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Sudhir Hazareesingh, *The Saint-Napoleon: Celebrations of Sovereignty in Nineteenth-Century France*. Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 2004. xiv + 307pp. Notes and index. \$49.95 U.S. (cl). ISBN 0-674-01341-7.

Review by Peter McPhee, University of Melbourne.

Alain Corbin has recounted unforgettably the drama of 16 August 1870, when several hundred peasants from around the tiny village of Hautefaye, near Nontron in southwestern France, battered a young nobleman, Alain de Monéys, for two hours, then, as he was about to expire, burned him to death.[1] Part of Corbin's explanation of this horrifying murder was historical. Here, in the north of the Dordogne, popular attitudes were imbued with suspicion and hatred of outsiders, whether nobles, priests, or urban republicans. This distinctive ideology, combined with unprecedented prosperity under the Second Empire, had generated a fervent Bonapartism, accentuated by the events of August 1870. The news of the imperial army's reverses during the Franco-Prussian war of that month reached the drought-afflicted countryside at the same time as the anxious villagers from around Hautefaye were attending the local fair. Hautefaye was the wrong place for Alain de Monéys to be. The young noble was accused of having shouted "Long live the Republic!," was branded a "Prussian" and became a doomed embodiment of accumulated hatreds and fears.

Sudhir Hazareesingh enables us to understand further why the noble's timing was fatal. His murder occurred on the morrow of a day more important than that of the local market: 15 August was the national festival of the "Saint-Napoleon." This was a deliberate link forged in 1852 by Napoleon III with the First Empire: in 1804 Napoleon Bonaparte had persuaded the Vatican to canonize a new saint whose celebration would coincide with 15 August, Napoleon's birthday. The day of Saint-Napoleon found its resonance in the canonization of the patron-saint of warriors, the Roman martyr Neopolis. So began the cult of Saint-Napoleon, of Bonaparte as Roman martyr, warrior, and saint all in one.

Historians agree that, in the century after 1789, a complex, regionally varied shift occurred in the relationship between the mass of French people and the state: in a word, they became "politicized." They do not agree, however, on when and how this happened. Sudhir Hazareesingh's splendid book is a major contribution to this debate. His central argument is that the Saint-Napoleon was both the first truly national festival in its central elements and at the same time "assumed a life and character of its own in its myriad encounters (harmonious here, tempestuous elsewhere) with local social and political cultures" (p. 17). His historiographical targets are "traditional Marxist, republican, and liberal views of the Second Empire" (p. 227), and the dismissal of the Empire's festivals as "Caesarism", imposed and devoid of spontaneity. He "completely rejects" (p. 12) the Caesarist trope of Alain Corbin and Rosemonde Sanson, instead preferring Bernard Ménéger's conclusion that 15 August marked "the first successful attempt at a national festivity in France before July 14" (p. 74).[2]

Equally important, Hazareesingh makes a refreshing contribution to our understanding of the complex interplay of memory, regionalism, and national institutional structures in the construction of collective identities.[3] This enables him to reflect on the place of religion in political festivals and to recover the spaces occupied by women because of assumptions they and the authorities shared about the special relationship between religious devotion and women. The book is replete with delightful examples of the Saint-Napoleon being moulded to local needs and subverted by the tensions of village and neighbourhood. How Hazareesingh must have enjoyed doing the archival research for this book! His examples are drawn from skilled research in the Archives Nationales and a sample of twenty-two *archives départementales* (the Massif Central and Brittany are rather underrepresented here).

The Saint-Napoleon was often the occasion for demonstrating civic pride, as at Castéra-Verduzan (Gers) in 1853, when the municipality had the village swept and washed, and distributed hundreds of flags. For the festivals were, as the Procureur-Général of the Haute-Garonne put it, the people's "own festivity, as well as that of the emperor" (p. 77). Everywhere, it was the occasion for popular sports, on beaches, rivers and village squares; at Saint-Gilles

(Gard) in 1859, however, the traditional bull race was disrupted when the bull attacked the crowd and made its escape. Everywhere, too, the festival was an occasion for the mid-summer consumption of prodigious amounts of alcohol.

