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Michael Broers, Peter Hicks and Agustín Guimerá, eds, *The Napoleonic Empire and the New European Political Culture*. Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012. xv + 352. Notes and index. £70 (hb). ISBN 9780230241312.

Review by Philip Dwyer, University of Newcastle.

This latest contribution to the “new Napoleonic history”—part of the Palgrave Macmillan series on War, Culture and Society, 1750-1850 edited by Rafe Blaufarb, Alan Forrest, and Karen Hagemann—attempts to place Napoleon and his deeds in a larger political, social and cultural context. It consists of twenty-four essays that came out of a conference held in Madrid in 2008. Broadly divided into four themes—the Napoleonic constitutions and the Civil Code; the administrative structures created by the imperial regime; policing, resistance and repression; and what Broers’ refers to as the “imperial enterprise”—the overarching thread, we are told, is the “tension at the heart of the Napoleonic project and the contradictions that tension arose from” (p. 2).

Broers did not structure his collection around these four themes. Instead, he chose to divide the essays into five sections based on geographical regions (see List of Essays below). I can see why Broers would have chosen to do this, since some of the essays do not fall easily under the four themes. The order of the essays in each section is not always chronological. For example, the section entitled “France, 1799-1814,” begins with Thierry Lentz and the empire in 1808, only to be followed by Howard Brown’s essay on the origins of Napoleonic repression during the Consulate. This is perhaps nit-picking, but structure is important, so let me deal with the essays under Broers’s four thematic headings, pointing in particular to what stood out as important, instructive and new.

Constitutions and the Civil Code

In some respects, these chapters are about the extent to which the French Napoleonic model—that fusion of old and new elites that helped reconcile the *ancien régime* and the Revolution—functioned in those regions under French influence. For liberals throughout Europe, the French invasions often represented a chance to break with the past and to introduce a new order. This did not always occur smoothly. We know that the Civil Code was imposed on the peoples of the Empire with a degree of pragmatism, so that it was applied variously, depending on the local conditions. Most of the chapters under this theme deal with a little researched topic, the various constitutions that the Empire inspired. In Holland (articles by Lok and van der Burg), the Dutch went through three constitutions. The Dutch constitution of 1801, like the French constitution of 1799 in many respects, aimed at political reconciliation, and a diminution in the number of people taking part in the political process. As in France, Napoleon was bent on using competent administrators, often selected because of social standing and wealth, regardless of their former political leanings. A fusion of sorts between radical republicans and Orangists existed for a while. Attempts to reform the state largely failed, however, in part because the country was annexed (in 1810) for too short a period. Institutionally, there was as much a reliance on old political forms as on introducing institutional reforms. In the process, the French consolidated and even revitalized many older structures, a pattern that can be seen in other parts of the Empire. Reforms in the Empire did not always lead to transformation.

Rapport’s chapter on Belgium is instructive. He poses two fundamental questions, key to understanding the nature of the Empire: did the Civil Code represent a new form of liberal order or

was it merely an instrument of French domination? Was the Civil Code a means of transforming Belgians into French citizens or a tool for “aggressive cultural assimilation”? These questions could be asked of every region in which the Code was applied, and for Belgium at least the latter question is easily answered. A degree of *francisation* had already occurred, but the extent to which the Code was used as a tool of assimilation was limited. This was not, one can imagine, the case in Portugal where, despite being present only six months or so, the French nevertheless managed to introduce the Civil Code. Nor was it the case in Spain, where there were two constitutions—one Napoleonic (1808), and the other Spanish-liberal (1812)—neither of which seems to have had the slightest resonance beyond the French occupation. If the Civil Code made an impact on Spain (Lorente), it was only in the second half of the nineteenth century. In Portugal, on the other hand, it was not the French, but the British who made a lasting impression.

