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Marc Olivier Baruch, ed., *Vichy et les préfets: Le corps préfectoral français pendant la Deuxième Guerre mondiale*. Paris: La Documentation française, 2021. 327 pp. Notes and index. €19.00 (pb). ISBN : 9782111456730. €10.99 (eb). ISBN 9782111574298.

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This book provides a wonderful synthesis of the best scholarship on Vichy published over the course of the past generation. While the title might sound somewhat esoteric, prefects constitute a privileged vantage point to examine perhaps *the* central interpretive challenge for the period. If scholarship has moved, in Robert Gildea's memorable phrase, from the "good French" of the Robert Aron era to the "bad French" of Robert O. Paxton and Marcel Ophuls, on to the "poor French" of Jean-Pierre Azéma and François Bédarida, the past generation has rethought the basic relationship between continuity and change, the ambiguous, shifting relationships of state, society, and occupation—what Philippe Burrin, invoking Primo Levi, famously called the "grey zone" of accommodation.[1] While specialists will want to consult the landmark articles and theses that underpin this historiography, many of them written by the contributors to this volume, *Vichy et les préfets* brings that work together and brings it up to date. Its extensive introductory prosopography and discussion of available sources will make it particularly valuable for researchers interested in the social history of this crucial corps within the French state.

The volume itself has a history worth noting. Jean-Benoît Albertini, Secrétaire général du ministère de l'Intérieur, writes in the preface that the project started as an homage to Jean Moulin on the fiftieth anniversary of his Pantheonization. That effort gave rise to a series of three colloquia, sessions that included historians and members of the prefectural corps over the course of 2016. As Albertini puts it, the project shifted from the celebration of a celebration fifty years on to an effort to come to terms with the constraints, choices, and motivations of personnel in diverse prefectures who had the responsibility of managing the administration of the country between 1939 and 1945, and in some cases beyond (p. 3). If there is an unevenness of scope and scale among the contributions, what emerges is no hagiography.

The first of the three substantive sections, on prefects' service to the state, usually referred to as *collaboration d'état*, is fittingly the most substantial in terms of pages and content. Marc Olivier Baruch begins this section with an overview of prefects' role in the administration. The regime's effort to overhaul its ranks stands out. Eighty-two of eighty-seven prefects were appointed within a year of the seizure of power, with eighty leaving leadership positions: thirty-three forced into early retirement and forty excluded because of their origins, born to non-French fathers. A law of July 17, 1940, gave the minister of the interior the power to remove prefects deemed

untrustworthy--giving rise to the term *juilletisation*--and the period experienced unprecedented turnover in the ranks: on average, more than half of all prefects left their post each year (p. 292). Vichy viewed politics in authoritarian terms, with power exercised from the top down, through the prefects to natural, organic communities. In its initial, Pétanist, incarnation, the État Français denounced the Third Republic for politicizing administration while rejecting input from mayors and elected city councils, effectively politicizing the role of prefects, leaving them privileged intermediaries between state and society. Later, more pragmatic leaders, Pierre Laval and Pierre Pucheu, were more open to working with elected officials but alienated them with their aggressive collaboration with the Nazis. Prefects struggled not only with an increased workload but also with new competition and oversight in the form of regional prefects, economic intendants, and police intendants. They were only partly compensated with higher wages and efforts to boost their prestige.

The contributions are particularly good at situating prefects in context, recognizing their room for maneuver while never losing sight of the power occupation authorities held over them, all too often overlooked in recent literature on exclusion. Gaëlle Eismann points to the lengths to which the Militärbefehlshaber in Frankreich (MBF) went to monitor the reliability of French prefects. If, at least through the summer of 1941, its image of French prefects was "plutôt positive," the MBF did not hesitate to intervene directly in French personnel decisions (p. 132). It conducted lengthy discussions with Vichy authorities, negotiated over acceptable candidates, and also intervened, on the German side, to restrain some of the more aggressive security and police agencies within the Reich. After the 1941 German invasion of the Soviet Union, of course, occupation officials tightened their grip and resorted more often to a heavy-handed subordination of French police, gendarmes, and other officials to German command, demanding French police turn over case files and suspected Resistance fighters, among others. As Laurent Joly puts it, French prefectural authorities had never been so powerful--without competition from mayors and local assemblies--but the French state had never, in recent times, been so weak, so dependent, their responsibilities so unpleasant, unpopular, and inhumane. These tensions and contradictions reached their most extreme form in the French participation in the Final Solution. The decision by Vichy authorities, notably the general secretary of the police, René Bousquet, to organize vast roundups of Jews put prefects under enormous pressure, nowhere more so than Paris, where 150,000 of the 170,000 Jews in the country lived. Joly rightly notes that four of the five French officials arrested for crimes against humanity after the war had served in the prefectural corps.