Local legitimists had in 1815 dubbed the village of Cubzac (Gironde) “Sainte- Hélène” because of its Bonapartism: it was still known popularly by that name fifty years later. By then Napoleon III had had the inspired idea of introducing the “Médaille de Saint-Hélène” to honour the 390,000 veterans of the Grande Armée still alive in 1857. Henceforth the Saint-Napoleon became overtly military in tone, and sometimes xenophobic: the mayor of Alignan (Hérault) in 1860 celebrated France’s leadership “in the expedition that is being carried out against the barbarity and Islamic fanaticism of Syria” (p. 68).

The Saint-Napoleon was also deeply political. When the mayor of Marsillargues (Hérault) in 1855 extolled the “peace and tranquillity that we enjoy” because the emperor had “successfully and firmly stopped the revolutionary engine” (p.28), he encapsulated perfectly the mood of the party of Order at the time of Louis-Napoleon’s coup d’état in December 1851. The Saint-Napoleon gave authorities the occasion to increase surveillance of republicans, who in turn responded by ostentatiously absenting themselves from festivities, deliberately dressing-down, or allowing a piece of red fabric to be visible on clothing. Police in Cette/Sète (Hérault) complained in 1869 that they were sick of cleaning republican and socialist graffiti from lavatory walls. (This was less dangerous than defacing official posters in Rennes with “Liberty or Death, Long Live the Republic of 1793!”). By then, of course, the gloss had worn off the régime for legitimists and priests as well. The *curé* of Leers (Nord) in 1865 pointedly referred to the Catholic feast of the Assumption as the only genuine festival of 15 August and refused to mention the emperor in the prayers that day. The municipal council’s response was to have the church bells ring immediately to honour Napoleon III, and to complain bitterly to Paris.

It is clear, however, that the celebration of the Saint-Napoleon was predominantly an occasion for expressions of local pride, fun, and nationalism. So much so that Hazareesingh ends by challenging the whole idea of the unbridgeable gulf between republican and Bonapartism which has been unquestioned since 1850. He quips of his colleague Olivier Ihl that “I have so far failed in my endeavour to convince him that all modern French republicans are really Bonapartists at heart” (p. xii).[4] The Second Empire did not fall, in his opinion, because of a loss of “symbolic and ideological appeal” (p.227). These are of course highly contestable as well as intriguing assertions.

We now have a rich harvest of studies of public practice of political loyalties and commemoration, from Michael Vovelle and Mona Ozouf on the revolutionary period to Sheryl Kroen and Françoise Waquet on the Restoration, and Alain Faure, Maurice Agulhon, Olivier Ihl, and now Hazareesingh on the decades after 1840.[5] With the exception of Waquet’s book on *fêtes royales*, however, they have primarily contributed to our understanding of the creation, survival, and strengthening of liberal and, above all, republican loyalties and practices in the face of royalist and Napoleonic authoritarianism. In this narrative of the emergence of a democratic political culture, the Second Empire has always been understood as an autocratic hiatus between the energetic apprenticeship of republicanism in 1848-51 and its mature mastership after 1870. Hazareesingh’s success is to show instead how the official celebrations of 15 August were a central element in the Second Empire’s citizenship project. In the process, he has much to tell us about popular religiosity, the place of women in the public sphere, and the interplay of regional and national identities.

It is perhaps inevitable that historians who have studied the emergence of democratic politics across the ‘long nineteenth century’ should overemphasize the novelty and importance of the period of their particular focus. So Michel Vovelle (a curious absence from Hazareesingh’s bibliography) has seen the Revolution as the moment of unprecedented popular participation in national politics, while Maurice Agulhon and many others have identified a mass political apprenticeship during the Second Republic; for Eugen Weber, of course, this was a process which began far later in the regions south of the Loire.[6] Hazareesingh’s corpus has radically challenged and enriched our assumptions about the Second Empire, but there are times when his claims are rather too bold. He describes, for example, the festivals of the Revolution as ‘unsuccessful’ and those of the first half of the nineteenth century as ‘modest’ (p. 3). The history of politicization was not so unilinear; every generation relearns the meanings of public life. The Second Empire, we now know, created new forms of mass politics, but it did not invent it. One thinks, for example, of the Fêtes de la Fédération held across the country in July 1790 or the public celebrations in November 1848 of the proclamation of the constitution of the Second Republic.

