

H-France Forum

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Christine Haynes, *Our Friends the Enemies: The Occupation of France after Napoleon*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018. 404 pp. Notes and index. \$39.95, £31.95, €36.00 (c1). ISBN 978-0-674-97341-5.

Review essay by Thomas Dodman, Columbia University

If the Napoleonic wars were the “first total war”, then it would seem fitting that their ending require a novel attempt at “total peace” (p. 3). Of course, history is rarely that logical, yet such is Christine Haynes’s contention in *Our Friends the Enemies*: the three year-long allied occupation of north-eastern France following Napoleon’s defeat at Waterloo, was the “first modern peacekeeping mission” (p. 2). Not only that, it was by and large a success, “one of the most successful cases of war termination ever” (p. 320). It established a durable peace in Europe, helped regenerate a war-torn country and exhausted nation, went a long way to turning enemies into partners (if not quite friends), and even fostered a short-lived moment of liberalism and European cosmopolitanism. If it was the first of its kind, perhaps it was also one of a kind...

At any rate, such are some of the bold claims Haynes makes in this wide-ranging, carefully balanced, and meticulously researched book that helps put the Occupation of Guarantee (as it was called) on the map. Quite literally, in fact, as one of the first things that stood out to me upon opening the book are four helpful maps illustrating the scope and nature of the occupation. These show how two thirds of France were initially occupied by up to 1.2 million men in the summer of 1815 (leaving only the West and South West under nominal French control). The Treaty of Paris signed on November 20, 1815 stipulated the creation of an occupied zone, running from Switzerland to the English Channel along the north-east border, and in which 150,000 troops would be stationed (it also established a demilitarized buffer zone stretching parallel, from the Somme to the Doubs). This was a multinational force of Austrians, Prussians, English, Russians (the largest contingents, of 30,000 men each), and Bavarians, Württembergers, Badois, Hessians, Piedmontese, and Saxons. These troops clustered in towns and fortresses along the border, and the four big powers each supervised their own sector of the occupied zone. If this sounds (and certainly looks) familiar, it has probably less to do with what most of us already knew about the period, than with similar maps of “occupation zones,” “demilitarized buffers,” and “allied sectors” that we all know from twentieth-century postwar settlements (the two World Wars, Korea, Vietnam, only to name the most obvious). The effect is uncanny: right from the beginning, Haynes invites us to *see* the Occupation of Guarantee as we have come to *see* “modern” postwar occupations—that is as a negotiated and territorialized peacekeeping settlement. This is a bravura exercise in visualization, one that sets the tone to the book.

The “modernity” of the Occupation of Guarantee is the first, explicit historiographical framing that this book puts forward. The Paris treaty did not only establish the first multinational peacekeeping occupation; it also innovated in imposing war reparations (and occupation costs) on France. This was no indiscriminate punishing of a defeated enemy, but rather the price to pay both for damage done and to “rejoin the community of nations” (p. 42). In imposing these

sanctions, the victorious allies were at pains to distinguish the Napoleonic regime from the French people: they had fought against the former, not the latter; with a more congenial ruler at their helm, the French would be “friends” again. Like apprentice sorcerers, the allies were inaugurating another modern political tradition: regime change.

For Haynes, all these formal innovations in postwar peacemaking mark a hitherto unappreciated milestone in a shift in the law of war from *jus ad bellum* (or the moral rules and international laws regulating the resort to force) to *jus in bello* (that is laws and humanitarian principles that govern the conduct of war itself). This is a big claim, but one difficult to substantiate in the absence of more sustained engagement with both legal history and the history of humanitarianism (surely the distinguishing feature that led, in the wake of the Crimean war, the Franco-Austrian war, and the American Civil War, to the first Geneva Convention of 1864 and the two Hague Conventions of 1899 and 1907). It would seem more appropriate to suggest that 1815-18 marked a new beginning for what we might call “*jus post bellum*.” But even this would be reductive, for the real payoff of Haynes’s zeroing in on the Occupation of Guarantee comes with her refusal to remain at the level of high politics, intergovernmental treaties, and legal measures. Instead she moves her analysis onto the terrain of the social and cultural historian, asking what three years of occupation meant and felt like for those who experienced it. Her historiographical compass in this endeavor is recent literature on “*sorties de guerre*,” or the challenges individuals and whole societies face in adjusting their livelihoods from wartime to peacetime.[1] After twenty-three year of virtually continuous warfare and back-to-back invasions, it is perhaps no surprise that peace didn’t simply resurface, ready-made and good to go, when the cannons fell silent. By 1815, many (if not most??) French men and women had quite simply never known peacetime. The thing itself would have to be reinvented. It seems to me that this is where *Our Friends the Enemies* makes its strongest statement: it shows, *post-factum*, just how much of a total war the Napoleonic wars were. It does so by bringing the camera down from the drone to shoulder height, and by exploring in detail the daily life of another “occupied France”. Central to this endeavor is a prodigious amount of empirical data collected on a whirlwind tour of archives in France, Germany, and the United Kingdom (35 by my quick count). This book is an ode to painstaking archival truffle hunting, to the muffled singular voices that archives preserve, and to the granular, muddled jigsaw that they ultimately yield to the historian (as one blurb on the back of the book nicely puts it, there is more than a hint of Richard Cobb in these pages). Haynes’s evidence often points in contrasting directions, sometimes leaving one to wonder whether the glass that she sees half full isn’t in fact half empty. And yet it is this attention to detail that ultimately allows her to rescue the importance of the period 1815-18 in the history of modern France, by showing just how much the Restoration could *not* mark a clean rupture from the revolutionary-Napoleonic episode, how much it remained entangled in the aftereffects of war. In this respect *Our Friends the Enemies* also adds a critical chapter to the ongoing historiographical reevaluation of the Restoration itself, uncovering a surprising moment of political and economic opportunity in the Occupation of Guarantee—one that would have a lasting impact on France’s own path to modernity.

