H-France Review Vol. 25 (June 2025), No. 47.

Lorenzo Cuccoli, *The Technical Corps Between France and Italy, 1750-1814.* New York: Springer Nature; Palgrave Macmillan, 2024. xv + 271 pp. $139.99 U.S. (hb). ISBN 9-78-3031682247; $119.99 U.S. (eb). 9-78-3031682254.

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This book enriches the growing literature focused on the systems of administration, education, and institutional restructuring that anchored the vast machinery of the Napoleonic state. Lorenzo Cuccoli's subject, the training and reconfiguration of the technical corps in French-controlled Italy, is especially relevant for the methodical behind-the-scenes efforts that made possible the more glamorous, well-publicized aspects of the *Grande Armée*'s exploits.

The book is organized into two sections of four chapters each. The first section, titled "The French Model," offers a survey of the way officers and NCOs from the artillery and engineering branches (army engineers and geographical engineers)--the technical corps--were recruited, trained, and employed throughout the eighteenth century and during the subsequent turbulent times of Revolution, Consulate, and Empire. Cuccoli keeps the focus on the individuals who formed these corps, with prosopography the preferred methodology. Chapters one, "Introduction," and two, "Achieving Professionalism in the French Technical Corps," examine the part played by the Enlightenment concept of merit in reforming the French army. It is common knowledge that the Old Regime French Army filled its officer corps almost exclusively with nobles, a practice further entrenched just before the Revolution with the notorious Ségur Ordinances of 1781, which required all infantry, cavalry, and dragoons to prove four degrees of nobility in the patrilineal line. Cuccoli draws on leading studies by David Bien, Rafe Blaufarb, and Jay M. Smith to summarize pre-revolutionary debates on merit and talent, when influential writers advocated for opening the ranks of military and government service careers to non-nobles. Artillery, which depended on specialized technical knowledge, provided an early example of careers (relatively) open to merit, via examinations. Remarkably, selection through competitive examination eventually attracted more nobles to the artillery branch thanks to the aura of professional prestige and what Cuccoli, employing Pierre Bourdieu's terminology, calls distinction. The *esprit de corps* achieved in this way, with knowledge, skills, and intellectual preeminence being the source of authority and legitimacy, endured throughout the revolutionary and Napoleonic years.

Chapters three, "Institutional History of the French Technical Corps," and four, "Careers in the French Technical Corps," review the changing legislations that structured the corps of artillery,

military engineers, and geographic engineers from the early eighteenth century through different phases of the Revolution up to the end of the Napoleonic empire. Technological advances and political upheaval bore on each other to prompt multiple reforms in the modalities of selection, training, required competencies, and performance expectations of the three corps as France moved from the old to the new regime. Observations on some of the officers' and politicians' concerns with the centrality of seniority and the attending slow pace of promotion, offer a glimpse into the competitive atmosphere in which technical corps functioned regardless of politics, and also of the pride they took in the expertise acquired through rigorous studies. They had reasons to be proud, for successful completion of engineering and artillery school cycles involved passing examinations in advanced mathematics, several geometry subjects, geography, applied physics, drawing and writing, alongside practical training in the field. Not surprisingly, the *Ecole Polytechnique*, founded as *Ecole Centrale des Travaux Publics* in 1794 and militarized by Napoleon in 1804, stood out as the crown jewel of technical education in revolutionary and post-revolutionary France, with a demanding curriculum taught by renowned scholars such as the mathematician Louis Puissant. Cuccoli does not discuss the reasoning behind the state's commitment to educating technology--proficient military professionals. Readers can guess that specific battlefield experiences, where victory may have hinged on superior technical equipment and knowhow in combination with the Enlightenment ethos of scientific progress, encouraged the formation of *corps savants*, but the issue is not addressed.

