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**Vincent Juhel, Ed.** *Arcisse de Caumont (1801-1873). Érudit normand et fondateur de l'archéologie française.* Caen: Société des antiquaires de Normandie, 2005. 514 pp. Notes and figures. 35 € (pb). ISBN 2-9510558-2-X.

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This book is not for the faint-hearted. It is 514 pages of conference proceedings on Arcisse de Caumont (1801-1873), the cultural operator who created a wide and long-lasting network of provincial savants, learned societies, and congresses. Twenty-seven essays by scholars, archivists, librarians, curators, doctoral students, and members of the Société des antiquaires de Normandie (co-founded by Caumont in 1824). A 122-page bibliography of books and articles written by and about Caumont. A listing of nineteen collections that hold archival traces of the man. Figures galore—portraits, book covers, archeological illustrations, photographs of manuscript notes, advertisements for Caumont's lectures, and more. And, finally, several transcriptions and facsimiles of documents. My favorite one is on page 66: an 1832 letter in which Caumont informs Charles d'Orbigny, agent of the Société géologique de France, that he had sent him publications by stagecoach that very morning. The three-sentence letter (ms. 654 in the Bibliothèque municipale de La Rochelle) occupies an entire page in the volume.

Parisian journalists and novelists such as Louis Reybaud mocked provincial *érudits* in the nineteenth century and it is easy enough for scholars to do the same today. Erudition has its virtues, of course, but this book presents itself as scholarship as well, and yet none of the contributors tell us what purpose this letter may serve beyond its mere existence. Some of the essays will frustrate the reader who seeks analysis rather than compilations of data. One contribution says a great deal about nineteenth-century British archeology and its links with France, but without discussing the singularities of the British and French archeological milieus. Another surveys representations of Caumont (statues, engravings, medals), but without deriving broader lessons about the cult of provincial great men or the interface between memory and material culture. The New Biography this is not.[1] This can grow tiresome, as can the tributes to Caumont's "perceptive eye" and "engaging thought" (pp. 65, 208). (The book, I should add, has neither an introduction nor a conclusion). Still, I began to feel around page sixty-six that there was something touching about this homage to a figure who barely registers in France today. It is so removed, after all, from our own practices. The volume's paper is crisp and Pepsodent-white, its scent an unidentifiable mix of plastics. But its pages, like those of the yellowed, dusty publications it follows, may transport the amenable reader to this nineteenth-century provincial world.

Beyond its existence as an artifact, this book also has the virtue of capping a twenty-year reevaluation of Arcisse de Caumont. This petty noble and legitimist from Bayeux became a *wunderkind* of French archeology in the 1820s. He published widely-read manuals, geological maps, and periodicals; helped found several learned societies in Normandy; created the Société française pour la conservation et la description des monuments historiques, which held annual archeological congresses; launched annual and itinerant *congrès scientifiques*, whose members discussed everything from agronomy to political economy; and in 1839 founded the Institut des Provinces, a provincial counterpart to the Institut de France. For a long time, historians of science alone paid attention to Caumont and his network. Like Stendhal, who linked Caumont's *Histoire de l'art gothique* to "the aristocratic craze that has taken over this country" (quoted on p. 167), they dismissed the man and his coterie as fossilized legitimists, obsessed with aristocratic or clerical privileges and impervious to new scientific currents.[2] Things began to change in the mid-1980s. As France moved cautiously towards decentralization and embraced

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memory in all its forms, including local and national, cultural and social historians took a new look at Caumont's scientific enterprises, his politics, and his brand of regionalism. In so doing, they drew our attention to a "Caumont moment" which began under the Restoration and ended with the advent of Gambetta's *couches nouvelles* (Jean-Pierre Chaline, p. 154). During those decades, land-owning elites and professional *capacités* governed the provincial cultural realm and gave it a new impetus.[3]

