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Wayne Hanley, *The Genesis of Napoleonic Propaganda, 1796-1799*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2002. Gutenberg e-book. [www.gutenberg-e.org](http://www.gutenberg-e.org) Figures/Illustrations, Bibliography, Appendix, Web Links and Search Facility. Access \$49.50. ISBN: 0-231-12456-2.

Review by Malcolm Crook, Keele University, UK.

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We have all become used to accessing articles on screen, but I suspect that most of us still instinctively prefer hard copy for books. In the case of Wayne Hanley's study of Napoleonic propaganda there is no choice, since it has only been published electronically as part of Columbia's Gutenberg project, which currently offers another ten historical titles; payment for access to the website provides the necessary username and password. Though the text can be printed if the reader so wishes, the e-format provides opportunities which print copy cannot. In reviewing *The Genesis of Napoleonic Propaganda*, some account will therefore be taken of the medium as well as the message.

The declared aim of the Gutenberg project is to use the new technology in a "creative and thoughtful" fashion and, in this case, it has done so to a large extent. The site is easily navigated and some advantage has certainly been taken to include material that a book could simply not contain. A substantial appendix supplies over seventy items from Napoleon's *Correspondance*.<sup>[1]</sup> It is a pity that newspaper extracts, which are also heavily employed in the study, have not been included as well, especially since they are less readily available, but icons bearing their mastheads can be enlarged from the text to good effect.<sup>[2]</sup> Indeed, many illustrations are provided in this fashion and, in addition, there are links to further information on individuals and events which are mentioned in the text. A few specific documents (*Sur Bonaparte, conversation entre un soldat, un royaliste et un rentier*, extracted from the Bibliothèque nationale, for example) have also made available, besides a series of relevant websites (on Napoleonic medals, for instance), which offer a veritable cornucopia of images. Maps are to be accessed in this manner, rather than embedded in the text, where one might have expected to find them, given that this is a study based on Napoleon's Italian and Egyptian campaigns. By contrast, the notes are easy to consult at the click of a button on the page where they appear. The biggest drawback is an unhelpful search facility (replacing the conventional index), which merely refers the reader to a chapter, not the particular portion of text where the word or phrase appears.

*The Genesis of Napoleonic Propaganda* thus offers considerably more than the text, which itself is relatively short and split into five chapters, introduction, and afterword, all subdivided into brief sections. Pagination is absent from the electronic text—a general problem with e-books—though it can be found on the pdf version set up for printing (the citations that follow will accordingly refer to this format). The study originated as a thesis, which was then selected by the American Historical Association to be published in the Gutenberg series. It might not otherwise have found a wider audience, which would have been a pity, for the subject is an important one that has received relatively little treatment, though it is not quite as neglected as the author suggests (Introduction, p. 1). Robert Holtman's classic work on Napoleonic propaganda commences with Bonaparte's advent to power in Brumaire (November 1799). Yet, as Jean Tulard has rightly stated, the legend was born on the battlefields of Italy.<sup>[3]</sup> Annie Jourdan has certainly indicated the direction that representations of the Republican General might take and her splendid, pioneering efforts should have been accorded much more credit than a mere mention in the bibliography.<sup>[4]</sup> Hanley, however, has worked his way through a good deal of primary source material and drawn on various secondary studies of printed and visual imagery. He presents a convincing account of how Napoleon's own efforts and those of others

constructed a powerful popular image of a hero, who fulfilled the public's need for such a figure at the end of the Revolutionary decade, even if he did not quite become "everything the French desired" (chapter 6, p. 14).

Howard Brown once remarked to me that historians have spent a good deal of time examining the ownership and diffusion of the press in the Revolution, but very little exploring what the papers actually said. While researching reference to elections under the Directory, I was struck by the amount of print devoted to Bonaparte's campaigns in the *journaux* I was reading and the liberal use of adulatory phrases like *héros italique*. Hanley has systematically exploited this wealth of information though, as he shows, the general did not have it all his own way, since the right-wing press was rather critical (and its circulation was banned in the army). In fact, the general set up his own titles, during both the Italian and Egyptian campaigns, the most notable of which, the *Courrier de l'Armée d'Italie*, enjoyed an eighteen-month run, unlike its short-lived counterparts. Distributed among the soldiers, these papers also went on sale in Paris (and Milan), where other editors picked up stories and inserted them in their own pages (Hanley refers to this practice somewhat inappropriately as "passive propaganda", chapter 6, p. 1). Bonaparte contributed his own, distinctive efforts—his terse, dramatic and, of course, self-serving style (modelled on Caesar's *Gallic War*)—to this propaganda campaign. Though the Egyptian expedition was a military disaster, it ended as a public relations triumph and Napoleon returned to unprecedented applause.