The second part of the book, "The Italian Case," turns the spotlight to the composition and education of technical corps in the Italian armies. Chapter five, "Institutional History of the Cisalpine and Italian Technical Corps," shows how Italy's military institutions mirrored their counterparts in France, in the wake of military conquests, that is, first in the sister republics during the French *triennio* (1796-1799) and during the Consulate and the Empire afterwards (1800-1814). The book focuses mainly on developments in the Cisalpine Republic, reconfigured as Italian Republic in 1802 and Kingdom of Italy in 1805. Inevitably, the process of imposing a ready-made model on a different reality caused logistical headaches and clashes of personality. Finding appropriate textbooks, for instance, was a matter of urgency. Tensions arose especially around questions of authority and legitimacy, as French officers commanded garrisons until the founding of the Kingdom of Italy, when Italian officers gained access to senior leadership positions. Yet, both the French officials tasked with this work and their Italian colleagues struggled on and Italians, like their French colleagues, began to cram for exams in specialized schools of artillery, topography, and engineering. What social categories of young men volunteered for enrolment in the technical corps are the subject of chapter six, "Careers in the Cisalpine and Italian Technical Corps". The initial pool comprised graduates from existing military schools in Turin, Naples, and Verona, the first two already modeled on Old Regime French schools. Recruitment by admission examinations and the focus on merit allowed for a measure of social diversity among the cadets. An interesting case, too cursorily presented, are the Naples Royal Academy or School of Mathematics, founded in1745 for training artillery officers, and the Special School or Military Engineering Academic Institute, founded in 1754. The schools merged in 1785. In 1788, François René Jean de Pommereul, at the time lieutenant-colonel, arrived at the school with a mandate from the war minister of what was still Old Regime France, to reorganize the Kingdom of Two Sicilies' artillery. A *militaire-philosophe*, who had contributed to the *Encyclopédie* and incidentally had been one of Napoleon Buonaparte's examiners at his entry at the École Militaire, Pommereul imparted more than technical

knowledge. He shared new ideas with his Neapolitan colleagues and in 1789 displayed enthusiasm for the revolutionary events occurring in his home country; his extra-curricular activities encouraged vivid discussions which got at least one local officer in trouble with the authorities. "Small wonder," Cuccoli exclaims, "that many of them [graduates of the Naples School of Engineering] were involved in the Revolutionary developments of 1794 and 1798-99" (p. 145). This reviewer, and one surmises, many readers would have been interested in learning more about these cadets' participation in the events triggered by the French operations in Southern Italy.

Technical education took off throughout the peninsula during the empire, with specialized curricula that seemed at times too daunting for many of the new students, or so some of the professors grumbled in letters reminiscent of contemporary college instructors' complaints. "You know that to learn a subject, and especially mathematics, one needs some form of aptitude for reflection, or strong determination and the utmost dedication to study. Both these qualities are unfortunately missing in many of the pupils in this class," wrote one despairing professor from Pavia in 1804 (p. 154). A noteworthy detail, again too cursorily treated, is the mix of career officers who entered the technical corps out of professional interest and politically motivated civilians who wished to put their skills in the service of republican ideals. It would be interesting to learn more: did such a social mix occur in certain time-periods more than in others? Were there differences in performance between the two groups and did they influence each other? Did political enthusiasm translate into military proficiency? As for social background, Cuccoli's data suggests that traditional elites, i.e. nobles and professional categories (*borghesia dei talenti*) provided roughly a third of the officers in the technical corps; about a quarter came from officer families, although it is not clear if the latter were part of the sample of nobility considered in this chapter. Again, apart from providing raw figures, there is little analysis of the impact different social backgrounds may have had on these officers' performance or *esprit de corps*. Recruits from outside the Republic / Kingdom of Italy too were able to build careers in the Republic / Kingdom of Italy's different branches, which however did not happen without tensions and predictable accusations of favoritism and corruption. Chapter seven, "Achievements of the Technical Corps Officers in Italy," offers details on the places where Italian artillery and engineering corps served. Italian artillery units participated to almost all the campaigns, from the battle of Marengo (1800) to several places in Spain, finally to the 1812 and 1813 campaigns in Russia and Germany. More information on their performance would have been helpful to understand these corps' contributions to the Napoleonic military saga. In any event, the economy of the Republic / Kingdom of Italy benefitted: while imports of weaponry from France were routine, the war economy also stimulated local manufacturing, or what Cuccoli calls somewhat anachronistically the military-industrial complex. The engineers, for their part, ended up shoring up the French controlled government led by viceroy Eugène de Beauharnais, not necessarily out of conviction, but because of the applied nature of their specific skills. Military engineers worked on fortifications and waterways; geographical engineers supplied maps complete with important information on population distribution, administrative divisions, and regional economic potential. "I want your work to be as complete as you can make it" (p. 199), the viceroy wrote to one of the geographical engineers' commanders, stressing that the efficiency of the administration hinged on familiarity with local realities. Chapter eight, "Conclusion," attempts to assess the long-term impact of the expertise and experience the Italian technical corps accumulated during the French-dominated Republic / Kingdom of Italy. Archival documents on