These scholars delineated three figures of Arcisse de Caumont, all of which surface in the present volume. We encounter first the influential man of learning who contributed to numerous disciplines and studied all artifacts to capture the soul of a province. This collection embraces a vision of Caumont as an archeological maven who classified existing knowledge within encyclopedic volumes that spanned all periods and styles and—via book-learning, questionnaires, and field research—outlined the singularities of French provinces.[4] François Guillet shows that Caumont's classifications owed as much to Linnaeus's series of recurring traits as to Lamarck's continual scale of living creatures (p. 88). Maylis Baylé and Guy Verron acknowledge the shortcomings of Caumont's history of art and archeology (a poor understanding of architectural structures and types of elevation, for instance), but they conclude that his rigor, his organizational schemes, and his quest for an overarching theory provided a foundation for later archeologists and the likes of Viollet-le-Duc. While many of the essays restrict themselves to Caumont, one of the book's four sections apprehends him as "the heart of a team." This is an excellent idea and a rich opportunity to undertake a historical sociology of a network in which, as one member put it in 1845, "any neglected or little-known talent can display his qualifications." [5] Unfortunately, the contributors discuss character traits and the specifics of individual relationships rather than collective trajectories, network-building, or modes of appreciation.

What they do discuss in welcome and sometimes fascinating detail is Caumont the scientific and cultural popularizer. Here again, the essays by and large complement earlier depictions of an energetic, savvy activist who employed all the instruments at his disposal to reach a broad, if primarily literate, audience. In this respect, the quality of his archeology matters less than his public courses and pedagogical publications, his illustrated volumes in which text and images were in constant dialogue, his grass-roots propaganda in favor of monumental preservation, and his ability to band together disparate social forces.[6] All of this was equally about "publicity, popularization, and pedagogy" (Vincent Juhel, p. 219). Still, Caumont was no democrat. Guy Verron thus depicts a figure who entertained aristocratic conceptions of otium and learning yet sought to reach, or even create, an educated, participatory public. Caumont may have done more than anyone else to render archeology and heritage "popular" in post-revolutionary France. He also grasped the growing importance of tourism. His guidebooks and brochures helped create a tourist-friendly image of Gothic Normandy that has survived to the present day (Guillet, pp. 91-92). Caumont's relationship to capitalism and a nascent mass culture remain unclear, however. How did this man, steeped in a literary and essentially erudite culture, understand and seek to manipulate the economic and social forces that were now traversing French society? How did he and others balance their attachment to social stability with their embrace of change and, to some extent, the market? This book implicitly poses such questions, but answers remain elusive.

This scientist and popularizer was also an ardent advocate of cultural and administrative decentralization. The man who emerges from these pages was no defender of provincial privileges, but a conservative who abandoned his family's rabid legitimism and reactionary nostalgia for a moderate ideal of decentralization. While he rapidly clashed with the authorities, Caumont accepted the post-revolutionary settlement and national unity. He founded provincial institutions and sought to disseminate useful knowledge outside the capital to compensate for Parisian domination and energize provincial intellectual life. His mix of traditionalist values and Enlightenment convictions (knowledge, utility, progress) shines through in this volume, though the contributors say little about it. Neither do they linger on Caumont's social conservatism, his religious views, nor the ideals of national identity and unity which he and his colleagues sought to articulate. When the Nîmes lawyer Charles Portalis

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declared in 1846 that the Congrès scientifiques would usher in “a more complete and truer national unity,” in which centralization vanished and “France alone remained,” he was seeking—like Caumont—to resolve contradictions that the Revolution had left unresolved and to propound a vision of France in which unity and diversity might coexist.[7] Caumont believed that two obstacles hindered such unity: centralization and local parochialism. While Guillet is not wrong to state that his regionalism rested on local patriotism (p. 93), this claim overlooks the tension in Caumont’s thought and practices between national coordination, regionalism, and localism. Caumont deemed the latter valuable, but too weak to rival Parisian forces and too narrow to achieve significant intellectual generalization and authority.

