

H-France Review Vol. 8 (May 2008), No. 75

Vincent Wright, *Les préfets de Gambetta*. Texte complété, mis à jour et présenté par Éric Anceau et Sudhir Hazareesingh. Paris: Presses de l'Université Paris-Sorbonne, 2007. 482 pp. Preface, tables, notes, and index. 45€ (pb). ISBN 978-2-84050-504-4.

Review by Rachel Chrastil, Xavier University.

The French state during the nineteenth century was one of the most sophisticated, efficient, and resilient bureaucracies in modern history. Despite successful efforts of recent scholarship to resurrect provincial institutions and cultures, the centralized state still lies at the heart of historical inquiry regarding modern France from the revolutionary era to Vichy: To what extent could individual civil servants shape the policies and character of the state? And how did the state cope with the double shocks of foreign invasion and regime change?

Vincent Wright's prosopography of the 136 prefects who served under Léon Gambetta provides the groundwork that may help scholars revisit these questions in the context of the *année terrible* of 1870-71. The Government of National Defense (GDN) succeeded the Second Empire when it fell on September 4, 1870, in the midst of the French Army's collapse during the Franco-Prussian War. Although most scholars seeking to explain the establishment of the Third Republic focus on the regimes of Thiers and MacMahon, the short-lived and much-maligned GDN also influenced the character of, and expectations for, republican institutions and politicians. No individual embodied the GDN more than Gambetta. When he assumed the double portfolio of Minister of the Interior and Minister of War, Gambetta attempted to mobilize a demoralized population against the Prussian invasion and ensure the establishment of a republican regime. The prefects who served between September 4, 1870 and Gambetta's resignation on February 6, 1871 formed the administrative army set on these tasks.

For over a decade before his death in 1999, Wright, who devoted his scholarly life to the examination of mid-nineteenth-century prefectural corps, meticulously gathered biographical detail on these public servants.^[1] In this volume, Sudhir Hazareesingh (Balliol College, Oxford) and Éric Anceau (Université Paris-Sorbonne) present the completed project of 136 notices, along with an intellectual biography of Wright and a group portrait of the prefects. The work complements both the prosopographical publications of the Centre de Recherches en Histoire du XIXe siècle (Universités Paris-Panthéon-Sorbonne/Paris-Sorbonne) and the scholarship of Anceau and Hazareesingh.^[2]

The selection criterion—service as prefect for the GDN—yields an odd yet illuminating slice of nineteenth-century political and administrative life. The prefectural corps of 1870-71 included political heavyweights such as Jules Ferry, Charles de Freycinet, and Sadi Carnot, and a total of fifty-eight future members of the Chamber of Deputies or Senate, encompassing men as diverse as Paul Bert and Martin Nadaud. Fifty-two served in *conseils généraux* and at least forty-six in municipal councils (p. 56). But over 70 percent ended their careers outside of politics and administration (p. 58). And, as Anceau argues, Gambetta's prefects formed an unusual group in comparison with the prefectural corps that served before or after. Less wealthy and less decorated, fully 43 percent of Gambetta's initial appointees were born in the department in which they served, a significant break in the dominant top-down, Paris-centric character of the French state (pp. 37-38).

Each notice provides a humanizing portrait of the prefect and his social, political, and intellectual life.

Beyond the dates and places of birth, death, and prefectural service, Wright traces each man's professional career before and after 1870, and lists the names, professions, and fortunes of his family members. In addition, he sketches each man's political opinions and associates, including his religious affiliation (if any) and opinion on secularism, any links to the Freemasons, and any Legion of Honor medals. Throughout, he intersperses quotations by and about the prefect, especially in the category "Autres détails sur lui," which often includes first-hand, subjective descriptions of personality and physiognomy. Each notice concludes with a list of works written by the prefect, archival and press sources, and acknowledgements. The organization allows for easy comparison between prefects, although their experiences and qualifications could be diverse. With so many extensive personal networks developed for each prefect, the helpful index of names runs over fifty pages.

