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**Nicolas Mariot**, *Bains de foule: Les voyages présidentiels en province, 1888-2002*. Paris: Éditions Belin, 2006. 352 pp. Figures, notes and index. €24.00 (pb). ISSN 1270-914-X, ISBN 2-7011-4452-3.

Review by Paul Smith, University of Nottingham.

Presidential visits to provinces seem so much part of French political practice that one almost forgets that they had a beginning. It was Sadi Carnot, who became the fourth president of the Third Republic in 1888, who instituted the practice when he replaced the discredited Jules Grévy and the regime was suffering from attacks from Radicals, monarchists, and Boulangists. Only a cynic would suggest that Carnot, victim of an assassin's knife during an official visit to Lyon in 1894, might have been better advised to stay at home: bad things happen, despite the best risk assessment. And despite Carnot's demise, his successors under three different republics have carried on the tradition.

For his study, Mariot has opted not to analyse presidential visits by means of a chronological narrative, choosing instead to tackle a range of themes that recur (or not) across a detailed study of tours within the prescribed timeframe. This means, of course, that he is not always comparing like with like and the reader might be permitted to ask if a tour by Carnot in 1890, Doumergue in 1927 or Coty in 1954, can really be compared to de Gaulle in 1965, or Mitterrand in 1982? Mariot insists they can, or rather does not confront the argument very much, because his interest is in laying bare the organisation, execution, and the reporting of the visit from anthropological, ethnographic, and sociological perspectives. Political history is not Mariot's concern, though political culture certainly is. So, colleagues looking for a thorough account of provincial tours by the presidents of the Third Republic will have to look elsewhere, or to extract the nuggets Mariot offers them. If they take the time, they will not be disappointed. There is a particularly appealing photograph of Albert Lebrun, top hat, morning coat and all, dancing a *ronde* with a group of children at a Besançon sanatorium (p. 40) that certainly recast my mental image of the last president of the Third Republic. Details of tours by Millerand, Doumergue, or Coty (who emerges in a very different light to the traditional picture) add new dimensions to men whose time at the Elysée Palace has not always received the warmest of reviews. Mariot has, moreover, gone to the lengths of making available via a website an extensive range of source materials that he has used and marking the relevant sections and entries in his book with an asterisk.[1]

Mariot has divided the main body of his work into two parts: "Théologie du voyage: les mécanismes psychologiques d'un succès annoncé" and "Liturgie des visites: les conduites acclamatives d'un contexte de liesse." The first focuses largely on the preparation of tours within the Elysée Palace, from the negotiation of itineraries to the logistics of moving the presidential caravanserai around the country and management of the officially accredited press corps whose job it was to loyally report a triumphant tour—the "succès annoncé." Organisation of any tour fell under the remit of the president's *secrétaire général militaire*, working in collaboration with the protocol service and liaising with prefects and sub-prefects and local *élus* to devise an itinerary that satisfied requirements on both sides: on the one, the presence of a good sized and enthusiastic crowd, on the other, a visit to local sites and presidential greeting for worthies and notables, as well as waving to the masses. One of Mariot's sub-themes is the rapidity with which a template for presidential visits was established. Indeed, he has uncovered a marked reluctance on the part of Elysée officials and their local interlocutors to depart from a successful formula once it had been road-tested. Repeatedly, Mariot shows, a presidential visit to a particular locale would follow the itinerary established by a predecessor (or even by the same president) on an earlier occasion. So, for

example, if the President is in the Pas-de-Calais and this is Boulogne-sur-Mer, it must be Friday. (Actually, until de Gaulle's time, tours very often revolved around a Sunday, to ensure a turn out.) Once the itinerary had been agreed, it was up to the press corps to deliver the right message. And they seldom failed to report that President X had been enthusiastically cheered all along the route, at every stop and even at quite a few places where he did not stop. Now, the comfortable complicity of Elysée staff and the press corps in presenting President X's visit as a success would be an obvious target for enquiry. But Mariot goes further, arguing that the presence of an enthusiastic crowd does not necessarily demonstrate that President X was well-loved. This is the main focus of part two--the "contexte de liesse."

In part two Mariot switches from the Elysian centre to the periphery, the province or provinces to be visited and the attempts of local officials and *élus* to ensure a successful visit, not just for the President but for themselves as well. And as he points out, all manner of inducements were made to entice citizens onto the streets to hail their chief, ranging from days off work or school, to making the visit part of a two- or even three-day *fête*. Prefects and notables spared no effort to ensure a good show for both the President and the public. Itineraries would be carefully adjusted to visit districts that were well populated, with local committees set up to organise street decorations and other jollities. At the same time, the municipality would arrange such entertainments as a fireworks display, a torch lit parade, a tattoo or a street ball (or even balls), either especially for the visit or in fitting the tour into existing festivities (such as the *fête de Jeanne d'Arc* at Orléans).

