

Review

Pierre Horn, *Le défi de l'enracinement napoléonien entre Rhin et Meuse. L'opinion publique dans les départements de la Roër, de l'Ourthe, des Forêts et de la Moselle*, Berlin, De Gruyter, 2017, 474 pp. ISBN 978-3-11-041545-3.

Bart Verheijen, *Nederland onder Napoleon. Partijstrijd en natievorming 1801-1813*, Nijmegen, Van Tilt, 2017, 432 pp. ISBN 978-9-460-04301-7.

Kees Schaapveld, *Bestuur en bestuurders van Nedermaas, 1794-1814. Met bijzondere aandacht voor het lokale bestuur in het kanton Wittem/Gulpen*, Hilversum, Verloren, 2017, 398 pp. ISBN 978-9-087-04689-7.

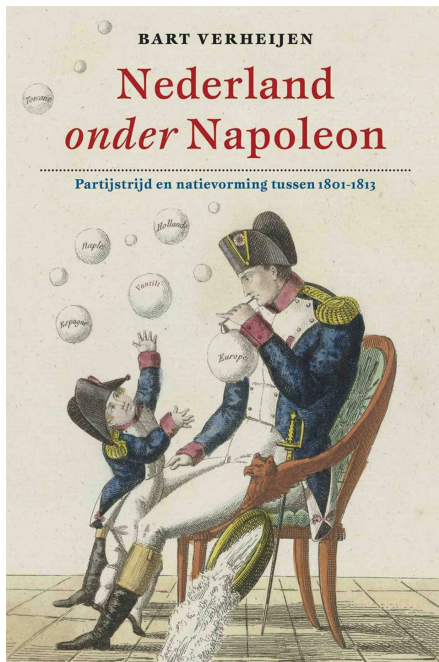
Historians have long studied Napoleonic Europe through the eyes of the central government in Paris. Basing themselves on records from the *Archives nationales* in Paris, they assumed that the annexed areas, such as the present-day Low Countries, simply accepted French rule unconditionally. This is mostly due to the overwhelming emphasis by traditional historians on Bonaparte's personality, and on his military campaigns. Since the 1990s, however, the perspective on the history of the Napoleonic empire has changed significantly. It has become increasingly clear that the French regime had to proceed differently in each of the annexed parts of the Empire. Recent research has devoted more attention to the intrinsic difficulties associated with the imposition of a uniform Napoleonic system on Europe and shifted attention away from Emperor Napoleon and metropolitan France. Until quite recently, however, relatively little attention was given to the Low Countries. It was very welcome therefore that in 2017 three new books were published, all doctoral dissertations that deal with the present-day Netherlands, Belgium, Luxemburg, and the German border regions.

Each of the three books under review here can be situated in the 'European turn' in Napoleonic studies which was pioneered by Stuart Woolf. Woolf, in his ground-breaking study *Napoleon's integration of Europe* (1991), explored Napoleonic integration attempts by looking at the responses of local communities to French measures. It was extremely difficult for the Napoleonic administration to immediately create support for the formation of a new modern state without taking into account local circumstances and wishes. For the French, 'the price of collaboration was', in Woolf's words, 'the acceptance of limits'. Woolf criticized the tendency of historians to see '1814-1815' as a divide in European history. He suggested that the success of the Napoleonic model can best be evaluated *after* Napoleon's disappearance. This, indeed, is what the American historian Isser Woloch did

in his book *The New Regime* (1995), which carried the study of the transformation of state and society into the early years of the Restoration, in order to underscore the continuities. Woloch also advocated a change from the 'top-down' to the 'bottom-up' perspective. In *Napoleon and his collaborators* (2002), Woloch shifted attention from Napoleon to the people around him, arguing that the collaborators were quite influential and not necessarily loyal supporters of Bonaparte. Oxford historian Michael Broers, author of books such as *Europe under Napoleon* (1996) and *Europe after Napoleon* (1996) underlined the rigid nature, or authoritarian nature, of French politics, which severely hindered imperial citizens. Broers did not deny the pragmatism of Napoleonic officials stressed by Woolf and to a lesser extent by Woloch, but suggested that it was in fact the repressive forces, such as the military and the police, where power really lay. These men were hardly concerned with appeasing and enlightening the newly conquered European subjects. According to him the Napoleonic Empire was arguably more 'European' than 'French': for instance, the Rhineland was better integrated than the peripheral French regions like the Vendée.

