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Jean-Paul Bertaud, *Le Duc d'Enghien*. Paris: Fayard, 2001. 466 pp. Maps, figures, illustrations, bibliography, and index. 24.50 Euros (pb). ISBN 2-213-60987-X.

Review by Malcolm Crook, Keele University.

The Duc d'Enghien became a prominent figure in the Napoleonic era as a result of his execution at the château de Vincennes during the night of 20–21 March 1804. Were it not for his summary and sudden demise at the tender age of thirty-two, he would surely have left little impression on the history of the period, despite his assiduous efforts to make a mark. As a member of the venerable Bourbon-Condé clan, and thus a cousin of Louis XVI, he seemed destined for a glittering career, but, just as he reached maturity, the Revolution intervened and in the summer of 1789 he went into early, princely exile. The second half of his brief life was not much more remarkable than the first, though he roamed the continent from the Rhineland to Russia serving in his grandfather's *émigré* army, peregrinating from principality to empire in search of an increasingly elusive victory over the hated French Republic. For irreconcilable enemies of the Revolution such as Enghien there was constant disappointment from the battle of Valmy to the campaigns of the Second Coalition, as the long-awaited triumph of the counter-revolutionary crusade failed to materialize. Yet if the Duc was no longer living in the manner to which he had been born, the genteel poverty into which he had fallen left plenty of room for travel, hunting, and amorous adventures, as well as occasional but fruitless military action.

This ordinary, not to say obscure personage (in life if not death) offers a case study of the *douceur de vivre* enjoyed by the aristocracy under the Ancien Régime and also the frustrations subsequently endured by the *émigrés*, yet Jean-Paul Bertaud casts little fresh light upon these broader issues. Unlike some notable volumes in the Fayard series in which this book appears, such as Michel Antoine's *Louis XV* or Jean Tulard's *Napoléon*, this biography does not attempt a grander interpretation of the times through which its subject lived.<sup>[1]</sup> Instead, Bertaud adopts a conventional narrative structure and splits the book into a dozen chronological sections each sub-divided into three, short chapters. Now professor emeritus, having recently retired from the Sorbonne, Bertaud is best known for his work on the revolutionary army and the press, but he has often written for *le grand public* and always communicated in an accessible manner.<sup>[2]</sup> The life of the Duc d'Enghien and his family thus is admirably recounted with the aid of letters, diaries, and memoirs.

Bertaud certainly succeeds in demonstrating that Enghien was more able than his insufferable grandfather, the prince de Condé, would allow. He did not, after all, follow in the footsteps of his own father, who eventually opted for exile in England and sank into debauchery. On the contrary, he remained willing to expose himself to danger on the battlefield, and he died bravely at the hands of Bonaparte's myrmidons. Indeed, he showed a degree of perspicacity where political developments were concerned, aware that some compromise with the principles of the Revolution was required if the legitimate monarchy was to be restored; he had both learned and forgotten. Nor did he entertain any illusions about Napoleon's alleged sympathy towards the royalists and correctly discerned the general's own soaring ambitions: "A few people regard him as a royalist. As for me, I am utterly convinced that if he is, then it is for himself." When he made this comment in 1800, Enghien could hardly have realized that his own historical role would be to play an important part in transforming the Bonapartist

Consulate into a Napoleonic Empire. Georges Cadoudal, the *chouan* whose plot to assassinate Bonaparte was to fatally implicate the Duc, uttered a similar sentiment, to the effect that he had sought to restore a king but enthroned an emperor.

Of course, one may argue that a monarchical outcome to the French Revolution was increasingly likely, if not inevitable, after the creation of the Life Consulate in 1802, which gave Bonaparte the opportunity to nominate his successor as well as extending his tenure of office. In the accompanying plebiscite there already were demands for a full-blown hereditary regime, expressed in the margins of the electoral registers.<sup>[3]</sup> On the other hand, there was widespread opposition to this particular evolution of the dictatorship, not least in the army. Any further changes in the direction of heredity would need to be carefully engineered. It was in this regard that the Duc d'Enghien was to enact his unwitting role, and the final hundred or so pages of Bertaud's book are the most interesting ones, though this is an aspect of the subject he has tackled in a previous study.<sup>[4]</sup> Nor is Bertaud alone, for the circumstances surrounding Enghien's death have been a constant source of controversy and numerous publications.<sup>[5]</sup>

It remains uncertain who exactly linked the Duc to the conspiracy to assassinate Bonaparte, which was orchestrated by royalists in Britain without his knowledge. The plot was led by Cadoudal, who clandestinely came to Paris in the autumn of 1803, and was joined by others, including the renegade general Pichegru, at the beginning of 1804. According to informants, they were anticipating the arrival of a prince in the course of their attempt to kill the Consul. Louis XVI's brothers, Provence and Artois, were unlikely candidates, but the Duc d'Enghien was living not far from the eastern border of France, just the other side of the Rhine in the small town of Ettenheim. He was installed there as a guest of the Elector of Baden with his "partner," Charlotte de Rohan-Rochefort (Enghien's haughty family refused to countenance a marriage with the goddaughter of the infamous cardinal who had been implicated in the pre-revolutionary diamond-necklace affair). It was Talleyrand and Fouché who made the fatal connection and convinced Bonaparte of the need to act against the unfortunate Duc. As Bertaud argues, Napoleon responded violently to the renewed threat to his person and cried out for "Corsican" revenge. Yet there was a case for exemplary punishment on the grounds of *raison d'état*, at a time when France was once again at war. The Consul himself may have subsequently offered conflicting versions of events, but he never denied responsibility for what followed. Enghien was kidnapped, brought to the French capital, and, after a brief trial before a military tribunal, held *in camera*, he was shot and buried in an unmarked grave in the moat at Vincennes.