Caumont’s difficult relationship with local learned societies is one reason, therefore, why his network never fulfilled the hopes for provincial regeneration it had stirred in the 1830s. Caumont understood as much. A few months before his death, he conceded that “much remained to be done” in France, a country whose “public spirit” was less “regenerated”, its “spirit of association” less developed, and its “spirit of literary and scientific association” less vigorous than Germany’s or England’s.[8] The contributors to this volume accept this diagnosis regarding Caumont’s failure, but they underline differing explanatory factors, from Caumont’s obstinate temperament to his frictions with the Parisian authorities to his inability to divorce his network from his person. They might have given more attention to his difficulties to convince provincials that disseminating ideas and information among a broad public was indispensable in modern societies. This provincial world was split, after all, between an ancient ideal of elite learning and a growing concern with popularization. For every member of the cultural elites who sought to reach this public, many more maintained a distance from the supposedly immature and unreliable classes. Many more of these elites were likewise convinced that such overtures would fail—or, at the very least, that they endangered their fragile intellectual and social authority.

It is no surprise, then, that the sole commemoration of Caumont’s bicentennial in 2001 was this one, a conference and proceedings that were conceived, held, and published in Caen by one of his own institutional offspring. Caumont’s network has survived, but at the margins of academic knowledge and official memory—due to such shortcomings and, no doubt, because it figures among the forces that have checked French Jacobinism, or what Alain Cottureau has called “stato-centrism.”[9] For this reason or despite it, some contributors reclaim Caumont as a model worth emulating. Consider Jean-Michel Leniaud’s short essay, “L’actualité d’Arcisse de Caumont”, for example. The author, a professor of the École Pratique des Hautes Études, has long expressed reservations about the centralized, unitary, and homogenizing model of cultural policy, hostile to both voluntary associations and civil society, that has, in his view, constituted a “French exception” since the 1830s [10]. He argues here that Caumont—anchored in the provinces and *le terrain*, averse to Parisian lobbying, and committed to free association and a critical dialogue with the authorities—provides a model for heritage policy in modern democracies. Other contributors to this volume likewise oppose a unitary, centralizing state to the brave provincials who resisted it (see Arlette Audic, pp. 186-87).[11]

But two of the most suggestive essays in the collection complicate this simple opposition. Loïc Vadelorge shows that the members of Rouen’s Commission départementale des antiquités de la Seine-Inférieure carved out a position at the juncture of civil society and the governmental-administrative realm under the Restoration. They held on to their autonomy while entering into close relationships with officials who both needed their material assistance and now sought to cultivate “public spirit” and local patriotism as a conduit towards solidarity and civic consciousness.[12] The authorities and the forces of civil society were thus embedded in a web of interconnections in which these actors perpetually weaved and mended fragile working relationships. Calls for, and actions in favor of centralization or decentralization often surfaced where one least expects them. There are no provincial “heroes” in this world. Charlotte Robert confirms this when she quotes an 1830 letter in which Caumont acknowledges that had the Académie Royale des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres admitted him (he had applied six times), “I would probably not have devoted myself to provincial agriculture and archeology, but one must

resign oneself to one's fate." [13] The erstwhile hero of provincial emancipation thus captures the trajectories of countless nineteenth-century provincials, who embraced local science or history after failing to secure a dominant position in the intellectual and professional fields of the capital.

Several things distinguished Caumont from other disenchanting provincials: his talent and energy, an unusually deep and enduring resentment towards the Parisian establishment, and his early decision to build a national network rather than retreat to Bayeux or Caen. This is undoubtedly a central lesson of the book. But it is less revealing, I think, than its contradictory depictions of governmental forces, civil society, and putative provincial heroes. This odd volume—a progeny of commemoration, erudition, and scholarship—thus ends up pinpointing, almost despite itself, an important fault-line within the scholarship of political culture and cultural politics in modern France.

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## NOTES

[1] Jo Burr Margadant, *The New Biography: Performing Femininity in Nineteenth-Century France* (Berkeley and London: The University of California Press, 2000).