As for the Netherlands, for a long time its history in the Napoleonic period was ignored as being of little relevance. In Dutch historiography, the years of Napoleonic rule were long considered a foreign episode which was not to be mentioned – a tendency which can be traced back to the early nineteenth century, as has been shown by Matthijs Lok in his *Windvanen* (2009). National-orientated historians focused on the House of Orange and its alliance with national history. The Napoleonic period was supposed to be no more than a prologue to the establishment of the Dutch nation-state. This one-dimensional image slowly changed in the course of the twentieth century. Very essential has been *De Adelaar en het Lam* (*The Eagle and the Lamb*, 2000) by Johan Joor. In this book Joor made clear that Dutch inhabitants had not been passive victims of the French, but challenged the Napoleonic rule. They had been 'Lambs' – in the sense that the protests were traditional, local and hardly 'nationalistic' – but these protests successfully managed to destabilize the regime. According to Joor, the reason that previous historians neglected these struggles was because they had only looked for conflicts that were explicitly pro-Orange and anti-French: in other words, conflicts that could be interpreted as a prelude to the nineteenth-century nation-state. As for the Dutch case, there is much debate on the existence of a Dutch national identity in the early 1800s. Recently, Lotte Jensen (following many earlier leads by Niek van Sas) has worked on the Dutch resistance literature between 1806 and 1813, and its function within the development of Dutch national thought. In *Verzet tegen Napoleon* she states that certain forms of opposition did in fact contribute to the shaping of Dutch national consciousness under Napoleon. She argues that from a cultural and literary perspective, protest was embedded in a national discourse. Anti-French propaganda literature was read nationally and was used to celebrate the superiority of the Dutch nation, often referring to Dutch history.

Bart Verheijen's book *Nederland onder Napoleon* echoes the title of the above-mentioned work by Michael Broers. Verheijen raises the question to what extent the Revolutionary and Napoleonic era affected political-cultural identity formation in the Northern Netherlands. His sources include resistance literature in the broadest sense of the word, for instance pamphlets, songs, and caricatures, to challenge the idea that political discussions in the late Batavian Republic were not very dynamic; in fact, he argues, fear for the demise of the



Republic fuelled public debate. Verheijen discerns three groups that actively contributed to public debate: the ‘republicans’, ardent revolutionaries, the ‘moderates’, more pragmatic revolutionaries, and lastly the Orangists who remained loyal to the former Stadholder. Interestingly, Verheijen shows that the Orangist party was not altogether silent but actively contributed to public debate. Meanwhile Napoleon’s not very democratic rise to power sparked discussions on popular sovereignty and the legitimacy of a single head of state. The ascendance of Louis Bonaparte was one of the last episodes of true open political debate. The incongruity of republicanism and hereditary rule was stressed, as well as the foreignness of King Louis. As freedom of the press dwindled, other forms of political oppositions became important, such as clandestine pamphlets, and even handwritten *libelles* which were posted on public buildings.

The chapters on the years of the Netherlands as *pays réunies* provide a good insight into the workings of the Napoleonic regime. The conflicts within the state apparatus show the clashes between different views on how to run a conquered territory. Verheijen also shows that Frenchmen were not necessarily staunch supporters of the Emperor, nor was there a general collaboration between them. Conversely, Dutchmen were certainly not all anti-French or preoccupied with national feelings. Lines were blurred. Very original is Verheijen’s research on anti-French protest songs, uncovered in Napoleonic police archives, which could easily be distributed as a way to circumvent the strict censorship. Verheijen’s analyses show how such unknown sources eventually encouraged reconciliation between the different parties, and created a ‘new style Orangism’ early in 1813, which would serve as basis for the uprisings of 1813. Verheijen does not provide a definitive answer to the question of why partisanship did not resurface as soon as that French had left. It seems unlikely that mere fondness of the Prince of Orange, who was not generally known for his likeability, legitimized the new monarchy. Perhaps Napoleon’s return from Elba really colored nineteenth-century national discourse Orange; Verheijen conclusions certainly are an incentive for future research along these lines.

Pierre Horn published *Le défi de l’enracinement napoléonien entre Rhin et Meuse*, in which he deals with similar questions as Verheijen. He focuses on ‘public opinion’, and engages with scholarship on this topic. But primarily, Horn investigates the implementation of French rule in the departments of present-day eastern Belgium, Luxemburg, and the western part of the Rhineland. Horn raises the question to what extent the Napoleonic regime managed to root in these annexed territories, roughly situated between the Rhine

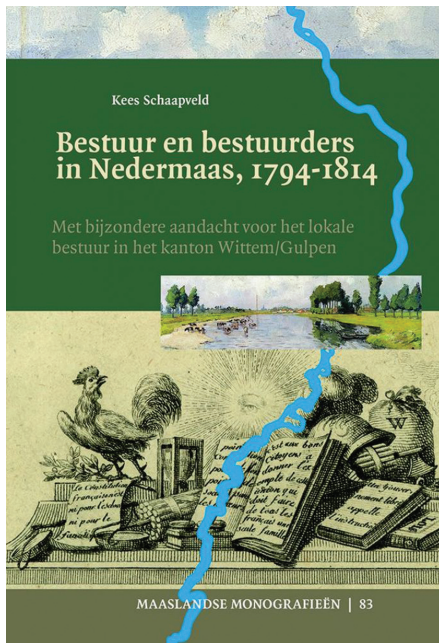


and Meuse, which were incorporated in the years 1795-1798. Horn's ambitions are transnational, or transregional if you will. He presents his book as a work of *histoire croisée*, and discusses many other theoretical and historiographical issues. The book is well documented, nuanced, and based on archival sources from archives in four countries. Horn sees a considerable cultural gap between the French authorities and the local population. Officials from old France hardly made any effort to acquaint themselves with local customs. This 'arrogance', however, did not necessarily contribute to the formation of German national identities. There was, in general, a mutual non-acceptance. However, especially lower French officials were less inflexible and the local elites were willing to intermarry with Frenchmen.