In these conditions, Mariot argues that it is inevitable that the crowds should come and that they should shout "Vive la République", "Vive Carnot" and sing the Marseillaise. Imputing to these cries the manifestation of a sincere attachment either to the person of the president, to his office or even to the Republic, argues Mariot, is a risky business. The presidential passage was often merely a prelude or a pretext, usually followed by something rather more Rabelaisian--once the president had moved on of course, or was tucked up in the presidential bed. And if that does not guarantee a good turn out, a day off and a delivery of tricolours to every school in each commune the presidential cavalcade will be travelling through should do the trick. Mariot has even uncovered evidence of complaints of schoolchildren, and therefore their teachers too, being mobilised to cheer for the president on a Sunday without a day off in lieu. And if the children did not cheer loudly enough, the teacher might well exhort them to renewed efforts. Nowadays, of course, party militants rather than school children fulfil the "rent-a-crowd" role, but then, as Mariot underlines, the function and the form of presidential visits have profoundly changed since the 1970s. Television has brought the president into every living room in the country every evening, either officially on the news or through *Les Guignols* on Canal Plus, reducing the sense of distance between head of state and ordinary citizen. Crowds still come out to see the president, but not in the same number. And with Chirac in particular, the urge for contact with the people has led to a *banalisation* of the provincial tour.

Generally, Mariot handles his material with great skill and is not afraid--on the contrary--to take on others who have ploughed this furrow, or the one next to it. There is a lively engagement throughout with the work of Alain Corbin, Maurice Agulhon, Olivier Ihl, and Sudhir Hazareesingh, to say nothing of Durkheim, Mauss, and Wittgenstein. Gustave Le Bon, author of *La psychologie des foules* (1895) would have given us a full house. Chapter three, "L'état d'esprit prêté aux foules", contains a vigorous engagement with Ihl and, in particular Hazareesingh's work *The Saint-Napoléon*, which Mariot suggests is rather too ready to accept at face value official accounts of popular jubilation under the Second Empire.[2] This seems an unlikely assertion and from what I recall of Hazareesingh's work, both he and Mariot are really pushing in the same direction, implying that subjects/citizens would have turned up and cheered for anyone given the right inducements to do so. Mona Ozouf is also taken to task for buying rather too readily into accounts of popular acclamation of the Republic or lusty singing of the Marseillaise as demonstrable proof of a bygone age of more serious political engagement by ordinary citizens (p. 310). And having personally stood on the Avenue des Champs-Élysées on 14th July 1989, as

Jessye Norman led us through the nth reprise of “Aux armes citoyens...”, I have some sympathy with Mariot’s view. We turned up for the parade, we sang until we were hoarse because Jessye did and then we watched the fireworks. It did not make us republicans, our noise was not patriotic and it did not signal that we had accepted the Revolution *en bloc*. Beware, Mariot warns us, of over-intellectualising *la fête* or over-interpreting the use of symbols. The latter only matter if everyone knows what they mean: and most citizens do not.

*Bains de foule* is not without its problems. Given Mariot’s description of the press corps’ willingness to depict every visit as a triumph, this reviewer was a little disappointed not to find any reference to some noticeably controversial tours. For example, in 1896, as the conflict between Léon Bourgeois’ government and the Senate was reaching its height, the *président du conseil* chose, very deliberately, to join President Félix Faure on his visit to the Côte-d’Azur, where the Marseille municipal council was squarely behind the government. At both Marseille and Cannes there were cries of “Vive Bourgeois” and “A bas le Sénat”, to say nothing of a forthright attack on the Senate by the mayor of Marseille (and yes, future senator) Simeon Flaissières. Now, Faure’s role in the crisis was far from insignificant. Exasperated by the persistent inability of the Chamber elected in 1893 to find its majority, Faure decided to test the Radicals and appointed Bourgeois, knowing full well that his government would meet unbreakable resistance to its programme in the Senate. So the visit took on a highly charged political meaning and various incidents almost led to an interpellation in the upper house.[3] And as for de Gaulle, his visits to the Nord-Pas-de-Calais in early 1966 (the first after his re-election) and to Brittany in spring 1969 (when he announced the referendum on the Senate and regional reform) were generally accounted as damp squibs at best. It was not all *vivats*, *liesse* and *retraites aux flambeaux* and enthusiastic press write-ups. There are some infelicities too. There seems to be suggestion on page 87 that Paul Doumer was victim of the same assassin as King Alexander of Yugoslavia at Marseille in 1934: that was Louis Barthou. Doumer was assassinated two years earlier, while opening a book fair in Paris. It is also highly unlikely, as is suggested on page 92, that Georges Pompidou attended a ceremony at Ajaccio in 1969 to mark the bicentenary of the birth of Napoleon III. It would have been his uncle. And because Mariot is not concerned to follow a chronological narrative, sometimes it is not easy to tell where the quotations and examples he uses as evidence come from and even flicking to the notes at the back does not always clear up the issue immediately.

However that may be, Nicolas Mariot has produced a fascinating and, undoubtedly, provocative addition to this burgeoning field. This is probably not a book for history undergraduates, unless they possess a really impressive command of French, but postgraduates and academic colleagues will draw a great deal of detail from the rich source material on which it is based and from Mariot’s forthright assertions.

## NOTES

[1] <http://www.jourdan.ens.fr/~mariot/>

[2] Olivier Ihl, *La fête républicaine*, (préface de Mona Ozouf), (Paris: Gallimard, 1996); see also Olivier Ihl, Jean-William Dereymez and Gérard Sabatier, eds., *Un cérémonial politique: les voyages officiels des chefs d'état* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1998). Sudhir Hazareesingh. *The Saint-Napoleon: Celebrations of Sovereignty in Nineteenth-Century France* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press. 2004).

[3] Paul Smith, *A History of the French Senate (I) The Third Republic 1870-1940* (Lewiston NY: Lampeter, 2005), p. 251.

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