the post-Napoleonic careers of artillery and engineer officers, especially of graduates of the School of Modena, suggest that many entered teaching, administrative, and scientific fields. Some Modena alumni reached senior positions, such as Camillo Vacani, president of the Lombard Institute of Sciences and Letters from 1847 to 1859 (and tutor to the future Napoleon III) or Pietro Paleocapa, Minister of Public Works in the provisional government of Venice in 1848 and later in the Piedmont government. It is, however, a stretch to affirm unequivocally that "pupils of the School of Modena helped materially and culturally to forge Risorgimento in Italy" (p. 218). A more restrained verb (such as: were part of) seems closer to the mark. To what extent the Italians maintained the French model imposed on them from above or if they tailored it to "*more italica*" (p. 220) is also discussed in this chapter. The author maintains that the high academic level several Italian military schools had reached before the French takeover (some of these schools, as shown in previous chapters, were already modeled on French institutions) led to the easy assimilation of the French system. "In both cases [the *Dépôt de guerre* and the School of Modena]…the model was not native but was successfully adapted and tailored because, for all their limitations, there was a cultural milieu capable of doing so" (p. 219). Accordingly, the assertion--ostensibly refuting Michael Broers' thesis--that "the notion of cultural imperialism may be ruled out" (p. 219) comes as a surprise. The final pages highlight the complications and deficiencies flowing from the Italian corps' subordinate position to the French military administration, which seem to contradict at least partially the previous statements of successful scientific and institutional cross-fertilization.

In conclusion, this book has a lot to offer, especially on the establishment, recruiting policies, academic objectives, and general functioning of the schools that trained the Italian technical corps during the Republic / Kingdom of Italy. Overall, the organization of the book suffers from weaknesses mostly due to the inherent difficulties of turning a PhD dissertation into a book. For instance, the promise of prosopography is only partially fulfilled: a few statistics and brief individual portraits hint at, but stop short of, a coherent collective portrayal. The preference for examining each technical corps and each school separately, bouncing back and forth between time-periods, makes it harder for the reader to follow the narrative. Cuccoli demonstrates excellent knowledge of the scholarship yet does not engage with major works in the field, like in the case of the above-mentioned brief rebuttal of Michael Broers' concept of cultural imperialism in a European context or Christy Pichichero's landmark study on the military Enlightenment. This reviewer closed the book hoping that the author will revisit the topic, deepen the analysis and follow up on several promising lines of inquiry such as scientific cooperation, emulation even, in the context of clear imbalances of power rooted in France's hegemony. In the present form, *The Technical Corps Between France and Italy, 1750-1814* is an informative study that makes a valuable contribution to the field by drawing attention to the specific experiences of the technical corps during the Napoleonic era in Italy and by bringing to light a wealth of important primary documents.

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ISSN 1553-9172