Isabelle Backouche explores Vichy's homegrown antisemitism and its imbrication in local politics in a wonderful chapter on housing policy in Paris, which was a vast effort to reclaim what was known as an *un îlot insalubre*, just to the south of the Marais between the rue François-Miron and the Seine. The term comes from an alliance of local government and public health reformers in the late nineteenth century who showed that a handful of neighborhoods suffered extremely high levels of tuberculosis. Cramped quarters, teeming with infection, in their view, needed to be razed. Based on models in Brussels and Le Havre, in 1893 Paris had established a system of monitoring housing whose residents died of TB, the *Casier sanitaire*. In 1906, the city drew up a list of six *îlots* which grew to seventeen after the First World War, ranked in terms of mortality in descending order.[2] None of these *îlots* received much attention before the Third Republic fell, and there were no plans to deal with number sixteen, the second least deadly island on the list. As late as July 1941, neither the city urban planning service nor the public health or housing departments had any plans to redevelop number sixteen. New legislation, however, facilitated the task. Expropriation was made easier, and local government could declare all the houses of an

îlot insalubrious, which reduced the cost of relocating inhabitants. As elsewhere, the prefects of the Seine during Vichy did not have to worry about resistance from elected officials. Backouche argues that authorities singled out *îlot* number sixteen in large part because of its reputation as a ghetto. It was easier for prefects Magny and Bouffet to flex their political muscles in a neighborhood whose residents could hardly object. The prospect of not having to rehouse or compensate an entire group of inhabitants must have made the neighborhood more attractive. Local officials knew that Jewish property was to be Aryanised, and other branches of local government had been directly involved in interning foreign Jews. Yet the relationship of the redevelopment process to Vichy antisemitism was complex. As Backouche has shown elsewhere, nearly 60 percent of the Jews expelled from island number sixteen, and therefore identified as Jews, escaped deportation; in some instances, getting expropriated ironically helped save their lives.[3] This redevelopment effort was a craven, opportunistic antisemitism, but it was not eliminationist.

A handful of chapters examine prefectures beyond Paris and show substantial regional variation. Pierre Allorant examines the urban renewal plans led by Jacques Morane in Orleans. Morane stands out for his elite pedigree—École polytechnique and École supérieure d'électricité. He fits here as an example of early Vichy's reforming, technocratic current. Initially named, at his own request, acting Prefect of the Loiret, which had suffered heavy damage from bombing, before taking over as regional prefect in Orléans, he quickly distinguished himself as a hyperactive technocrat (p. 94): competent, well informed, well connected, tirelessly working to improve local conditions, fighting against what Allorant calls "Parisian macrocephaly," (p. 94) and building a model his superiors would hold up for other regional prefects to emulate. Morane negotiated with occupation authorities for gas and foodstuffs and worked effectively with local elected officials to rebuild after the devastation of 1940. If he viewed himself as a non-ideological man of action, the technocrat worked easily with Laval's supporters, tipped his cap to Pétain on leaving office in fall 1942, and then agreed to take over running the internment camp at Pithiviers.

Subsequent chapters examine more ambivalent figures. Jean-Marie Guillon explores the "double game" played by members of the prefectures of the Var and Provence. As he points out, before 1943 we do not see prefects or even subprefects actively working for clandestine organizations, only the more junior members of the prefectural corps, like Henri Sarie, named *secrétaire général de la sous-préfecture* in Toulon in 1941. In that capacity he managed the oath taking to Pétain in 1942, while serving as departmental leader of Combat; he would go on to found and run the *Mouvements unis de la Résistance* in the Var. The legacy of the 1851 insurgency against Napoleon III weighs heavily here, the southern radical-socialist tradition that produced, among others, Jean Moulin. Although born in Marseille to a father serving in colonial Indochina and supported in his early career by the Sarraut brothers, Fernand Carles did not take the same risks. Prefect of the Nord from the Popular Front to the Liberation, Carles, married to a Jewish woman, faithfully carried out orders, both from Vichy and German occupation officials, who ruled that part of northern France directly.

The final section, "Devenir et souvenir," takes an eclectic look both forwards and backwards. The hagiographic origins of the project appear in Gilles Morin's brief appreciation of Adrien Tixier, de Gaulle's minister of the interior who reestablished republican normality and a sense of continuity after the war. Jean-Claude Barbier provides an overview of the handful of prefects and former prefects deported for serving the Resistance. In his chapter on the careers of Vichy prefects after 1945, Pierre-André Peyvel notes that in addition to the rupture of 1940, the

considerable turnover within the prefectural corps, the end of the war marked another significant turning point, at least among senior officials: eighty-five percent had to leave their positions abruptly after the Liberation with only a few able to go on in territorial administration.

This collective volume is hardly exhaustive. It synthesizes rather than blazing new paths or presenting new vistas, and it concentrates on a narrow, if hugely significant, group of administrators. Within that compass, *Vichy et les préfets* provides an outstanding overview of current research and a clear-sighted look at a group that, perhaps more than any other, embodies the ambiguities and ambivalence of Vichy France.

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NOTES

[1] Robert Gildea, *Marianne in Chains: Daily Life in the French Heartland Under the German Occupation* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2002), 7; Philippe Burrin, *La France à l'heure allemande: 1940-1944* (Paris: Seuil, 1995), 11.

[2] Yankel Fijalkow, *La construction des îlots insalubres: Paris 1850-1945* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1998); David S. Barnes, *The Making of a Social Disease: Tuberculosis in Nineteenth-Century France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2020).

[3] Isabelle Backouche and Sarah Gensburger, "Anti-Semitism and Urban Development in France in the Second World War: The Case of *Îlot 16* in Paris," *Contemporary European History* 23:3 (2014): 400.

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