Like Verheijen, Horn discusses the implementation and reception of imperial rule, which could facilitate novelties such as conscription. Conscription particularly inspired much resistance and led to a grow-

ing distrust among the population. However, Horn stresses that it is not possible to paint a uniform picture of the acceptance of French state building. The final part of the book focuses on the increasing exhaustion of the *pays réunies* and the intertwined eventual fall of the regime. According to Horn, the French suffered from strategic blindness. He stresses that they were inflexible in the final years of French rule and did not want or were unable to respond adequately to the new challenges. The role of public opinion is discussed in detail. Anti-French feelings were certainly rife among the population, but, as Horn underscores many times in his book, such feelings were not xenophobic. The French who were loyal to the Empire were looked down upon, based on the widespread unease with Napoleonic measures in the years before, and faced social discrimination more than anything else.

Whereas Verheijen's book is national in scope, and Horn takes a transregional approach, Kees Schaapveld has written a local-historical study, *Bestuur en bestuurders van Nedermaas, 1794-1814*. Such a local approach is urgently needed, since it was at a local level that clashes occurred between the centralist ambitions of the Napoleonic state and the needs of the local communities. Schaapveld's focus is on the French system of administration in the department of Nedermaas (*Département de la Meuse-Inférieure*). In the first half of his book, Schaapveld analyses the introduction and workings of French administration, specifically the local administrative unit of the canton. He shows how the fragmented Old Regime practises had to make way for a more uniform system. The local



administrative elite (which partly remained in power under the French, but was also enlarged with revolutionaries) struggled to align local and national interests. Problematic was the fact that before Napoleon's rise to power in 1799 there had been many reforms in France proper, which meant that the *départements réunies* also had to adapt to new circumstances. The administrative landmark of 28 *pluviôse* year VIII (17 February 1800) – essentially the birth of the modern French territorial administration – brought rest and thus support from local notables. Schaapveld shows how after the implosion of the Napoleonic empire, former Napoleonic administrators pursued new careers, either in the Netherlands, Prussia, or elsewhere.

In the second half of his book, Schaapveld, much like Pierre Horn, analyses various specific aspects of the administration, notably taxes, conscription, and the relations

between *citoyens* and *administrés*. He shows the consequences of the relatively heavy and effective French taxation. Likewise, the French administrative system was a means to successfully impose conscription, whether administrators from local descent liked it or not. Although the French were unloved, there was little resistance among the population, not least because of the Napoleonic police apparatus. Only a part of the small elite vehemently associated itself with the regime. A very interesting element of Schaapveld's study is his prosopographical research. He has reconstructed the careers and backgrounds of the regional administrators. For instance, he gives valuable information on their family networks, profession, capital, and their attitude towards the regime. Further systematic elaboration of this work would be a valuable contribution to future research. It has to be noted that both Schaapveld's and Horn's book can be considered complements to Michael Rowe's *From Reich to State* (2003), which deals with the French-German Rhineland. Rowe has analysed Napoleon's policy of *raillement*, the practice of attracting the elite. Schaapveld makes a brief comparison with Meuse-Inférieure, and Horn frequently refers to Rowe as well. In sum, Schaapveld's is a well-documented study and provides much detailed information on the regional developments; it will certainly serve as a starting-point for many more case studies.

All three works reviewed here deepen our knowledge of Napoleonic Europe and (implicitly or not) engage with larger debates within so-called 'New Napoleonic History' pioneered by historians like Stuart Woolf. Bart Verheijen's book, by taking political debate as a point of departure, deepens the insights of Johan Joor and Lotte Jensen, linking, for instance, regional rural upheaval concerning national taxes to national thought

of writers and poets. Pierre Horn, as a transnational scholar, shows how in a more fragmented political landscape populations struggled with the regime and the formation of local, regional, or even national identities. Kees Schaapsveld's findings are quite similar on an even smaller scale.

Significantly, all books interrogate the processes of state formation and nation building, and they all show that (notwithstanding regional differences) French state formation was rather successful, for instance in developing administrative, constitutional, and policing structures, but that these were certainly not uncontested. Furthermore, all authors make clear that the Napoleonic period stimulated new processes of identity formation, but the local, regional, and national levels of identity formation were not unproblematic in the Low Countries. This has also been argued by historians studying other parts of Napoleonic Europe. In most European cases there have been strong links between the emergence of the nation-state, and the appraisal of the Napoleonic experience. New studies show that in many European areas broader cultural identities were stimulated. It often depends on the source material, and the disciplinary context, which elements are accentuated, and researchers from different disciplines should carefully read each other's work. Without a doubt, further international discussions will contribute to a more transnational understanding of the (legacy of) the Napoleonic period, both in the Low Countries and in other parts of Europe.

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