This level of detail borders at times on the antiquarian; do we need to know that Émile Lenglet (Pas-de-Calais) was married to a woman whose aunt's husband served as the librarian of Arras (p. 292)? Yet these informal networks, through family and school, appear to have been more important to the selection of state officials than the formal ties among Freemasons and co-religionists; even those few who were active Freemasons (27 percent) did not share a monolithic political perspective (pp. 27, 40-42). And, as Hazareesingh notes: "derrière la simple etiquette de 'républicains', ces préfets étaient surtout des hommes" (p. 28). These small details add up to a poignant reminder of the human life behind the often illegible signature on prefectural form letters, now dry and crumbling in departmental archives.

The unifying characteristic of Gambetta's prefects was their near-universal resistance to the Second Empire (p. 37). Many came to the prefectural seat because local revolutionary groups selected them after September 4, and Gambetta simply confirmed their appointment. Anceau's careful group portrait of the prefects suggests that in September, the prefects supported Gambetta's radical republicanism, particularly his bid to postpone elections to assure republican success. But by January, some prefects worried that Gambetta had gone too far in declaring imperial servants ineligible to stand for the elections to the National Assembly on February 8—sixteen opposed his decree. Anceau argues that the prefects of the GDN prefigured the uneasy coalition of republicans of various stripes that created the Third Republic (p. 62). These hints at the prefects' actions and political convictions during and after the war tantalize, but the notices themselves offer little more on this score. Unfortunately, the book does not contain an index of departments, so researchers interested in the GDN's activities in a given department need to know the name of the prefect(s) already to begin using this reference.

But in any case, the book is not intended to illuminate the events of the Franco-Prussian War so much as the lives and careers of French civil servants on the cusp of a changing political regime. Hazareesingh, a leading scholar of nineteenth-century French state and politics, provides an intellectual biography of Vincent Wright that develops this context. More than a sympathetic portrait of an admired mentor and colleague, Hazareesingh's essay justifies Wright's methodology, a marriage between political science and history, resistant to disciplinary shifts toward totalizing theories in the former and the cultural history of institutions in the latter (pp. 28-29). He explains Wright's view that the French state, while not all-powerful or free of corruption and overly coercive powers, was relatively efficient compared with other nineteenth-century bureaucracies. The state, in Wright's conception, existed as a separate institution with its own logic and laws, but individuals both inside and outside the state bureaucracy shaped the state's functions. Networks of social elites populated the state bureaucracy, giving lie to the myth of social mobility through state service (pp. 25-26). Wright was sympathetic to Jacobinism, the unifying power of the state and the mistrust of interest groups, but understood that the Jacobin model was fragile in the face of the constant tension of the center with provincial forces as well as the particular tensions that arose during the disastrous Franco-Prussian War. Gambetta's prefects provide human evidence of these abstract notions about state and power.

Many of Gambetta's prefects had long careers after their service for the GDN, so this carefully researched book will be a useful reference for any scholar of the state or of the second half of the

nineteenth century. The book should find a happy niche in research libraries.

NOTES

[1] Vincent Wright and Bernard Le Clère, *Les Préfets du Second Empire* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1973); Vincent Wright, *Le Conseil d'État sous le Second Empire* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1972).

[2] Louis Girard, Antoine Prost, and Rémi Goussez, *Les conseillers généraux de 1870, Étude statistique d'un personnel politique* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1967); Jean Jolly and Adolphe Robert, *Dictionnaire des parlementaires français: Notices biographiques des ministres, sénateurs et députés français de 1889 à 1940* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1960-1977); Éric Anceau, *Dictionnaire des députés du Second Empire* (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 1999); Éric Anceau, *Les députés du Second Empire: Prosographie [sic] d'une élite du XIXe siècle* (Paris: H. Champion, 2000); Sudhir Hazareesingh, *From Subject to Citizen: The Second Empire and the Emergence of Modern French Democracy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1998); Sudhir Hazareesingh, *Intellectual Founders of the Republic: Five Studies in Nineteenth-Century French Republican Political Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Sudhir Hazareesingh, *The Saint-Napoleon: Celebrations of Sovereignty in Nineteenth-Century France* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004).

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