With *Subject to Citizen* and *The Legend of Napoleon*[7], Sudhir Hazareesingh has here completed a superb trilogy of works on the political culture of the period of the Second Empire. His social history of politics has been informed by the techniques of cultural history. By examining the intercesses of “official” politics and broader public life, he has been able to challenge current historical certainties about the hold of an autocratic régime over a controlled or quiescent populace. It is a first-rate book: meticulously researched, challenging, beautifully written, and with deft touches of humour and glimpses of the author. Above all, it leaves the reader stimulated to ask new questions and to pose familiar ones in a different way.

NOTES

[1] Alain Corbin, *Le Village des cannibales* (Paris: Aubier, 1990); trans. *The Village of Cannibals: Rage and Murder in France, 1870* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992).

[2] Bernard Ménager, *Les Napoléon du peuple* (Paris: Aubier, 1988), 153; Alain Corbin, preface to Corbin *et al*, eds., *Les Usages politiques des fêtes aux XIXe–XXe siècles* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1994); Rosemonde Sanson, *Le 14 juillet: Fête et conscience nationale 1789-1975* (Paris: Flammarion, 1976). Other recent studies of official display are Matthew Truesdell, *Spectacular Politics: Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte and the Fête Impériale, 1849-1870* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); David Baguley, *Napoleon III and His Regime: An Extravaganza* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000).

[3] The book draws on and reinforces the arguments of Jean-François Chanet, *L'Ecole républicaine et les petites patries* (Paris: Aubier, 1996); and Anne-Marie Thiesse, *Ils apprenaient la France: L'exaltation de régions dans le discours patriotique* (Paris: Editions de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, 1977).

[4] On this, see also Natalie Petiteau, *Napoléon de la mythologie à l'histoire* (Paris: Seuil, 1999).

[5] Michel Vovelle, *Les Métamorphoses de la fête en Provence, de 1750 à 1820* (Paris: Flammarion, 1976); Mona Ozouf, *La Fête révolutionnaire, 1789-1799* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976); Sheryl Kroen, *Politics and Theater: The Crisis of Legitimacy in Restoration France, 1815-1830* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); Françoise Waquet, *Les Fêtes royales sous la Restauration ou l'Ancien Régime re-trouvé* (Geneva: Droz, 1981); Alain Faure, *Paris Carême-Prenant: Du Carnaval à Paris au XIXeme siècle* (Paris: Hachette, 1978); Maurice Agulhon, “Fête spontanée et fêtes organisées à Paris en 1848,” in Jean Ehrard and Paul Viallaneix, eds., *Les Fêtes de la Révolution* (Paris: Société des Etudes Robespierriistes, 1977); *Marianne au combat: L'Imagerie et la symbolique républicaines de 1789 à 1880* (Paris: Flammarion, 1979); trans. *Marianne into Battle: Republican Imagery and Symbolism in France, 1789-1880* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Olivier Ihl, *La Fête républicaine* (Paris: Gallimard, 1996).

[6] Maurice Agulhon, *1848 ou l'apprentissage de la République, 1848-1852* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1973); trans. *The Republican Experiment, 1848-1852* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press; Paris: Editions de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, 1983); Eugen Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870-1914* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1976). This debate is analysed in Edward Berenson, “Politics and the French Peasantry: The Debate Continues,” *Social History* 12 (1987), 219-229; and Peter McPhee, *The Politics of Rural Life: Political Mobilization in the French Countryside 1846-1852* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), ch. 5.

[7] Sudhir Hazareesingh, *From Subject to Citizen: The Second Empire and the Emergence of Modern French Democracy* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1998); and *The Legend of Napoleon* (London: Granta, 2004).

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