As one might imagine, the invasion and occupation of France was hugely traumatic and caused immense hardship to a lot of people (more on that later). Yet central to Haynes’s contention that we ought to view it primarily as a success story, are some unexpected side effects and unintended consequences that it generated. The first of these is the surprising amount of

cooperation and “harmony” (a buzz word at the time) that reigned between occupiers and occupied. Haynes details how joint festivities, reciprocal courtesies, and avenues for socialization (from festivals and balls to taverns and masonic lodges) provided French civilians and allied soldiers with venues for intermingling. The “good intelligence” between them is documented in prefectural reports lauding instances of mutual aid, as well as in the Alexandermania that swept across the country and the many romantic liaisons between soldiers and civilians that blossomed in those years. Haynes speaks of all this under the rubric of “accommodation,” noting how the normative binary between collaboration and resistance bequeathed by the Second World War is inadequate to grasp the gradations of peaceful coexistence that can occur in military occupations. She ultimately agrees with Jacques Hantraye’s assessment that these years produced an acceptance of the “other”; indeed, she sees them go one step further, to lay the basis for a “cosmopolitan ‘European’ identity” (168). [2] Paris had been off limits to most foreigners for some twenty-five years; now they flocked to the French capital, provoking a glut of cross-cultural exchanges in fashion, food, entertainment, ideas, words, literature etc. This moment of intense cultural hybridization was critical to the late flourishing of romanticism in France and made it possible for Paris to become the “capital of the world in the nineteenth-century” (p. 169). Haynes recognizes that such cosmopolitanism did not go unchallenged and instead provoked chauvinist responses in many quarters; but she insists on recognizing the degree to which the Occupation of Guarantee promoted “international understanding and reconciliation” (p. 165).

Even more surprising, perhaps, is the political-economic window of opportunity that the occupation also opened up according to Haynes. The Napoleonic wars and especially the Hundred Days—the most expensive in French history, according to one estimate—had left the country exhausted and the state virtually bankrupt. By the terms of the Paris treaty, France owed the Allies 700 million Francs in reparations (to be paid over five years), on top of footing the bill for the occupation (to the tune of 50 million Francs a year) and a plethora of indemnity requests. Remarkably enough, the government was by and large able to meet these obligations, though a combination of tax hikes, cost-cutting, domestic subscriptions, and foreign loans that tripled sovereign debt but brought the occupation to an end two years earlier than expected. These fiscal measures inflicted huge hardship on the French population—including widespread famine in the wake of poor harvests in 1816-17—but impressed the allies and foreign lenders, rehabilitating France’s stature as it proved its newfound credit-worthiness. Simply put, these were the “largest war reparations ever paid in full” (p. 222); not only that, but out of the ashes emerged a recipe for economic growth and a distinct “path” to industrial modernity. Haynes stresses that the occupation provided economic opportunities for the French economy—including the most unlikely of ones, such as horse manure used as fertilizer—and brought entrepreneurial know-how from abroad. Following Jeff Horn’s work, she sees these years as crucial in the development of a distinctly French middle-of-the-road combination of laissez-faire and neo-mercantilist state protectionism.[3] More ephemeral, but no less important in Haynes’s analysis, is the short-lived moment of political liberalism that the occupation somewhat paradoxically incubated and protected against the most reactionary instincts of the Restoration. The allies’ tutelary oversight of French politics in these years facilitated the dismissal of the *Chambre introuvable* (dominated by the Ultras and resistant to paying reparations), inadvertently inaugurating a “political laboratory” (p. 256) for reforms and a first sustained attempt at parliamentary politics in France. It also oversaw a revival and “golden age” (p. 260) of the political press, unwittingly nurturing

neo-Jacobin radical groups—from the Carbonari to the Decembrists—and facilitating the “invention” of Bonapartism as a clandestine political movement. Ironically enough, this moment of political liberalization was itself cut short by the “liberation” of France in 1818, but not without showing the importance of unintended consequences.

