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Electronic version

URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/chs/1641>
DOI: 10.4000/chs.1641
ISSN: 1663-4837

Publisher

Librairie Droz

Printed version

Date of publication: 1 June 2016
ISBN: 978-2-600-01953-8
ISSN: 1422-0857

Electronic reference

Michael Broers, « The Napoleonic Gendarmerie. The state on the periphery made real », *Crime, Histoire & Sociétés / Crime, History & Societies* [Online], Vol. 20, n°1 | 2016, Online since 01 June 2018, connection on 30 April 2019. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/chs/1641> ; DOI : 10.4000/chs.1641

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- 1 The Gendarmerie was the proto-type for all the para-military police forces of modern Europe from 1814 onwards, as Clive Emsley has demonstrated in his wide-ranging study.¹ The Piedmontese – subsequently Italian – Carabinieri Reale and the Gendarmerie of the Kingdom of the Netherlands are its direct descendants, as were the police forces of the states of the Confederation of the Rhine; the Spanish Guardia Civil and the Royal Irish Constabulary were among its more furtive, but also most scrupulous imitators.² Its sheer presence in the European countryside, disseminated as it was in six-man brigades in every canton of the imperial departments and, through its sister-services, in those of the satellite kingdoms, marked a genuine revolution in the nature of the state in Europe. The fundamental changes the physical presence of this corps wrought in the relationship of the rural periphery to the state in Europe cannot be underestimated, although it is too often neglected in general histories.³
- 2 It received its vital reorganisation early in the Napoleonic Consulate, and had achieved maturity and high status as a corps by the time the empire flung itself out from 1805 onwards. Its usefulness in the enforcement of conscription, the collection of taxation, the suppression of banditry, and its ability to maintain a degree of civil order in the countryside – far advanced on previous circumstances, if hardly perfect – ensured that the Gendarmerie was always among the first imperial institutions set up in newly annexed areas, not far behind the civil administration of prefects and departments, and not far ahead of the tribunals and legal codes it was there to make real and enforce.⁴ At the height of the ‘Grand Empire’, between 1810 and 1812, the six-man Gendarmerie brigades were found as far afield as Croatia, Osnabrück and the Silvan hills. Where the system of sedentary six-man brigades, each patrolling its canton and settled in barracks, failed to take root, so did Napoleonic rule. At a functional level, this might be described as when – and when not – the Gendarmerie evolved from an essentially colonial police force, whose main function was control and exploitation, to an imperial corps, there to integrate and facilitate the fusion of a varied imperial polity.⁵ Its failure to assume this

model over much of the Kingdom of Naples – where it operated through urban-based flying columns into the hinterland – or in Spain – where it never left the blochaus on the main roads – marked where Napoleon's writ failed to run, and where French hegemony ended.⁶

An instrument of colonisation?

- 3 The omnipresence of the Gendarmerie clearly makes it an imperial institution. It was intended to be an imperial police force, created and defined in the metropole and then exported without significant modifications throughout the non-French territories of the First Empire. This is not quite the same thing as claiming the Napoleonic Gendarmerie as a colonial police force. The French had few illusions that local conditions would usually be so hostile and convulsed that its initial role would be that of a colonial police force, there to hold down newly subject populations. For the policy makers in Paris, this was meant to be but the first stage of an integrationist French project, but that is only one perspective. Whether the corps evolved from a colonial, into an imperial institution depended not only on how its role changed, but how it was viewed by those it policed. This entails an exploration of its attitudes towards its non-French administrés and a partial exploration of the wider question of whether Napoleonic France had a conscious, concerted policy that amounted to a 'civilizing mission' towards its new subjects which, in turn, presupposes a sense of cultural superiority on the part of the French. In so short a paper, I must begin by saying that my working assumption is that there was a 'civilizing mission' at the core of Napoleonic imperialism, and that it often translated into a marked sense that their subject peoples were inferior to them.⁷ The Gendarmerie was an agent of this mission, and was marked by this assumption of cultural superiority, at least at the level of policy, if not always in the behaviour of its ranks. It was there to stand apart from the communities it served, to set them a new, decidedly alien example of public service, just as it was to enforce the will of an alien state. Thus, its actions made it part of the civilizing mission, but its very presence in the most remote parts of rural Europe – an unheralded intrusion of direct state power in places never before so closely policed – inevitably marked it out as an agent of colonialism, not just of empire. That is, in the eyes of the communities it policed, it was an alien body, imbued with alien values and an alien mission. Its brigades and barracks were colons in almost the pristine sense of the term: Its men as individuals were far from settlers, for they were usually single men and were moved about with as much regularity as conditions allowed. The six man brigades became something akin to self-contained settlements, a sort colony of ex-legionnaires, for gendarmes were all veterans of the Grande Armée, set down among the barbarians as a reward for loyal service, and as an example of the dominant culture. Individuals came and went; as a brigade, they were a colon of sorts.
- 4 Objectively, the Gendarmerie could remain as essentially a colonial force by default, as it were. This remained so in its own eyes and those of the regime, when it failed to evolve into a sedentary force because of overwhelmingly hostile local conditions. Subjectively, it often remained perceived as a colonial agent in the eyes of its administrés because of its intrusive character: The very factor that marked its transition to an agent of integration in imperial strategy – its permanent presence diffused across the countryside – made it an intrusive occupying force for many local communities. This was aggravated by the very routine tasks the corps was charged with, above all the enforcement of conscription,

viewed by those subject to it as the worst – and highest – form of colonial exploitation; the ‘blood tax’ was but the fiercest and most cruel extractative process of colonial commodities.⁸

