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Sébastien Évrard, *L'or de Napoléon. Sa stratégie patrimoniale (1806-1814)*. Paris: L'Harmattan, 2014. 168 pp. Maps, tables, figures, notes, bibliography, and index. 18€ (pb). ISBN 978-2-343-02568-1.

Review by Gemma Betros, The Australian National University.

The title of Sébastien Évrard's book suggests an investigation into the wealth of Napoleon Bonaparte: how he acquired it, how he spent it, and how he saved it. While Évrard certainly addresses these questions, the book's focus is instead the *Comité des affaires contentieuses de la Couronne*, or for short, the Committee of Contentious Affairs. Founded in April 1806, its role was to cast an expert legal eye over all property transactions involving the emperor and make sure they conformed to the 1804 Civil Code, rebranded in 1807 as the *Code Napoléon*. For Napoleon was ostensibly as subject to the Code as any other citizen: a critical factor, argues Évrard, in sustaining the popularity and legitimacy of his rule.

The Committee's records are located in Série O2 of the *Archives nationales*, the archives of the imperial household. Its five (later six) members were highly experienced jurists and political figures, some of whom had been involved in the drafting of the Code. These were trusted men upon whose judgment Napoleon could rely and whose discretion was well-rewarded.

Much of their work concerned the *liste civile*. Created in 1790, and resurrected with the birth of the empire in 1804, the *liste* granted the head of state a sum of money and various property holdings, held in usufruct, to help maintain "the splendor of the throne."<sup>[1]</sup> Conscious of the erosion of royal property under previous regimes, Napoleon established the Committee to protect and consolidate this patrimony. Another key part of its job was to prevent the legal proceedings that the Code made possible against all private property owners, even imperial ones. The need to clarify what belonged to the state and what might be considered the emperor's private property further complicated its task. In addition, the Committee oversaw property acquisitions for major projects such as the restoration of the royal chateaux and the *Grand Dessein*, that decades-old dream to finish linking the palaces of the Louvre and the Tuileries. Here, it had clear instructions to favor private purchase over expropriation.

The Committee's caseload was diverse. Its tasks ranged from extracting the imperial household from a lease for a planned infirmary for sick pageboys to working out how Napoleon could grant property in return for faithful service without contravening the terms of the *liste*. It applied similar caution in France's overseas territories, taking care to investigate previous ownership and respect local legalities with each addition to the imperial property portfolio. Other cases concerned the former property of the Catholic Church, some of which Napoleon was keen to get his hands on for himself. Although the author does not explore the connection, the appointment to the Committee of Jean-Baptiste Treillard—former member of the Revolution's Ecclesiastical Committee, responsible for nationalizing Church property—must have been strategic. Most contentious of all for a committee dedicated to averting the potentially controversial were those requests concerning Napoleon's family members, not all of whom were as parsimonious as his mother. Even where familial demands raised the possibility of flouting the Code in order to preserve the imperial patrimony, however, the Code, according to Évrard, won out.

By preventing such matters from reaching civil trial, the Committee forestalled scandals like the Diamond Necklace Affair, but we hear little about the wider pressures that could have seen these cases escalate. One of these was the problem of projecting majesty in a post-monarchical state. For Évrard, Napoleon was determined to maintain the respect for private property enshrined in the 1789 Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen and repeated in the code that bore his name. Yet this particular revolutionary achievement kept coming into conflict with his desire to recreate the expensive physical manifestations of a monarchy the Revolution itself had destroyed. The result was constant tension between installing a new administrative order while resurrecting the institutions of the old, and between offsetting a need for personal wealth against a need for personal popularity.

Évrard is a scholar of both law and history, and while he does an impressive job of unpacking the complex legal conundrums that made up the Committee's day-to-day business, the book's narrow focus means that such tensions generally remain in the background. The author seems at times more interested in Napoleon's character, as he compares Napoleon's order and economy to the chaos of the *ancien régime*, admires his flexibility in France's newly annexed territories, and commends his wisdom in setting aside funds for difficult years ahead. Even while dissecting the tortuous legal workarounds found by the Committee, Évrard seems reluctant to acknowledge the sheer self-interest at play, and some historians might query his account of Napoleon's respect for his own legislation.[2] He is also sometimes too ready to acknowledge Napoleon's personal popularity, neglecting the possibility that the pursuit of grandeur apparent in many of these cases signaled a lack of popular belief in his fabricated empire.