The State and the Administration

This theme is really about new regimes and a new society versus the Old Regime. As we know from a number of studies on participation in the Empire, the involvement of the local population, especially the elites, was essential for any administration run from Paris to work. Local elites provided the expertise, and often the money, that enabled welfare, education and infrastructure works to be carried out. The lack of competent, willing, local administrators in the Kingdom of Westphalia (Todorov), for example, helps explain why Napoleonic reforms were not always implemented. It was the involvement of the wider population that helped break down the resistance of the elites. This was not the case, as one can imagine, in the department of the Isère, the capital of which is Grenoble (Thoral), although this chapter raises more questions than answers. One comes away from it with the impression that these elites took part in local government, public institutions and the National Guard out of practical necessity, and did so regardless of who was in power in Paris.

But was this the case? Surely one of the reasons the empire collapsed so quickly in 1813 and 1814 was the disaffection of the elites at every level of government? Thoral contends that elite participation was a way to compensate for the failings of the state’s administrative machinery, that elite involvement “increased the links between the state and civil society” and was as a consequence an important element in local democracy (p. 67). This is a good point, but what does it tell us about the empire in contrast to, say, the Restoration or the July monarchy? A comparative analysis of levels of elite participation and elite attitudes would have gone some way to answering that question.

The contrast between the cities of Aachen and Cologne outlined by Rowe is another example of the complexity of elite participation. Although Aachen received preferential treatment during the empire when it became the seat of the department of the Roer, Cologne fought hardest to maintain French institutions when it was incorporated into the kingdom of Prussia in 1815. This was largely because the Cologne elites had successfully operated these institutions in ways that conformed to local interests. As Rowe effectively demonstrates, the experience of Napoleonic rule could vary enormously within the same region.

We see a similar story across the Empire. In Italy (Grab), Napoleon attempted to amalgamate both the bourgeoisie and the old nobility into a new propertied elite (although Grab doesn’t tell us how successful that amalgamation was). It was not successful in Switzerland (Clemens) where, despite introducing the French state model, Napoleon pandered to the traditional ruling classes to the point where far-reaching reform was stymied and feudal privileges remained. In Naples (Rao), the abolition of feudalism produced different results, depending on local conditions. In the Illyrian Provinces (Stauber), the attempt to abolish the feudal system remained unsuccessful. Everywhere reforms were introduced, however, it was not so much out of a desire to modernize—although this was always the end result—but out of the need to extract men and money more efficiently.

Policing and Popular Resistance

As a consequence, wherever the French went they met with resistance. Resistance was regional rather than national (Planert) and always the result of material hardships associated with occupation. It could vary from Prussian patriots plotting military insurrection in northern Germany to the relatively widespread popular resistance with which we associate the Tyrol, Calabria, and Spain (Aymes), to urban rioting in Hamburg (Aaslestad). Often, as we know is the case for Italy (Broers), the response stemmed from long-held local attitudes against the state. The French responded to that resistance in different ways, but invariably, brutally. Much more research needs to be done on the methods used by the French to suppress recalcitrant populations, but one method was the Special Tribunal (Brown), a mixture of civilian and military judges, established to deal swiftly with crimes such as armed rebellion.

The Special Tribunal, an attempt to dress repression in the garb of legality, was exported from France to most other occupied regions, replacing the military once the state had managed to consolidate its hold on the territory in question, and proved very effective in establishing law and order. The two exceptions appear to be Spain and Calabria, although I find Brown's explanation for the lack of state regulated repression unconvincing, namely, "if one side believed that it was facing 'total defeat' in social and cultural terms, and the other side was bent on 'total victory' in imperial terms, the need to legitimize the repression diminished dramatically" (p. 46). A more straightforward explanation would be that a state can only effectively introduce structures and institutions once it controls the territory over which it wishes to rule, and the French never accomplished that feat in Spain.

The most common form of resistance to the empire was not ideological or political, but a consequence of conscription. In France (Forrest), resistance to conscription depended in part on topography. Regions that offered ideal terrains for men to hide were more likely to produce draft dodgers than regions with flat, low-lying lands. The conscript system was exported to the rest of the empire where it met with varying degrees of opposition, but it was always deeply unpopular and was one of the measures, along with the Code, the Concordat and the Continental System, that fuelled hatred towards the French. In Holland (Joor), there were more than fifty-nine riots after 1810 (although we are not told how many were related to conscription and how many to the economic blockade). In the southern German states (Planert), conscription provoked resistance, although most of it was limited to recently-incorporated Austrian territories or Imperial cities and generally involved the lower social orders. On the other hand, the urban elites in German Central Europe, the educated middle classes, remained above these revolts and were committed to French internal reform.