[2] Charles-Olivier Carbonell, *Histoire et historiens: une mutation idéologique des historiens français: 1865-1885* (Toulouse: Privat, 1976), pp. 241-44; Robert Fox, "Science, the University, and the State in Nineteenth-Century France," in Gerald L. Geison, ed., *Professions and the French State, 1700-1900* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1984), pp. 92-93; and Pim den Boer, *History as a Profession: The Study of History in France, 1818-1914*, trans. Arnold J. Pomerans (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1998 [1987]), pp. 34-35.

[3] See also François Guillet's contribution to this volume, "Arcisse de Caumont, un archéologue provincial," p. 93; and Edmond Goblou's classic *La barrière et le niveau: Étude sociologique sur la bourgeoisie française moderne* (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1925).

[4] Bernard Huchet, "Arcisse de Caumont (1801-1873)" (Ph.D. thesis, Ecole Nationale des Chartes, 1984), 4 vols., 1: 95-105; Alain Schnapp, *La conquête du passé: Aux origines de l'archéologie* (Paris: Livre de poche, 1998 [1993]), 340; and Guillet, *Naissance de la Normandie: Genèse et épanouissement d'une image régionale en France, 1750-1850* (Caen: Annales de Normandie, 2000), pp. 291-301.

[5] Archives Nationales F17 3090/1: Eugène Courmeaux to sub-prefect of Reims, 29 December 1845.

[6] Guillet, *Naissance de la Normandie*, pp. 301-9; and Françoise Bercé, "Arcisse de Caumont et les sociétés savantes," in Pierre Nora, ed., *Les lieux de mémoire*, 7 vols., *La nation*\*\* (Paris: Gallimard, 1986), pp. 533-68.

[7] *Congrès scientifique de France, 14e session tenue à Marseille, en septembre 1846*, 2 vols. (Marseilles: Bellande, 1847), 2:178-79.

[8] Arcisse de Caumont, "L'esprit d'initiative à l'heure qu'il est," *Annuaire de l'Institut des provinces* 25 (1873):5.

[9] Alain Cottureau, "Esprit public et capacité de juger: La stabilisation d'un espace public en France aux lendemains de la Révolution," *Raisons pratiques* 3 (1992):239-73. On these forces, see Pierre Rosanvallon, *Le modèle politique français: La société civile contre le Jacobinisme de 1789 à nos jours* (Paris:

Éditions du Seuil, 2004); and my own *The Pride of Place: Local Memories and Political Culture in Nineteenth-Century France* (Ithaca, N.Y. and London: Cornell University Press, 2003).

[10] Jean-Michel Leniaud, “L’Etat, les sociétés savantes et les associations de défense du patrimoine: L’exception française,” in Jacques Le Goff, ed., *Patrimoine et passions identitaires* (Paris: Fayard and Editions du patrimoine, 1998), pp. 137-54.

[11] Along those lines, see also Marcel Baudot, “Trente ans de coordination des sociétés savantes (1831-1861),” in *Actes du 100e Congrès national des sociétés savantes* (Paris: Bibliothèque nationale, 1976), pp. 7-28.

[12] On this language, see Marie-Vic Ozouf-Marignier, “Centralisation et lien social: le débat de la première moitié du XIXe siècle en France,” in Enrico Iachello and Biagio Salvemini, eds., *Per un Atlante storico del Mezzogiorno e della Sicilia in età moderna* (Naples: Liguori Editore, 1998), pp. 75-91.

[13] Bibliothèque Nationale de France, ms. NAF 11 593: Caumont to Eugène Burnouf, 30 November 1844, quoted in Charlotte Robert, “L’Institut des provinces de France, le détonateur d’une lutte pour la décentralisation intellectuelle,” p. 194. Robert is the author of “Arcisse de Caumont (1801-1873)” (Master’s Thesis, Université de Paris X-Nanterre, 2000).

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