

Michael Rowe, *From Reich to State: The Rhineland in the Revolutionary Age, 1780-1830*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003. xi + 331 pp. Maps, bibliography, and index. \$65.00 U.S. (cl). ISBN 0-521-82443-5.

Review by Rafe Blaufarb, Auburn University.

Michael Rowe's *From Reich to State* is a work of broad scope that crosses sacrosanct chronological frontiers and navigates two national historiographies that have rarely been mastered by a single individual. Of the book's two principal concerns, borderlands and transitions, the latter issue receives the lion's share of attention. [1] Examining culture, politics, society, economy, and law and institutions in the Rhineland across the revolutionary era, it discovers a rich vein of continuity—especially a respect for the rule of law—running through the changing fabric of Rhenish public life. For French historians, perhaps the book's most interesting contention is that the transformations wrought by Napoleon during the brief period when the Rhineland was part of the French Empire actually helped revive the region's traditional civic culture, thus affording it the means of moderating Prussian authority after 1815.

From Reich to State contributes to three scholarly debates. The first concerns the role assigned to the old Reich in the historiography of modern Germany. Aligning himself with those scholars who reject viewing its eighteenth-century history solely in terms of Prussia's rise to power, Rowe calls for the "rehabilitation of the Reich" (p. 6). He persuasively argues that its distinctive legal and political institutions—notably the system of imperial justice with its appellate courts at Wetzlar (*Reichskammergericht*) and Vienna (*Reichshofrat*), representative estates (*Landstände*), and republican municipal traditions—all played a role in shaping German liberalism. The second debate with which Rowe engages concerns the nature of Napoleonic rule. Against the image of the imperial state as a bureaucratic (and sometimes brutal) leviathan, he asserts that Napoleon ruled mainly in a pragmatic fashion, relying on "negotiation and adaptation" and the mobilization of "dominant elements and traditions within a locality" to govern his Empire (p. 8). Although Napoleon imposed on the Rhineland a new institutional and legal framework, this actually encouraged the "reinvigoration of practices, traditions, and, more subtly, *mentalités* commonly associated with the old order" (p. 9). The Napoleonic legacy proved remarkably durable in the Rhineland, Rowe argues, because it was "in harmony with what went before" (p. 9). Finally, Rowe enters the fray over the question of the trajectory of Germany's nineteenth-century political development. Although he avoids evoking directly the vast scholarship on Germany's purported *Sonderweg*, his conclusion—that the traditional civic values of the Rhenish town burghers (*Städtbürgertum*) were sufficiently robust and adaptable to contribute to early German liberalism—implies a rejection of the notion of a German special path. Rowe's interventions in these three debates fuse nicely to produce a coherent, overall argument: that, in the midst of dramatic changes, underlying continuity in Rhenish political culture helped provide a vigorous alternative to Prussian authoritarianism.

After a concise introduction clearly situating his work in the context of these three debates, Rowe begins by describing the "distinct if diverse historico-cultural space" of the Rhineland on the eve of the French Revolution (p. 13). Its political geography was highly fragmented, with a patchwork of ecclesiastical electorates, imperial cities (*Reichsstädte*), and residence cities (*Residenzstädte*), as well as distinct Habsburg, Hohenzollern, and Wittelsbach holdings. These various entities were all governed by "conventions that dated back centuries," ensuring a bewildering degree of institutional variability between them and often producing intricate jurisdictional conflicts (p. 45). Contemporaries often identified this administrative confusion, coupled with the persistence of "baroque religiosity" in the Rhineland (sometimes derided as *die Pfaffengasse*, "the priests' alley"), as the cause of the region's backwardness and stagnation (p. 21). Rowe finds instead that fragmentation not only mitigated the worst kinds of religious discrimination, but also encouraged economic interdependence and fostered a

rich civic life. Open to new intellectual currents, the region was fertile ground for the Enlightenment, although Rowe makes the interesting observation that in the Rhineland it was "primarily as a religious reform movement motivated partly by an inferiority complex vis-à-vis Protestant Germany" (p. 45). To a great extent, however, conflict between the enlightened and the orthodox concealed much older disputes--pitting "magistracies against burghers, and princes against estates"--that "revolved around a myriad of particular issues that varied in detail from locality to locality" (p. 46). On the eve of the Revolution, the Rhineland may have exuded a faintly "medieval" air, but it was hardly a region in stasis.

