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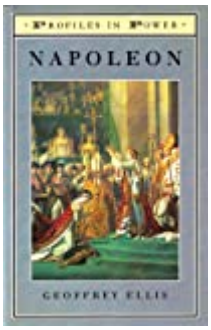

Geoffrey James Ellis. *Napoleon.* London: Longman, 1997. viii + 290 pp. $48.75 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-582-02548-6; $24.00 (textbook), ISBN 978-0-582-02547-9.

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Suddenly, the long drought of good teaching books in English on the Napoleonic era is over. We now have not only the broad sweep of Stuart Woolf's excellent *Napoleon's Integration of Europe* (Routledge, 1991), but also Michael Broers's *Europe under Napoleon, 1799-1815* (Arnold & St. Martin's Press, 1996 [see H-France review, August 1997]), my own *Napoleon Bonaparte and the Legacy of the French Revolution* (Macmillan UK and St. Martin's Press, 1994), as well as the book reviewed here. Three out of these four titles are by authors with a previous connection to the work of the late Richard Cobb. Given Cobb's personal prejudices against Napoleonic studies, this is indeed a paradoxical situation.

Ellis is an Oxford-based historian, responsible for a short textbook entitled *The Napoleonic Empire* (Macmillan UK, 1991), as well as his major work, a study of Alsace during the Empire which remains a fundamental reference point for any inquiry into the impact of the Continental Blockade. His new book appears in the Longmans *Profiles in Power* series, apparently conceived in the spirit of the "Great Man" theory of history. Although Ellis's approach is a traditional one, this is a little unfair to his book, which does not pretend to offer a full political biography. All the same, it certainly begins like one, with Napoleon's childhood in "proud" and "rugged" Corsica. It contains in addition much speculation about his sexual life and alleged sexual indifference, and his relations with Josephine, with odd forays into psychohistory inspired by the Napoleonic historian Harold Parker. But essentially this is an analysis of Napoleonic power, how it was established, elaborated, and extended. As his secondary aim, Ellis tries to confront the historiographical debates of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In spite of Ellis's lucid treatment, the limitations of the series and of its fundamental assumptions are clearly apparent. They do not permit the author to give a full analysis of the social context in which Napoleonic power operated, either in France or in Europe as a whole.

Considering this emphasis on power, Ellis tells us surprisingly little about the actual *seizure* of power. There is a very sketchy account of the coup of *brumaire*, in which Lucien Bonaparte rather misleadingly "persuades" the deputies to disperse (p. 32). It might be more exact to say that Lucien "persuaded" the soldiers to throw the deputies out. A student wanting to find out why Bonaparte came to power in the first place will not get much of an answer from this book.

Ellis's main argument really emerges from the dialogue he conducts throughout his book with Stuart Woolf. In *Napoleon's Integration of Europe*, Woolf tended to see imperial expansion as a modernising force, the extension of a French vision of rational administration

by an increasingly professional bureaucracy promoted by the Napoleonic state. Although Woolf was perfectly well aware of local resistance to the imposition of any universal plan of integration–and had no illusions about its many local adaptations–he nevertheless discussed the Empire in terms of a coherent "Napoleonic Project." Ellis is too much of an empiricist to be comfortable with this interpretation (and this is where Richard Cobb's legacy is apparent). For Ellis, there was no preconceived imperial plan. Instead, he argues, the Empire was improvised according to military circumstances and political opportunity. "What made Napoleonic imperialism possible," he writes, "was its gradualism" (p. 6), and again, "the social accretions of Empire did not appear all at once, like a crop of mushrooms overnight; they came in staggered phases, which were themselves determined by the chronology of war" (pp. 136-37).

This simple idea, however, is not fully developed. Ellis even tends to betray his own thesis by acknowledging the Code Napoleon as ready-made for global export, and by inviting us to see the Continental Blockade as a system or a "market design" (pp. 108-10). But he views the Empire as a "spoils system", in which French exactions and institutionalised plunder undermined the egalitarian potential of social reforms. The internal contradictions of the Empire are well-exposed here by the author.

Ellis's emphasis on the gradual evolution of imperial power cries out for a chronological approach. But Ellis takes a thematic approach, thus blurring and telescoping chronological developments and weakening his own thesis. In the end his account gives us little clear sense of development from Consulate to Empire, especially within France itself.

This book has much to offer on the administrative, fiscal, and economic history of the period. As we might expect from a leading authority on the subject, there is a useful and concise section on the Continental Blockade itself. Ellis emphasises the development of Napoleon's personal authority right from the beginning of his career. Given this personalisation of authority, he argues, the republicanism of the Consulate was a sham.

The discussion of power and imperial expansion lacks a social dimension, which may partly at least be a fault of the *Profiles in Power* series. There are barely two pages on the overall social impact of the Empire on the conquered territories (pp. 140-41). Where are the peasants in this story? As usual, they are only discussed in the predictable context of resistance to conscription. The commercial and industrial classes hardly make an appearance in their own right, either. Napoleonic history is a notoriously "macho" subject, but little attempt is made here to compensate for this *defaut*. Ellis does not discuss power and its impact in gender terms, except for the routine walk-on performance by Germaine de Stael, mistress of an important political salon during the revolution and then an influential novelist. This is history from above–Ellis is only interested in the Empire's social impact as far as it affected the nobility, seen through the eyes of the La Tour du Pin family.

One chapter discusses the historiography of the Napoleonic legend, but unfortunately Ellis only takes us up to the Second World War. He thus deprives the reader of a potentially stimulating discussion of J. M. Thompson, Francois Crouzet, Louis Bergeron, Francois Furet, Jean Tulard, and others who have pushed aside the dated work of Peter Geyl and Felix Markham.

Ellis uses words like "proleptic," "irenic," "eschewed" and "Pyrrhic" and cites an erudite reference to Glaucon, suggesting that he has not thought hard enough about the vocabulary most likely to succeed in an undergraduate text. And he overuses the word "nicely"–what does it mean?

Overall, we are indebted to Ellis for providing two clear and concise chapters summarising the reforms of the Consulate, and the territorial expansion of the Empire. The concluding pages of this book, too, are admirably short and sharp. The rest is a disappointment, for two main reasons: because we need to understand the exercise of power in a fuller social context, and because Woolf's account remains for me denser, more solidly developed, and therefore more convincing.

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