, he writes with assurance and verve, making the book a pleasure to read. The book is thoroughly documented—no less than 100 of its 277 pages are given over to endnotes and bibliography—and its judiciously selected illustrations—10 figures in all—give the reader vivid visual representations of Colbert and his world of paperwork, while its index is quite serviceable, if somewhat uneven in the quality of its execution.

Needless to say, no book is ever a perfect production, and attentive readers will doubtless discern flaws within the text. Soll's translations of passages from Colbert's papers are not always as precise as one might have expected: such linguistic lapses tend to be minor and in no case do they undermine his interpretation of the historical significance of the passages in question. One also finds signs of editorial laxity sprinkled throughout both the main text and endnotes, ranging from misspellings to poorly edited sentences. With rare exceptions, such textual errors are likely

to cause annoyance rather than bewilderment: nevertheless, one would hope that the product of a well-regarded university press would exhibit greater editorial care than is the case here.

The picayune errors mentioned above should not deflect attention from the generally high quality of Soll's book. *The Information Master* is an excellent book on a fascinating subject that is bound to attract readers from a range of historical and information-related fields: historians of early modern Europe will find in it an innovative redescription of Colbert's career; those interested in the history of libraries and archives will learn much about the political and cultural forces that shaped these information institutions in early modern Europe; and information historians will derive profit from Soll's many insights into the workings of Colbert's information-saturated administrative régime. In light of its excellence and potential interest for a fairly wide scholarly audience, this book richly deserves a place on the shelves of all academic libraries. —Thomas Dousa, *University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign*.

**Barbara M. Wildemuth.** *Applications of Social Research Methods to Questions in Information and Library Science*. Westport, Conn.: Libraries Unlimited, 2009. 421p. alk. paper, \$50 (ISBN 9781591585039). LC 2008-053745

In this earnest, encyclopedic, energetic and easily accessible book, Barbara Wildemuth has produced a landmark text that will be of great use to information and library science (ILS) master and doctoral students, as well as to professors and professionals in library and allied fields. The hefty volume brings together various disciplines, incorporates enormous scholarship, and encourages research to help further the field of information and library science. Wildemuth, a professor in the School of Information and Library Science at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, is either full author or coauthor of all chapters in the book; the

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