Holland (Joor) did not have a separate police corps before 1806 but rather "officers of justice." Even then the police were so small in number—eventually fourteen in total for the whole kingdom—and limited to small harbours and villages along the coast, that their impact would have been negligible. Joor's chapter, although nominally about resistance against Napoleon, really concerns the creation, role and impact of the police. Most of their time was spent enforcing the Continental System, an impossibility in a country like Holland. It was only with the incorporation of the kingdom into the empire that the French police system was introduced — along with its gendarmes and thirty-five secret police — although not until the beginning of 1811. Nevertheless, despite the number of political prisoners (130 in Amsterdam, but I do not know if this was for the whole country), it is a bit of an exaggeration to describe Holland as a "police state."

Imperialism

We come back to the question posed by Lentz, "what was the French empire"? This question, which is really about the nature of Napoleonic rule, has intrigued if not plagued historians for generations, from Lefebvre to Furet to more recent reflections by Howard and Broers in the volume under review. That there is no agreement among scholars is testimony to the difficulties historians face when trying to capture the relationship between Napoleon as leader and the state he helped create. By the end of Lentz's essay, we are no closer to resolving this particular problem. Lentz's answer is that the Empire was not a military dictatorship, but rather a state "based on law." What European

state was not? Much more interesting is Jourdan's concluding discussion on sovereignty and nature of the regime (although it is a little odd that it has been titled "the" conclusion). Jourdan's chapter is really about the transition from republic to empire. For many in the political elite, the creation of the empire, and the creation of a new form of monarchy (which many believed to be constitutional) harkened back to 1789. Napoleon broke the "social pact" that was the Empire, which is why the Senate disbanded the imperial government in 1814.

Conclusion

Like many collections of this nature, we are presented with a mixed bag of essays, some of them interesting works of scholarship and others that attempt to revisit well-worn themes without bringing much that is new. One of the problems with the collection is that the essays are too short (averaging six to ten pages) to provide a comprehensive coverage of the topics listed. By the time the history of the region is placed in context, there is not much room left for a discussion of the theme in question. Perhaps it would have been advisable to leave a few of the chapters out to allow others to expand more fully on their topics.

The "new Napoleonic history," of which this collection claims to be part, is a rather grandiose-sounding name for the shift in research that has taken place over the last few decades away from diplomatic and military history towards cultural, social and economic studies. This "scholarly renaissance," as Steven Englund once put it, is really a sign that historians of the empire are playing catch-up with their counterparts in other fields, or to put it more positively, that younger historians are at last taking an interest in the period and bringing to it a much larger array of methodological tools. At the very least, this collection contributes to that scholarship and is a welcome addition to the literature, especially since it contains chapters on countries like Holland, Belgium and Portugal that are rarely discussed in the English-language literature. Negotiating one's way through the maze that is Napoleonic Europe is not made any easier, however, by the lack of a detailed index.

I am not entirely convinced by Broers' argument that the "true significance [of the Empire] lies less in what actually happened, than in what was attempted" (p. 1). Broers is essentially arguing that the legacy of the Empire (and of the Revolution, for that matter) was more lasting and profound than anything that was implemented during the life of the Empire. That is possible, but to focus on the legacy is to diminish if not trivialize the cost in human life and suffering that was the price to be paid for modernisation. The one thing that becomes clear, however, when looking beyond Napoleon to the structure of the Empire is that, for the most part, the imperial regime represented both a new form of liberal order and a means of exploitation, that it both broke with the past and relied on *ancien regime* institutions and people to help implant that new order, and that it inspired both hatred and hope. There has been a plethora of interesting studies in recent years that shed new light on the ways in which the imperial regime interacted with both its subjects and other Europeans. This collection makes a valuable contribution to that understanding.

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