Closer engagement with relevant scholarship could have helped produce a more incisive analysis. Pierre Branda's landmark 2007 work on the financing of the Napoleonic regime, *Le prix de la gloire: Napoleon et l'argent* is mentioned only once, while Branda's 2011 history of the imperial household—which, among other strengths, lays out the changing laws concerning imperial property ownership—is not mentioned at all.[3] Robert Morrissey's work on the "economy of glory" is another surprising omission.[4] The book's bibliography of just sixteen works seems rather cursory, even for a *bibliographie sommaire*, and no scholarship in English appears to have been consulted. Diana Rowell's 2012 book on Napoleon's efforts to turn Paris into a "new Rome"[5] is a particularly unfortunate oversight, not least because of Évrard's claim that Napoleon's projects for urban reform in Paris are still unknown (p. 43). The only biography of Napoleon listed is a 1975 edition of Jean Tulard's classic, despite the new material and approaches to have emerged with the many biographies published in the last few years.

The book's organization is also somewhat idiosyncratic. Divided into ten chapters—some just a few pages long—it reads, on occasion, like an assemblage of notes and case studies, and lacks a conclusion, which could have drawn out the significance of the material presented. As it stands, the level of detail relayed for some case studies means that readers might emerge with a sound knowledge of, say, the legal intricacies surrounding the use of fish traps off the Italian coast, but are left to work out for themselves what such cases tell us about Napoleonic rule more generally. Nor is there much consistency in guiding the reader. A potted history of the Louvre is provided as background to Napoleon's plans for the *Grand Dessein*, for example, but for a comprehensive account of the *liste civile*, readers may be better served by the author's 2011 article, cited above. Explanations of legal, property, and financial terminology are similarly patchy: a glossary would have helped readers navigate terms like *bail emphytéotique* more easily.

Évrard has published a number of books with L'Harmattan in recent years, with this one appearing as part of the publisher's *Travaux* series, dedicated to the dissemination of "scientific" university research. The book's uneven approach to referencing—with references provided for some quotes but not others, and just 121 notes in total—made this reader wish for slightly more scientific rigor. Closer editing would have picked up minor slips that see the Constituent and Legislative Assemblies meeting in Paris in the "Salle du jeu de Paume" (p. 47) instead of the Salle du Manège, and the philosophe Volney appearing as "Volnay"

(p. 82). As always, the absence of a full index, that French exception in matters of publishing convention, is vexing: in a book with so many case studies, an index of surnames is of only limited use.

These points aside, Évrard has drawn attention to an important and little-known aspect of Napoleonic rule and compiled some useful archival material that will benefit other scholars. By investigating the legal issues that arose for this particular head of state—around questions of property and patrimony, family and supporters, and the conduct of political affairs at home and abroad—the book furthermore reminds us of the often nebulous boundaries between public and private that political leaders must negotiate, and negotiate lawfully. In the recent French context alone, marked by growing demand for *la moralisation* of politics, such questions, their resolution, and their role in upholding the legitimacy of a political regime can be considered especially timely.

#### NOTES

[1] Sébastien Évrard, “Le Droit au service du Trône: le Conseil des affaires contentieuses de la couronne, institution méconnue de la splendeur impériale (1806-1812),” *Revue historique de droit français et étranger* 89, 2 (2011): 216.

[2] See for example Annie Jourdan, “Napoleon and Europe. The legacy of the French Revolution,” in Alan Forrest and Matthias Middell eds, *The Routledge Companion to the French Revolution in World History* (London and New York: Routledge, 2015), p. 210 and pp. 216-17.

[3] Pierre Branda, *Le prix de la gloire. Napoléon et l'argent* (Paris: Fayard, 2007) and Pierre Branda, *Napoléon et ses hommes. La Maison de l'empereur, 1804-1815* (Paris: Fayard, 2011).

[4] Robert Morrissey, *Napoléon et l'héritage de la gloire* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2010), published in English as *The economy of glory: from ancien régime France to the fall of Napoleon*, trans. Teresa Lavender Fagan (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2013).

[5] Diana Rowell, *Paris: The 'new Rome' of Napoleon I* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012).

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