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Ami-Jacques Rapin, *Jomini et la stratégie: Une approche historique de l'oeuvre*. Paris: Sofedis and Lagny; Belgium: Sodis, 2002. 336 pp. Notes, biographical notices, and bibliography. 23.70 Euros (pb). ISBN 2-601-03297.

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It is easy to have bad conscience when advertising a military theory course as containing a "comprehensive" treatment of nineteenth-century military thought. The most sincere efforts to offer balanced comparisons between the two great interpreters of Napoleon, Carl von Clausewitz and Antoine-Henri Jomini, tend to degenerate into a Clausewitz appreciation club. Surveys of military theory, whether in print or in the classroom, normally reduce the Swiss theorist to caricature, a source for facile and invidious comparisons with the German master. Clausewitz becomes the discoverer of the protean nature of war, Jomini a mere geometer and pedant.

Of course, we know better. We know that Jomini contributed more to the history of war than a set of aphorisms and an easy target for the admirers of Clausewitz. It is almost impossible, however, to treat the two theorists equally. Clausewitz's ideas, though difficult to master, are accessibly condensed into one major, albeit incomplete, theoretical work. His productive life was less than half that of Jomini and his total corpus much smaller. It is, therefore, no great claim to have "read" Clausewitz. If the vast amount of material written about Clausewitz defies efforts to keep up, the existence of so many secondary studies makes it easy to feel well informed about at least some aspects of the German theorist's thought.

Jomini is a much different proposition. Jomini's prodigious literary efforts from 1800 until his death in 1869 are astonishing in quantity and known only to specialists. It is difficult even to keep track of what he wrote, as each treatise appeared in a series of editions as the author revised his thought. Some of Jomini's works are lost forever; others are very difficult to obtain. Many have never been translated into English. Even so, the sheer bulk of what is available is daunting, especially to readers who have no reason to suspect that the contents of that vast corpus would be worth the effort to read it. Not much guidance is to be found in the secondary literature, which remains relatively thin. Under the circumstances, one understands why military theory courses tend to describe Jomini simply as the author of the *Précis de la art de la guerre* and to condense his military thought to a few platitudes about interior lines and the importance of concentrating mass at the "decisive" point. Few people actually teach the *Précis* when it is simpler to assign John Shy's excellent survey essay in *Makers of Modern Strategy*[1] and get back to reading *On War*.

In this context, the publication of a volume entitled *Jomini et la stratégie* is a welcome event, an opportunity to discover whether we have really understood Jomini after all. Unfortunately, however, the book turns out not to be about Jomini's military thought (the *stratégie* promised in the title) but about the Jomini's oeuvre. Imagine a 290-page historiographical essay.

Rapin's introduction offers a brief and very interesting survey of Jomini's life, promising to demonstrate

that one can understand the *Précis de l'art de la guerre*, Jomini's signature work, only in the context of decades of work preceding it (p. 10). Particularly interesting is Rapin's emphasis on Jomini's lack of formal military education. An autodidact, Jomini found writing difficult and published the many different editions of his various works as part of a constant struggle to grasp and explain his own ideas (p. 13).

Part one of the book is a comprehensive history of Jomini's writings. Rapin situates each piece in Jomini's career (indeed we have here an extended biography of Jomini) and the historical circumstances, but his primary concern is to track every scrap of writing through every edition and every disagreement with his publisher or his assistant, Jean-Baptiste Koch. The actual contents of the various writings receive relatively little attention, though Rapin does identify such crucial moments in Jomini's development as his "pivotal argument" about the importance of concentrating "la plus grande masse des forces, un effort combiné sur la point décisive" (p. 33) and quotes from Jomini's *Souvenirs* the author's pleasure at his discovery (p. 35).

The second part of part one deals, again exhaustively, with writings about Jomini. Rapin's general purpose is to demonstrate that while some of Jomini's conclusions may be dated, his methods, historical and deductive, were far more sophisticated than critics acknowledge (p. 195). The insights offered into Jomini's method are valuable, but, in the absence of serious attention to their results, one is left wondering whether the careful reading of Jomini's work necessary to appreciate his sophisticated methodology would be worth the effort.

After reviewing the general historiography, Rapin devotes two chapters to specific types of study, comparisons of Jomini and Clausewitz and analyses of the role of Jomini in the strategic thought of the United States. The investigation of the interplay between the two theorists is undermined, as is the whole book, by the fact that the citations do not include page numbers, making it very difficult to follow his argument in the actual texts. Especially in the absence of page numbers, the endnotes offer very little help to the reader seeking to confirm Rapin's observations or to pursuing lines of inquiry. One oddity about the American chapter is that although Rapin emphasizes Jomini's search for principles of war throughout the book, he does not mention that the United States Army derived its canonical "Nine Principles of War" from Jomini and the extent to which those principles have shaped American military thinking to the present day.

Rapin defends Jomini's method by describing it as "more nuanced and more subtle than it appears at first" (p. 195), which is surely true but falls a long way short of demonstrating the utility of reading Jomini's voluminous writings now or explaining how one might best adopt his methods in the present day.

Although Rapin's study seems remarkably thorough, he repeatedly insists that it is impossible to study Jomini properly in the absence of either a definitive edition of the theorist's *Souvenirs* or of a "scientific biography." Nor is he willing to offer detailed analysis of the impact of specific elements of the Napoleonic wars on Jomini's thought. Thus, "en cadre de cette brève mise en perspective analytique des conceptions du général suisse, il ne saurait être question de discuter en détail de sa réelle compréhension du système de guerre napoléonien" (p. 232). This reader cannot help but wonder why Rapin felt compelled to sort out the various editions of each Jominian treatise rather than editing the *Souvenirs*, writing the required "scientific" biography, or reflecting on the relationship between Jomini's thought and Napoleon's way of war. Rapin chose to write a different book, one not without interest but ignoring the crying need for an accessible study of Jomini's thought.

In the end, we learn from Rapin that studies of Jomini reveal him to be a complex and innovative thinker. Neither a clone of nor a foil for Clausewitz, the Swiss theorist is worthy of serious study in his own right. Alas, Rapin's volume, while clearly written and full of interesting information about Jomini's

life and writings, leaves one still awaiting not only the scientific biography demanded by Rapin but a deep study of Jomini's thought.

NOTES

[1] John Shy, "Jomini," in Peter Paret, ed., *Makers of Modern Strategy From Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1986), pp. 143-85.

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