For Haynes, the “success” of the Occupation of Guarantee is thus measured not only in the precedent it set for future post-war settlements, but also in the crucial impact it had in orienting post-Napoleonic France towards the European concert of nations and nineteenth-century liberal capitalism. The evidence she musters makes the latter claim especially compelling, forcing us to integrate the occupation years more thoroughly in the ongoing historiographical renewal of the Restoration and, more broadly, the aftermath of wars in peacetime society and politics. I could not agree more with this; and yet I do find myself wondering whether this isn’t, in fact, a tale of two occupations that Haynes’s portrays, two quite different experiences of these years that her evidence points to in equal measure, but that her overarching narrative tries to subsume in a positive gloss. There seems to me to be a distinctly class element, and center-periphery articulation, at play here: the occupation that promoted polite *entente*, literary and stylistic cosmopolitanism, political and economic opportunity, was by and large (though by no means exclusively) an occupation of elites based in Paris and cities in the occupied zone (such as Cambrai, site of Wellington’s HQ). Further down the social ladder, and especially in small towns and rural parts of the north-east, it was a very different occupation that people lived through. For those who suffered from dispossession, violence, and shortages, this was a traumatic experience—whether physically, psychologically, or symbolically—akin to a “plague” (p. 72). The occupation came with requisitions of property and people (for *corvée* labor) and billeting of foreign troops when barracks weren’t available. It pushed up prices and taxes, compounding the misery and starvation caused by crop failure in 1817-18. It brought with it a familiar lot of arbitrary rule, violence—including sexual violence impossible to quantify precisely—and cycles of resistance and retribution. Rape was both a personal reality and collective metaphor for the “subjugation” and “emasculatation” of an entire country, symbolized most potently by the “rape of the Louvre” (the recuperation of artwork seized across Europe by Napoleon’s armies). For the vast majority of people this was, in the words of the prefect of the Nord, a difficult “time to endure” (p. 108).

As Haynes notes, this is a “universal tale of military occupation” (p. 75)—one that *Our Friends the Enemies* duly details, but ultimately tends to minimize. This is fair enough, as the originality of the research lies primarily in uncovering the surprising goodwill, opportunities and cosmopolitanism that the Occupation of Guarantee promoted. Yet if I draw attention to the underacknowledged class dimension of this book and to the more predictable and darker, popular story of occupation, it is neither to undermine Haynes’s positive take, nor merely out of knee-jerk leftist sympathies (though there is that too), but because I wonder whether there might not be equally important seeds that were planted in *that* story as well, ones that also highlight the significance of this overlooked episode in French History (albeit pointing in a very different direction). Indeed, together with an openness to the other, the occupation solidified demonization and hatred of the other. The chauvinism of these years could at times appear relatively benign, as in the “battle of the Montagnes russes”, or rival “foreign” and “home-grown” roller coaster rides. But it could also acquire more sinister and durable undertones when it latched onto specific enemy “types”: the perfidious Brit, the savage Cossack and, increasingly, the dreaded “Uhlan.”

In this respect, more could have been done of the political recuperation of Joan of Arc in these years, as a figure of national resistance as well as royalism and Catholic identity—and with a long and prosperous future ahead of her... Perhaps this is too anachronistic, but I wonder whether this could not have also been tied to portrayals in the press and popular perceptions of the government’s recourse to tax hikes, cost-cutting (during a famine), and foreign lenders—primarily British and Dutch bankers, to the tune of several hundred million francs and for a rate of indebtedment that reached 4 billion francs and cost 240 million annually in interest by 1821. For there does seem to be something else that is eerily familiar in the differential impact of the occupation and the reparations it imposed: as so often since in comparable situations of economic crisis and debt, it is the *petit peuple* that is asked to tighten the belt and bail out elites so that they can go on living their cosmopolitan ways. I am, of course, being voluntarily caricatural and seeing the glass half empty from our age of economic inequality and populist nationalisms; but I do genuinely wonder whether this isn’t also part of what made the Occupation of Guarantee a “success” story of sorts.

NOTES

[1] The key text is Bruno Cabanes, *La Victoire endeuillée: la sortie de guerre des soldats Français (1918-1920)* (Paris: Seuil, 2004).

[2] Jacques Hantraye, *Les Cosaques aux Champs-Élysées: L’occupation de la France après la chute de Napoléon* (Paris: Belin, 2005).

[3] Jeff Horn, *The Path not Taken: French Industrialization in the Age of Revolution, 1750-1830* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006).

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