In 1792, French armies burst into the Rhineland. Rowe breaks the period of invasion and occupation into four phases. The first, from autumn 1792 to spring 1793, centered on the French attempt to set up the so-called "Republic of Mainz." This brief experiment in exporting revolution failed dismally, undermined by the lack of support it received from all but a few local radicals and then crushed militarily by the Coalition. The second phase, lasting from the French reoccupation of the Rhineland in 1794 until early 1797, saw the armies of the Republic return not as liberators, but as exploiters. During these years, the Rhineland was systematically pillaged by the French army, which generated a great deal of bad feeling on both sides. The third phase began in March 1797 when General Lazare Hoche took command of the region. Disgusted at the inefficiency of the prevailing *ad hoc* administrative arrangements, Hoche sought improvement through the wholesale reintroduction of old regime personnel and institutions. This effort, however, was doomed to failure, because the Rhenish old regime had never existed in a vacuum, but had been embedded in the larger framework of the Reich. The coup of 18 Fructidor ended this ill-conceived experiment. The fourth phase saw the beginnings of annexation, with the Rhineland divided into four new departments (the Roër, Rhin-et-Moselle, Sarre, and Mont-Tonnerre), stripped of its old regime administrative structures, and subjected to a succession of *commissaires*. Throughout these transitions, the inhabitants of the Rhineland proved equally unreceptive to both revolution and counterrevolution. If there were few true adherents of French-style republicanism, so too were there few supporters of the *émigrés*. With their long tradition of legality, moderation, and consensual rule, Rowe argues, Rhinelanders did not see things in terms of a choice between revolution and counterrevolution, but rather between their own concept of the *Rechtsstaat* and the arbitrariness of both revolutionaries and princes.

In the book's five core chapters (4-8), Rowe discusses the Napoleonic impact on the Rhineland. Throughout, both tone and argument are highly revisionist. Far from instituting a military dictatorship, Rowe demonstrates, Napoleon ended the tyranny of generals that had characterized the republican occupation of the 1790s and, through a new emphasis on official ceremonial and etiquette, gradually forced the soldiers to accept the primacy of civilian authority. And far from inaugurating a period of arbitrary rule, he revived the rule of law that Rhinelanders had so cherished under the old regime by introducing the Code Napoléon and trial by jury. These are just some of the most significant ways that Napoleonic rule encouraged the revitalization of Rhenish civic tradition. Napoleon's efforts to consolidate a class of notables, the so-called *masses de granit*, generally allowed traditional municipal elites to regain their former stature (p. 114). Despite the unprecedented demands of the state, particularly in the form of conscription, the social cohesion of communities remained intact and, in some cases, emerged strengthened. At no point did the imperial government succeed in breaking through the crust of political and social intermediaries to reach society directly. Indeed, as Rowe is just the latest to point out, Napoleonic government was characterized by "dependence upon local elites" and a readiness to adapt existing institutions to its own ends (p. 114). For their part, Rhenish elites found that Napoleonic innovations, such as the much-scorned electoral colleges, actually provided them with a serviceable instrument for advancing their own, traditional ends, namely those of *Stadt* and *Land* (p. 115). Even the Continental System, Rowe argues, gave the economy of the Rhineland a shot in the arm by shielding nascent local manufacturing from English competition and creating a context in which lucrative smuggling could take place. Although the imperial regime was certainly not loved, as evidenced by the withdrawal of support for it after 1813, its legacy--particularly in the legal realm--was highly appreciated and not only by Rhinelanders. In 1815-16, the officials appointed by the victorious

allies to head the region's interim administration recommended to their masters retention of the Napoleonic legal codes and institutions. One of Prussia's representatives, Johann August Sack, even recommended transferring them eastward to the heartland of the kingdom where he hoped they could help re-energize the moribund national regeneration briefly sparked by resistance to imperial domination (p. 242). Although this did not happen, the Rhineland was able to maintain its Napoleonic legal regime and deploy it successfully against arbitrary Prussian decisions. The most famous Rhinelander to find shelter behind the rampart of the Code Napoléon and the institution of jury trial was the young journalist Karl Marx, twice acquitted of charges of sedition (p. 285).