This was clearly a crime, indeed an act of piracy, since the Duc d'Enghien was captured rather than extradited from the territory of Baden. It was also profoundly unjust in so far as the prince had explicitly rejected assassination as a means of a royalist restoration, looking instead to insurrection and armed intervention in his continuing quest to overthrow Bonaparte. Whether it was a blunder, as some suggest, is more debatable. Despite the howls of protest that greeted the execution abroad, there were virtually no repercussions inside France. Above all, together with the harsh repression of the royalist plot that preceded it, the death of Enghien paved the way for the creation of the First Empire. As so often, Napoleon revealed his opportunism, exploiting this latest plan to eliminate him in order to render his power more permanent. On the one hand, Bonaparte reasserted his revolutionary credentials with this act of summary justice that recalled the Terror and regicide, while on the other hand he rendered any compromise with royalism utterly impossible. The proposal to establish the hereditary empire thus quickly followed, and it was massively endorsed in the plebiscite of 1804. Bertaud rightly suspects that the official returns for this third popular vote since the coup of Brumaire were artificially inflated. An investigation of the original dossiers reveals extensive fraud at the local level while, as on the previous occasion, whole swathes of illiterates were recorded by name in the registers without their knowledge.<sup>[6]</sup> Additional annexed departments were included in the returns, so the slight increase over the total for 1802 must be discounted. In sum, fewer Frenchmen voted for the First Empire than the Life Consulate, but the notables were given greater confidence that essential social and economic

gains from the Revolution would be preserved as a result of crowning a "king of the people."

Bertaud provides the clearest and most convincing account that we have of this latest in the series of *coups d'état* (or, perhaps more accurately, *coups de théâtre*) that characterized Napoleonic rule. However, the more fascinating question, which the author does not fully address in this biography is why, 200 years later, the demise of the Duc d'Enghien still commands so much attention. Comments made in the brief conclusion to this book, like items listed in the ample bibliography, suggest that there may be rich pickings in pursuing the posthumous images and representations of the ill-starred victim. Even while Napoleon was still on the throne, the execution began to attract the interest of literary figures such as Chateaubriand. Further publicity was generated in 1816, once Louis XVIII was firmly ensconced on the throne, when Enghien's remains were exhumed from their dismal resting place, and he was finally given a decent burial. Hugo and Lamartine elaborated upon his sacrificial death during their royalist phases, and a legend began to grow, which glorified the Duc's bravery: "Aim here," he was alleged to have said to the firing squad, pointing to his heart. The efforts that were made to exploit the cult of this reactionary martyr, whose untimely end procured historical celebrity, are certainly worth exploring, especially since the history of the Restoration remains so badly neglected. The same cannot be said of the Napoleonic era, which is currently basking in its *bicentenaire*, but this well-written and enjoyable book adds relatively little to our knowledge of the nature and development of either the Bonapartist dictatorship or its adversaries.

#### NOTES

[1] Michel Antoine, *Louis XV* (Paris, 1989) and Jean Tulard, *Napoléon* (Paris, 1980).

[2] See the recent *festschrift* in his honour: *La plume et le sabre. Hommages offerts à Jean-Paul Bertaud* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2002).

[3] Archives nationales (AN) BII 615-9, Registres de vote de la Seine, an X (1802), for example.

[4] Jean-Paul Bertaud, *Bonaparte et le Duc d'Enghien* (Paris, 1972). See also Bertaud's entries under "Enghien" in Albert Soboul (ed), *Dictionnaire historique de la Révolution française* (Paris, 1989), p. 416; and Jean Tulard (ed), *Dictionnaire Napoléon*, 2 vols. (rev. ed., Paris, 1999), t. 1, pp. 724-7.

[5] Maurice Schumann, *Qui a tué le duc d'Enghien?* (Paris, 1984), among others.

[6] AN BII 834A and 834B, Registres de vote des Deux-Sèvres an XII (1804), for instance. And see two forthcoming articles of mine: "Confiance d'en bas, manipulation d'en haut: la pratique plébiscitaire sous Napoléon (1799-1815)," in Philippe Bourdin (ed), *L'incident électoral de la Révolution à la Ve République* (Clermont-Ferrand, 2002) and "Confidence from below? Collaboration and resistance in the Napoleonic plebiscites," in Michael Rowe (ed), *Collaboration and Resistance in Napoleonic Europe* (London, 2003).

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