Hanley devotes another two chapters to visual representations of Bonaparte, who was keen to demonstrate his intellectual and cultural, as well as military *savoir faire*. He was initially able to do this via the Commission pour la Recherche des Objets de Science et d'Art, which was established to confiscate material from Italy. The idea was not a new one, since the Low Countries had already been looted in this manner, but the Italian peninsula offered much richer pickings, especially once the resources of Rome and Venice were included in the plunder. It was even proposed that the famous arena at Verona be dismantled and re-assembled on the Champ de Mars in Paris. Surprisingly few pieces were lost en route to France, where their arrival was the subject of festivities arranged by the Directory at the end of July 1798. By then Bonaparte was on his way to Egypt, taking with him a large number of savants, with whom he had been rubbing shoulders and whose acquaintance secured him election to the Institute in December 1797. Equally important was the way in which the general began to be visually represented from the Italian campaign onwards, notably by Jean-Antoine Gros. The Bridge at Arcola was an early example of art as propaganda on the general's behalf, since the actual assault by Bonaparte was unsuccessful and some liberties were taken with the detail to show the him brandishing a *tricolore* and leading the crossing metaphorically as well as literally. The popularisation of such images was equally important and Hanley devotes an especially interesting chapter to the production of medals (again an established, commemorative feature of the Revolution). The centre-piece was the "Five Battles" series, which is carefully analysed by Hanley. Fabricated under Bonaparte's supervision, the set demonstrated defeat of the enemy at Lodi and Castiglione, the capture of Mantua, traversing the Po, Adda, Mincio and Tagliamento, and the taking of Trieste. Just as paintings were reproduced as prints, these medals appeared in cheaper copies and huge quantities as miniatures or *jetons*. Bonaparte was depicted in protean fashion, as victor, peacemaker, and patron of the arts. Every medal tells a significant story and they are still being churned out for the Napoleonic *bicentenaire*.

The text also mentions music, theatre, and poetry, which are surely ripe for further investigation, but Hanley has presented a wealth of printed and visual propaganda. We are left with the enduring problem of assessing its impact, which is much more readily asserted than assessed. Thus Hanley makes several statements to the effect that the coup of Brumaire, or rather Napoleon's leading role in it, was made possible by the campaign in the press and other media. For example: "Bonaparte's campaign to build the favourable public image that would eventually enable him to become First Consul in 1799 ... was one of

the most successful in history ...” (chapter 2, p. 2). These issues should have been discussed in a proper conclusion. The brief Afterword that is appended to this study instead sketches Bonaparte’s advent to power, using a familiar narrative and relying on rather elderly secondary sources to do so.[6] Clearly other factors were at work in this (arguably unexpected) outcome to the crisis of 1799, beyond the propaganda of the previous three years. The shortcomings of the Directory, which were inevitably exaggerated in Bonaparte’s pronouncements, like chief conspirator Sieyès’s incompetence in managing the coup d’état, must also be taken into account.

Weighing up the relative contribution of the material examined in this study is a difficult matter, but no real attempt is made to do so. Some response might be found in evidence presented here: for example, the sheer weight of references to Bonaparte and his campaigns is fleetingly compared to the column inches devoted to different generals and other military fronts. Hoche had his own press and when Bonaparte was despatched to Italy it was not considered to be the main theatre of war. There were plenty of able, youthful generals serving the Republic, and a concerted comparison might demonstrate why they failed to make a similar impression on the popular consciousness. Hanley also suggests a means of measuring impact via so-called “passive propaganda”, whereby independent sources latched on to material originated by Bonaparte. This is a promising avenue to explore, for it reflects a significant influence, such as the extent to which his press reports were “syndicated”, or official portraits were replicated in prints and medals. In the end, as the author rightly concludes, Bonaparte used all the means at his disposal to signal effect. The Revolution had generated a propagandist press and a practice of representations: Bonaparte recognised their potential and manipulated them to the utmost, just as he did with innovations in so many other domains.

The argument is clearly put and the text is generally well-written. There are one or two factual slips: Sieyès did not write the Constitution of the Year III (Afterword, p. 1) which he would later overturn; on the contrary his proposals were not generally incorporated into the document which he held in the greatest contempt. More irksome is the large number of spelling mistakes, chiefly afflicting French names and words (Maximilien Robespierre, François de Neufchâteau and the Champ de Mars among them). The Gregorian equivalents of the Republican calendar (a bane for historians of this period) are sometimes incorrect and, in the footnotes for the Afterword, events leading to the coup of Brumaire are given as Year VII rather than Year VIII. These typographical shortcomings can be easily rectified. One particular advantage of an e-book, unlike a print copy, is that the text can be rapidly revised, without a second edition. I suggest that the author grasps this opportunity.

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## NOTES

[1] Napoleon Bonaparte, *Correspondance de Napoléon 1er publiée par ordre de l'Empereur Napoléon III*, 32 vols. (Paris: Imprimerie Impériale, 1858-69). The Fondation Napoléon is in the process of producing a *Correspondance complète*, which will include many additional items. The first two volumes have appeared, published by Fayard in Paris, and they go up to 1799.

[2] A superb collection of microfiches was produced by Pergamon in 1989 on various aspects of the Revolution and included a series on the press, which contained complete runs of many *journaux*. I have used the collection at the Bibliothèque de l'Institut de l'Histoire de la Révolution française at the Sorbonne, but I am not sure where others are located. Any information regarding their whereabouts would be most welcome.

[3] Jean Tulard, *Napoleon. The Myth of the Saviour*, Trans. 1984 (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson), p. 61.

[4] Robert B. Holtman, *Napoleonic Propaganda* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1950).

[5] Annie Jourdan, *Napoléon: héros, imperator, mécène* (Paris: Aubier, 1998), sadly not yet translated into English. See more recently, Philip Dwyer, "Napoleon Bonaparte as Hero and Saviour: Image, Rhetoric and Behaviour in the Construction of a Legend", *French History* 18 (2004):379-403, in a number of the journal devoted to Images of Napoleon and the Empire.

[6] See also, Jean-Paul Bertaud, *1799: Bonaparte prend le pouvoir* (Brussels: Éditions Complexe, 1987, new ed. 2000), Thierry Lentz, *Le 18-Brumaire. Les coups d'état de Napoléon Bonaparte* (Paris: Jean Picollec, 1997) and Malcolm Crook, *Napoleon Comes to Power: Democracy and Dictatorship in Revolutionary France, 1795-1804* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1998).

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