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Alexander Grab, *Napoleon and the Transformation of Europe*. Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003, xiii + 249 pp. Maps, notes and bibliography, and index. \$75 U.S. (hb). ISBN 0-333-68274-2; \$22.95 U.S. (pb). ISBN 0-333-68275-0.

Review by Malcolm Crook, Keele University.

Too much of the literature on Napoleon is devoted to aspects of his military campaigns and diplomacy, or to the details of his private life, all of which have been raked over with renewed vigour during the current bicentenary. The flow of biographies continues unabated; demand from publishers, if not the public, appears insatiable.[1] However, there are encouraging signs that the Empire rather than the Emperor is beginning to attract greater attention, and with it the recognition that Napoleon was as much a part of European as of French history. There have been some splendid surveys in recent years, notably the work of Stuart Woolf, Mike Broers, Geoff Ellis, and Annie Jourdan, not to mention a couple of excellent collections of essays.[2] Alexander Grab is thus building on strong foundations in this volume which, deliberately aimed at the student market, offers an accessible and up-to-date synthesis as part of Palgrave-Macmillan's European History in Perspective series. The select bibliography is deliberately restricted to items in English, though the notes to each chapter reflect the author's enviable facility in French, German and Italian, as befits a historian of the Italian peninsula under Habsburg and French rule at the turn of the nineteenth century.[3] More maps would have been helpful, to assist an understanding of the kaleidoscopic boundary changes that regularly occurred on the continent during the Napoleonic era, but the book is otherwise extremely user-friendly.

Whereas comparable volumes on the Empire have treated the subject in a thematic fashion, Grab has opted for a country-by-country survey. The strength of this approach lies in its clarity, but there is no apparent order to the countries he surveys, either in terms of the geography or chronology of conquest: the Netherlands, for example, precede the chapter on Belgium, which was incorporated into the French Republic in the form of *départements réunis* in the late 1790s. The treatment of the geographical expression that was Germany is especially awkward. A more viable framework might have dealt with different areas according to the intensity of their experience of the Great Empire, which tended to reflect the nature of the occupied terrain and the duration of French domination. Grab addresses these important dimensions by tracing the history of each country over a lengthy time span, from an old regime (which anticipated a number of later changes) to the Restoration (which retained many Napoleonic measures). Yet a weakness of this procedure is that it tends to become somewhat descriptive, even a little repetitive. For each chapter follows a similar progression from the late eighteenth century, to the impact of the French Revolution, and thence to the Napoleonic period, before concluding with a section on the imperial aftermath. Despite the claim on the book's cover that the impact across the entire continent is to be explored, there is nothing on those areas that resisted Napoleonic dominion, from Britain in the west to Russia in the east. None the less, the scope of this study is substantial, even heroic, encompassing all the annexed territories, satellite states, and allied kingdoms. It is, indeed, unusual to find any space devoted to Portugal, still less so to the far-flung Illyrian Provinces, which are the subject of short chapters, even though in both cases the impression left by French domination was extremely slight.

Nine areas are examined in turn, in addition to France with which the survey begins. This continental tour is conducted almost as hastily as the great man's exploits, in a mere 200 pages, leaving the reader a little breathless. As a consequence it is difficult to focus on the common factors. To be sure, the different countries are enfolded by a pair of chronological chapters on the creation and collapse of the Empire, as well as by an early analysis of its nature and then, at the end, by a general conclusion on the imperial legacy. Yet too few of the issues raised there are highlighted in the area studies, even when it comes to those that experienced the greatest transformation, from the Low Countries to the Rhineland and Northern Italy.[4] The unevenness of the Empire would have become even more evident had it been tackled in a more coherent fashion. Yet the lack of any plan behind Napoleonic expansionism, which was driven to such a large extent by the imperatives of war and the Continental System, is clearly demonstrated as a result. What also comes across effectively is the mixture of reform and exploitation that characterised the Empire. By choosing a civilian portrait ('Napoleon in his Study' by David) to adorn the jacket of his book, Grab declares his intention to place greater emphasis on the Janus-faced Emperor as reformer than warlord, though this perspective can be contested as overly Franco-centric. For most Europeans the Empire accentuated the incidence of those old certainties, death and taxes, in the form of unprecedented conscription on the one hand and the massive requisition of resources on the other. Any benefits conferred in the process were clearly secondary to the goal of imperial domination, a product of necessity as much as design, and 'modernisation' was unlikely to be much appreciated when it was dispensed by an occupying force. Moreover, any advantages conferred by prefectural administration (perhaps not quite as immediately efficient as Grab suggests), or the abolition of artisan guilds, were evident in the long- rather than the short-term.

