

H-France Review Vol. 13 (July 2013), No. 106

Quentin Deluermoz, *Le crépuscule des révolutions 1848-1871*. Paris: Editions du Seuil, 2012. 409 pp. 25.00€. (pb). ISBN 978-2-02-100596-7.

Review by Pamela Pilbeam, Royal Holloway, University of London.

Two new series on the history of France are in production in France, apparently stimulated, according to *Le Monde*, by the concern of the Sarkozy regime that the French are forgetting their national identity. This seems somewhat unlikely. The Seuil series is also keen to situate the French nation in its colonies and the wider world. The volume under the microscope here is number three of the ten-volume Seuil, *Histoire de la France Contemporaine*. This replaces their *Nouvelle Histoire de la France Contemporaine* issued in the 1970s and which covered 1787 to the 1970s in eighteen slim volumes. Three volumes of the new series have appeared since the late autumn of 2012 and the rest are due by 2015, although no details have yet been announced. The three so far published are Aurélien Lignereux's *L'Empire des français, 1799-1815*, Bertrand Goujon's *Monarchies postrévolutionnaires, 1814-1848*, and this volume.[1]

When the 1970s volumes were produced, the French were immersed in regional history, exploring variety in their national story. The period 1848 to 1871 was divided between two volumes: Maurice Agulhon, *1848 et l'apprentissage de la république 1848-1852* and Alain Plessis, *De la fête impériale au mur des fédérés, 1852-1871*. [2] Their replacement, *Le crépuscule des révolutions*, covers the entire period in 409 pages. It is the work of a relatively new scholar who completed his doctoral dissertation with the leading nineteenth-century expert, Dominique Kalifa. That was a study of public order in Paris, 1854-1914, published by the Sorbonne in 2012. The title of his Seuil volume, *The Twilight of Revolution*, instantly invokes a different, less assured mentality than Agulhon's "the apprenticeship of the republic," or as in the Cambridge translation, *The Republican Experiment*. [3] Deluermoz offers his reader a tentative and conflictual republic, an Empire which was transformed almost into a republic by 1870 and a Paris Commune, "l'année terrible," stripped of the emotional empathy of the Plessis volume (p. 307). Revolutions obscured in the dusk for sure. It would seem that having lost their Marxist justification, the French are puzzled as to how to explain their tendency for repeated revolutions. They seem almost to want to smuggle revolution away just as Etienne Cabet accused the Orléanists of disposing of the 1830 revolution. Indeed volume two in this new series provides no hint of revolution in its title.

The first three chapters in this volume pursue a conventional chronology; first the "République advenue," the republic that "came to pass" between February and June 1848. This is an unusually neutral way of describing the new republic, although historians generally concur that it sprang up with the backing of only a tiny pre-existing republican movement. (Not surprisingly, since even the word "republic" was banned during the previous Orléanist monarchy.) Chapter two deals with the Second Republic between February and the June Days and concludes that the period marked the transition from the politics of the food riot to the complexities of universal suffrage. The Second Empire is described as an "illiberal democracy" (p. 107), in which the regime was brought closer to the people more by administrative and policing arrangements than by plebiscites and elections. Faint praise! The following four chapters deal analytically with a number of relevant themes. First the extent to which France became a more "national" society, evaluating the impact of urban, industrial, transport and banking innovations. Next the author considers whether these practical changes made society, the elites,

peasants, workers less locked in, or “verrouillée” (p. 167). Significantly, although by the 1860s, 75 percent of children had some schooling, only 1.5 percent of workers’ children went on to secondary school. The chapter on how sensibilities and ideas altered observes the growing gender gap in religious practice. By the 1860s, there were 900 congregations of women, compared to seventy of men, and 70 percent of women, compared to 30 percent of men were regular churchgoers. Chapter seven asks how the new empire, which consisted mainly but not exclusively, of Algeria, was run, and its relationship with the metropole. Algeria meant prestige, but contributed very little to the French economy, providing only a shrinking 7 percent of French imports in 1860.

The final three chapters revert to a chronological format, exploring how it was that the Empire was transformed into a modern republic. Striking became legal and 1869 saw 40,600 on strike, a number that was not equalled until 1919. A Frenchman had fifteen opportunities to vote during the Empire, making it a veritable apprenticeship for democracy, and politics became increasingly professionalised. The role of parliament, if not the significance of the republican opposition, apart from in the major towns, grew markedly in the 1860s. The autocratic empire was being gradually transformed into a parliamentary regime when the regime was shattered by war with Prussia in 1870. Both sides assumed they would win and their armies were of similar strength, but Prussia was able to mobilise far more quickly. Deluermoz fails to note that this was partly because the Prussians had built a double-track railway to the border, whereas the French had merely a single track on their side.

The Emperor was captured at Sedan in September 1870 and a republic declared with little violence or opposition. In January 1871, the French were permitted to elect a new Assembly by the victorious Prussians. The vast majority of the deputies were former monarchists, chosen for their willingness to make peace. The hostility of Thiers and the majority of the deputies to radical Paris, which had endured a five-month siege, provoked the Parisian National Guard in March 1871 to organise the election of a Commune, recalling memories of 1792. The ninety-strong body, of whom an unprecedented number were workers, tried to revive the city’s economy, but could never agree on how to approach the Thiers’ government. Thiers ignored them and in May launched a brutal military assault on the capital. Much of the city and some of its major buildings were destroyed by fire. The death toll was 873 soldiers and perhaps 15,000 Communards, of whom many were shot illegally after surrender. After the trials and convictions of Commune prisoners, the government gradually pieced together a republican regime. Contemporaries described the complexities of the Commune as a sphinx. The hopes of the spring of 1848 were gone, but conservative, democratic, secular republican structures were tentatively constructed within a gradually modernising economic framework.

This is a pragmatic account, stripped of “isms,” big claims, theories and attempts to make links with the twentieth century. One objective of this series is to produce a synthesis of recent research. The work of scholars publishing in English is, for the first time, given serious and sustained attention. However, although there is an up to-date-bibliography, and the names of recent scholars appear in the text, their books are sometimes missing from the bibliography. The only footnotes are to a few primary sources. Hopefully, if an English translation is made, some bibliographical revisions can be made, so that undergraduates can profit from this excellent volume.

NOTES

[1] Aurélien Lignereux, *L’Empire des français, 1799-1815* (Paris: Seuil, 2012); Bertrand Goujon, *Monarchies postévolutionnaires, 1814-1848* (Paris: Seuil, 2012).

[2] Maurice Agulhon, *1848 et l’apprentissage de la république 1848-1852* (Paris: Seuil, 1973); Alain Plessis, *De la fête impériale au mur des fédérés, 1852-1871* (Paris: Seuil, 1973).

[3] Maurice Agulhon, *The Republican Experiment, 1848-1852* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

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ISSN 1553-9172