- 5 Equally, colonialist attitudes remained strong within the ranks of the corps. Hard experience and ingrained prejudice led gendarmes to perceive themselves as colonial enforcers, rather than as agents of imperial integration. Hostility was often reciprocal. The sense of alienation from their administrés was present from the outset, within the frontiers of ‘old France’ itself, and at the moment the corps began to take its definitive form. This is a reminder, however complicating in terms of definition, that France, the imperial metropole, may have had a suitably imperialist, colonialist image of itself at the apex of its state and among its elites; yet France in the late Directory and early Consulate was regarded by those who had to police it as ‘an empire within a nation’. No one espoused this so unequivocally, or with such sheer venom, as Étienne Radet, the soldier who has the best claim to be called the father of the Gendarmerie, alongside his rival, Bon-Adrien Moncey. The latter went on to give the corps its definitive regulations soon after Napoleon took power in 1799 and masterminded its ultimate shape. The former, however, pioneered the system of recruitment for its members, laid down its code of conduct, its training methods and, above all, its system of operations, in the years immediately before Napoleon’s seizure of power. Radet did all this, significantly, at local level, mainly in Provence and then Corsica, and in response to some of the most convulsed conditions facing the Directory in its final months. It should be added that Radet – like Moncey – was from the Meuse, in north-eastern France. He commanded 500 men, over the departments of Bouches-du-Rhône, Gard, Hérault and Vaucluse in 1798 with a brief to fight brigandage and to deal with royalist rebellion.⁹ Radet went further than this, giving first shape to the brigade system by cantons and drawing up comprehensive codes of conduct for his men. Equally striking, from the perspective of colonial policing, were his attitudes to his administrés. His views on what he encountered in Avignon and the southern Rhone valley give full expression to his attitude towards the region and its people:

If the Midi enjoys an un-natural calm, it is due only to the good judgement of the government, which has put it under military rule and confided its running to republican generals. Effectively, the throat-slashings, the assaults and the thefts will begin again...if firmness and foresight are not deployed. They are all extreme people...The people of the cities, as well as the peasants, have hysterical characters, which comes from the nature of the region, itself, where the climate influences the disposition of the body, itself.¹⁰

- 6 He depicts them all as paresseux et mendiants...le sol est de Dieu et le peuple du diable. Radet never identified with the region he policed – he hated the Midi:

It is tempting to want to blast away everything in this accursed region; integrity here is seen as an enemy that egoism assails with all available means...‘Public spirit’ as it is known here is an inhuman, revolting thing.¹¹

- 7 A year later, his views had not changed at all:...peu d’esprit national, mais beaucoup d’égoïsme et de vénalité. Radet came to equate the meridional French with his deprecating image of the Italians:

They are our Lazzaroni, men without any sense of restraint, amoral, craving lucrative posts, cruel killers, ferocious when banded together, cowardly when face-to-face with an opponent, lazy, inclined to vice and excess; in a word, the enemies of ordered society...Law courts mean nothing to them. The local authorities are loathsome; many of them are illiterate; our laws are simply unknown to them.¹²

- 8 This was the birth of the corps, and Radet was the man sent first to Parma, then to Florence and Rome, and finally to Naples, to organize it.¹³ His remarks while in Italy reveal that familiarity did not alter his penchant for stereotypes that were themselves, rooted in what might be termed a 'mediated' Montesquieuean vision of the world:

I have noticed that, in general, the great mass of the people, although indolent thanks to the bounties of nature, as well as through softness and their taste for pleasure, is naturally docile and easily led, and good natured.¹⁴

- 9 Edward Said cannot but spring to mind.¹⁵ Hardly surprisingly, Radet was entrusted with the arrest of the Pope in 1809, and saw it as a victory for civilization. When he was sent to organize the corps in Corsica, under the Consulate, many of his letters to friends, family and superiors came to resemble those of the colonial administrator-turned-amateur- or proto-anthropologist: "Save in the towns, where the habits and ways of the continent have begun to appear, they are unkempt, jealous, lazy, restless and still far from civilized." Of the shepherd communities he wrote, "...their itinerant way of life, their habits, their daily regime, make them rather akin to the savages of antiquity, and distance them from any concept of civilization."¹⁶ This was the hierarchy of the corps speaking of the communities of its own metropole, albeit those of its remote periphery.¹⁷

- 10 It would not be outlandish to classify these as 'proto-colonial' attitudes, and to see the corps' mission, in such places, as that of the vanguard and as the 'hard edge' of a civilizing mission. Indeed, many of Radet's comments on both Corsica and his Italian postings, speak in exactly these terms, and see 'good government' – with the corps, of necessity at its forefront – as the means of salvation for meridional societies.

