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Alexander Mikaberidze. *The Napoleonic Wars: A Global History*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2020. xxiii + 936 pp. Maps, notes, bibliography, and index. \$39.95 U.S. (hb). ISBN 978-0-19-995106-2.

Review by Elise Kimerling Wirtschafter, California State Polytechnic University, Pomona.

Since the late twentieth century, historiographic evolution and reinterpretation of key processes in modern European history--processes such as the Enlightenment, transatlantic revolutions, revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, and European restorations--have done much to tarnish cherished images of the French Revolution and Napoleonic Empire as embodiments of liberal democratic progress. Although author Alexander Mikaberidze clearly admires Napoleon and in his massive history of the Napoleonic Wars often foregrounds the French republican perspective, the cumulative result of his global history is to reassess the achievements of the nation in arms, the legend and military genius of Napoleon, and the democratic credentials of the revolution and empire.

Before turning to concrete questions of analysis and perspective, the scope of the scholarly endeavor undertaken by Mikaberidze in *The Napoleonic Wars: A Global History* should be highlighted, recognized, and applauded. In more than 880 pages of narrative, notes, and bibliography, the author has mastered a daunting subject and produced a readable account of the coalitions and wars that during the period from 1792 to 1815 dominated Europe, including Russia, and brought change to critical parts of the globe. Mikaberidze understands the French Revolution as a global, not merely a European or transatlantic event, and he treats the Napoleonic Wars as a single global conflict. Although no historian is uniformly equipped to cover multiple continents and regions of the world, Mikaberidze brings to his study more than the usual array of European languages and archival sojourns. Not all of the research is grounded in archives. Secondary sources figure prominently in the coverage of some topics, and the encyclopedic sweep of the book leads to editorial oversights and the need for follow-up verification of random facts and characterizations. On balance, however, the book will stand as a reliable starting point for any scholar, student, specialist, or non-specialist who needs information and guidance on the subject of the Napoleonic Wars.

Among scholars, there is no generally accepted definition of what constitutes a global history. In this case, as in so many others, the reader must focus on the concrete events being described and then try to work through and absorb the voluminous detail and empirical information that is provided. Across twenty-four chapters, Mikaberidze discusses a rich array of topics and circumstances, not all of which are equally interconnected. Even so, the presentation of events

and personages convincingly places the Napoleonic Wars within the global framework of European empire building. The subjects covered include the French Revolution and international order of the eighteenth century; the Coalition Wars of 1792 to 1815, which pitted France and shifting constellations of allies against equally variable conglomerations of European powers; the Napoleonic Wars fought outside of Europe and on the seas (in the Caribbean, the Mediterranean, Egypt, the Ottoman Empire, Persia, southern Africa, the Indian Ocean, and India); the Continental System within and beyond Europe; the European defeats of Napoleon in 1812, 1814, and 1815; and, finally, the reorganization of Europe at the Congress of Vienna and at subsequent meetings of the great powers. There is no question but that Mikaberidze's vision and narrative are global in scope.

Coverage of topics such as Haitian independence, the incorporation of Georgia into the Russian Empire, the military activities and government of the British East India Company, the reforms of Ottoman sultan Selim III, the defeat of Mamluk leaders and the consolidation of power by Mehmet Ali in Egypt, the Greek independence movement, the Portuguese invasion of Rio de la Plata, the Louisiana Purchase, and the American-British War of 1812-1815 illustrates Mikaberidze's grasp of events across the globe. That said, global coverage does not always add up to analysis in global terms. Even within the global history framework, the goals and actions of the great powers of Europe--Austria, Britain, France, Prussia, Russia, and to some extent Portugal, Spain, and Sweden--dominate most of the book's chapters. This in fact is one of Mikaberidze's main points. The Napoleonic Wars propelled dramatic change throughout Europe. But equally significant was the fact that as the wars played out in distant colonies and theaters of European imperialism they ultimately transformed the world.

For this reader, the most successful theme developed throughout the book in order to illustrate the global significance of the Napoleonic Wars concerns British-French competition for imperial and naval power. Mikaberidze pays significant attention to Napoleon's desire to build a navy that would have been capable of challenging Britain on the high seas and overseas. Precisely because France failed to contain British naval power or compete for the colonial territories and economic advantages that naval power allowed Britain to obtain and hold, Napoleon focused on forging a French empire in continental Europe. For observers inclined to condemn Napoleon's hubris and aggressions, Mikaberidze draws attention to the practices of British imperialism across the globe (in India, Persia, the Mediterranean, and southern Africa), as well as Russian expansionism in the Caucasus, the Balkans, Poland, and Finland. Mikaberidze concedes that as "a hegemonic power" France "aggressively pursued imperial designs in Europe and overseas" (p. 168). Yet he also seems sympathetic to "French fears for their position in the global economic system against their traditional [British] rival" (p. 166). In light of France's inability to undercut Britain's global economic position, the Continental System, which "sought Europe-wide integration into a French-dominated economic sphere" likewise appears rational and even justified (p. 231). Certainly, from a world historical perspective, it is correct to argue that the imperial policies of Britain were "no less opportunistic and exploitative than those of Napoleon" (p. 456). But given "the failure of the project to combine republican ideals with colonialism and territorial expansion" (p. 78), as illustrated by the French invasion of Egypt in 1798-99, one also might conclude that the most appropriate context for evaluating Napoleon remains Europe. In Europe--from the Austrian, British, Prussian, Russian, and other perspectives--Napoleon was less an enlightened monarch and more "a power-hungry maniac" (p. xii).

Historical writing is inevitably a matter of perspective, and Mikaberidze's attention to the imperialist ambitions of major European powers allows the voices of small countries, subjugated peoples, and second-order powers (European and non-European) to be heard with greater force and clarity than is normally the case in histories of the Napoleonic Wars. But alternative narratives, no less than master narratives, can carry their own distortions and assumptions. What stands out for this reader (an historian of Russia) is the acceptance of Austrian and British suspicions about Russia's expansionist intentions, the downplaying of Austrian power throughout the Napoleonic Wars and the peacemaking that followed, and the sympathy for traditional views of Napoleon as a transformational leader who forced liberal reforms on reluctant European rivals. In Mikaberidze's conception, the reforms imposed on the European powers required military, technological, and industrial changes that subsequently led to European domination throughout the world. Any and all of these arguments can be effectively defended. The point here is to suggest that when reading a global history, it can be difficult to discern whose perspective is being offered.

From the perspective of the Napoleonic Wars in Europe, questions also arise about how best to characterize the specific situations, circumstances, and conjunctures that unfolded in various non-European contexts. For the non-specialist (and every reader is a non-specialist with respect to numerous localities and regions of the world), it is important to distinguish when a particular conflict represented a full-blown war, a European great power intervention with or without local allies, a regional conflict between non-European great powers, or an imperialist subjugation of indigenous peoples. Of course, one of the benefits derived from global history is that because of the reader's uneven (or inadequate) expertise, place-based concepts and assumptions are frequently disrupted. For this reason, the book can be absorbed more as a process of discovery than as a definitive or paradigmatic interpretation.

Alexander Mikaberidze has brought a large knowledge base to an even larger and magnificently complicated topic of study. Despite the unavoidable challenges of global history, the book is an enlightening and thought-provoking read, and the author should be commended for his herculean labors. Indeed, at a time when digital humanities, open-access platforms, and the reorganization of research and teaching spaces are allowing and forcing scholars to downsize their personal libraries, this is a book that should remain on one's shelf.

Elise Kimerling Wirtschafter
California State Polytechnic University, Pomona
ekwirtschaft@cpp.edu

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