It can also be argued that too little attention is accorded to the impact of the Revolution, which might have offered the sister republics more of the benefits of reform and fewer of the drawbacks of exploitation than the subsequent client states. Better the Batavian Republic than the Kingdom of Holland, for instance? As Grab shows, the ruler of the Empire became more willing to compromise with the old elites the longer he reigned, discarding any earlier affinities with Jacobinism he may have evinced. This was as true of a more developed region like Switzerland as it was of a less advanced area such as Poland. Yet it is difficult to disentangle the combined impact of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic eras, for both represented vital moments in the drama of modernity that brought the mixed blessings of enhanced state power and secularisation in their wake, frequently ignoring liberty in the process. Grab is an administrative historian by upbringing, and one might object that his essentially 'top-down' approach neglects questions of culture, notably imperialism and nationalism.[5] It also sidelines the themes of collaboration and resistance which have bulked large in recent research.[6] A sense of the texture of life as it was lived under the Napoleonic Empire is largely absent, as pride of place is assumed by political and military events. Yet one can only achieve so much in a relatively short synthesis, and Grab did set out to focus on the transformation wrought by Napoleon as his title proclaims. It is sometimes hard to distinguish wood for trees, but the author reveals a formidable grasp of detail and a tremendous breadth of knowledge. The difficulty of striking a satisfactory balance between narrative and analysis is never easily overcome, but the chronological and thematic chapters at start and finish can be consulted with particular profit, while the individual area studies constitute a wide-ranging work of reference, with their succinct summaries supplying a series of brief histories that span both the Revolutionary and Napoleonic periods. Specialists may find little here to surprise them, but a good deal of common sense, while students will doubtless be grateful for a solid, reliable survey that literally covers the ground in such a comprehensive and competent fashion.

NOTES

[1] The latest addition to this vast corpus is S. Englund, *Napoleon. A Political Life* (New York: Scribner, 2004).

[2] S. Woolf, *Napoleon's Integration of Europe* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991); M. Broers, *Europe under Napoleon 1799-1815* (London: Arnold, 1996); A. Jourdan, *L'empire de Napoléon* (Paris: Flammarion, 2000); G. Ellis, *The Napoleonic Empire* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, second edition, 2003), which includes a substantially revised section on the annexed lands and subject states; P.G. Dwyer, ed., *Napoleon and Europe* (London: Longman, 2001) and J.-C. Martin, ed., *Napoléon et l'Europe. Colloque de la Roche-sur-Yon* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2002).

[3] For his chapter on the Italian Peninsula, Grab draws heavily on a fine essay he contributed to J. Davis, ed., *Italy in the Nineteenth Century 1796-1900* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

[4] M. Rowe, *From Reich to State: The Rhineland in the Revolutionary Age, 1780-1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) is a recent addition to the growing bibliography.

[5] See, for example, M. Broers, "Cultural Imperialism in a European Context? Political Culture and Cultural Politics in Napoleonic Italy," *Past & Present*, 170 (2001): 152-180.

[6] M. Rowe, ed., *Collaboration and Resistance in Napoleonic Europe: State Formation in an Age of Upheaval, c.1800-1815* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), for a recent survey, and C.J. Esdaile, *Fighting Napoleon: Guerrillas, Bandits and Adventures in Spain 1808-1814* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004).

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