A key question that emerges from Rowe's treatment of Napoleonic rule and its legacy under the Prussian monarchy is that of national identity. To what extent did the Grand Empire succeed in making the Rhineland French? During the 1790s, when the French Republic viewed the occupied Rhineland as little more than a source of supply and plunder, it made no efforts whatsoever in this regard. It was only in 1798, when the decision was taken to absorb the Rhineland into France, that a policy of "Frenchification" was officially adopted. Characteristically, its centerpiece was the decision to make French the official language of the four new departments. But Napoleon, ever the pragmatist, made only sporadic (and poorly-funded) efforts to implement this policy. Of more interest to him was acculturation and *ralliement* of the elites through education, notably through the *lycées* and *écoles spéciales*. But Rhenish elites, with their memories of revolutionary anti-clericalism, indigenous university tradition, and distaste for the more narrowly vocational (if not frankly military) overtones of the new Napoleonic institutions, showed little interest in them, preferring instead to send their sons to study in Germany or Austria. Other Napoleonic initiatives, such as harnessing local masonry to the imperial cult, founding military colonies, or encouraging marriages between demobilized veterans and local women, all failed to have decisive impact. Rhinelanders, Rowe concludes, "were not transformed into Frenchmen" (p. 156). This does not mean, however, that they saw themselves as Germans. To the extent that they identified themselves with any larger political entity, it was the Reich and the Habsburg dynasty (at least for Catholics) (p. 124). But for most Rhinelanders throughout the period, Rowe suggests "loyalties to locality and confession remained paramount" (p. 157).

Rowe is right to question the salience of both French and German identities to Rhinelanders between 1780 and 1830. But his critical approach to the problem of identity does not go far enough. Perhaps the most fundamental question in this regard goes unasked in *From Reich to State*: when did the inhabitants of the dozens of cities, electorates, duchies, and other entities that straddled the Rhine River come to see themselves as belonging to a territorial whole and forming a distinct cultural unit? When did they begin to view themselves as Rhinelanders? Given the pronounced political and cultural diversity of the region, the eventual emergence of such an identity cannot be taken for granted. To give just one example of political fragmentation, the Roër department alone was formed by consolidating thirty-two distinct territorial entities (p. 116). Culturally, the region was profoundly fractured not only by religious differences between Catholics, Lutherans, Calvinists, Jews, and Mennonites, but also by linguistic variation. A "plethora of local *patois*" was found throughout the region, and even individual towns were divided by language. In the northern reaches, near Belgium, the social elite spoke Dutch while the majority spoke Walloon or a Liègeois dialect. In Aachen, Walloon was commonly heard, although the town's elite spoke French (p. 117). In a footnote on page 43, Rowe mentions that it was only in the 1780s that the word "Rhineland" began to be used to designate collectively the inhabitants of the region. Given that the emergence of this notion coincided precisely with the period under investigation in the work, it is surprising that no further attention is given to it. The existence of the Rhineland as a coherent entity and Rhinelanders as a self-conscious people are both taken for granted throughout the rest of the book.

This is particularly problematic, given Rowe's focus on the transitions of the revolutionary age, since the "Rhineland" was clearly not the framework in which those transitions were experienced. The great changes he considers were primarily political, institutional, and legal, yet not until annexation by

France did the Rhineland have any political, institutional, or legal unity. Because each Rhenish entity had its own constitution, the same revolutionary transformation could produce quite different effects from locality to locality. Rowe himself provides a telling illustration of this in his comparison of how the Napoleonic attempt to consolidate a *notabilité* defined by wealth and talent affected urban elites in Cologne and Aachen. In Cologne, the city's old regime institutions had long "provided mechanisms whereby newcomers in possession of wealth and talent could rise to prominence within the city." As a result, Napoleonic social initiatives merely confirmed the existing social order. In old regime Aachen, however, "a variety of institutional barriers prevented the perfect translation of wealth and talent into political power." There "Napoleonic government resulted in significant modifications to the elite" (p. 114). This is just one example of how unique local contexts determined what impact the major revolutionary transformations would have. These contexts were not common to the Rhineland, but rather existed only within more tightly circumscribed polities. Their distinctive institutions, laws, social configurations, and histories defined the framework within which the revolutionary drama would unfold. In taking as its subject the entire Rhineland, Rowe's account loses in specificity, texture, and precision what it gains in geographical breadth.

NOTES

[1] In this regard, a surprising absence from the book's bibliography is Peter Sahlins, *Boundaries: The Making of France and Spain in the Pyrenees* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989).

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