- 11 The general rule throughout the empire was the same, however. Napoleon's reforms took great care to ensure that his gendarmes did not mix with the locals, or become directly involved in their affairs: The corps was housed in barracks, not lodged with locals, wherever possible, a policy which both insulated the gendarmes and insured that they did not become a financial burden on those they policed. To further this end, they were paid by the Army, not by local government; the corps was, indeed, a part of the French Army, commanded by the Minister of War, and not in the least a civilian police force, despite the nature of its duties. Marriage with local girls was firmly prohibited, and single men were definitely preferred for the corps. The corps meant it. In 1803, a French gendarme in a remote Piedmontese village asked permission to marry a local girl, and his brigadier got cashiered for allowing it. The commandant of the department told Paris:

It is important to prevent similar abuses (occurring) if we do not want to witness gendarmes marrying everything Piedmont has to offer in the way of the worst and most distasteful kind of subject.¹⁸

- 12 Officially, everything possible was done to thwart 'intermarriage' with the natives, although humanity would have come out in the most unpromising places. In March, 1814, twenty-two French gendarmes deserted when ordered to withdraw from the Tuscan departments, reportedly to remain with their 'wives', local women they had married illegally, in church, without the obligatory civil ceremony or official permission.¹⁹

- 13 Finally, the government always preferred gendarmes to come from outside the areas they policed. Indeed, in the 'reunited' departments of Belgium, northern Italy and the Rhineland, two thirds of each brigade (usually four out of six men) were drawn from France itself – 'the Interior' or 'old France', as contemporary officials called it – and two were local men, to act as translators.²⁰ It was a policy begun in the troubled western departments of France, centred on the Vendée, and extended for the first time to Belgium

in 1798. Napoleon made it standard practice. When first extended beyond France to the Belgian departments, this policy had its idealistic side, as expressed by General Wirion, the man charged with its organisation, first in the Vendée, then in Belgium, and later in Piedmont.²¹ For Wirion, the mixture of Frenchmen and locals was “an infallible method of cementing the spirit of concord and fraternity that we are trying to re-establish between the old and the new departments.”²² In Piedmont, he dwelt more on the negative reasons behind this policy, chiefly the impossibility of entrusting law enforcement to partisan local men: “In this way (the inclusion of Frenchmen) I can stop the fears that might be raised among good citizens, that the guarding of their safety had been delegated to a corps incapable of inspiring their confidence, and also...incapable of winning it back.”²³ Either way, the end was the same, however: Wirion sought to create a professional, impartial police force. It was all the more necessary, given the kind of societies – savage, lawless by nature, retarded in the context of Enlightened progress – that they had been posted to, and were expected to police.

- ¹⁴ This is perhaps the aspect of the experience of policing rural Europe that most characterises the Napoleonic Gendarmerie as a proto-colonial police force: The sense shared by the corps’ directors in Paris and the men on-the-ground, that they were charged not just with the policing of areas new to the French system of government, but of communities hitherto bereft of law of almost any kind. This is reflected in the kind of men sent in to ‘do the spadework’, as it were. Significantly, when Napoleon altered his policing policies, the men who enforced them moved on from those areas to the new trouble spots of the empire. Two ‘police teams’ emerged during the Napoleonic period, who specialised in the different stages of pacification. The ‘first wave’ was headed by Wirion, as we have seen, and was concerned with setting up the basic institutions. It was usually followed, in the middle years of the empire, by another headed by General Menou, who had first come to prominence as the head of the military government in Egypt during Napoleon’s occupation of Cairo in 1798, where he married the daughter of the owner of the Turkish Baths, converted to Islam and – for a wager as well as for love – was circumcised.²⁴ Menou was always a ferocious defender of the Gendarmerie against the complaints of the civilian administrators, and was known to despise even the Special Criminal Courts as too soft on bandits, preferring his own ad hoc ‘Extraordinary Military Tribunals’. He was the commandant of the 27th and 28th Military Divisions, which embraced north-western Italy until 1807, when he lost the argument over the use of the Law of 10 Vendémiaire, Year IV, and over prolonging the life of the Extraordinary Military Commissions.²⁵ What is important, however, is that this did not spell the end of his career. Menou was less sacked than transferred to Tuscany on its occupation by the French in 1808, where his methods were still deemed appropriate. Later, in 1810, he moved on to Venice, where he died the following year. In a very real sense, Menou’s career path is a reflection of the growth and character of the Napoleonic Empire itself, and of how those who ruled it sought it to evolve. There was more than a little taste of the ‘wild west’ about the pacification of Napoleonic Europe: The ‘wild frontier’ kept shifting further away from the centre of the empire – or, at least, that was the hope – and so the men who ‘tamed’ that frontier became unwelcome, moving on to the ‘Indian country’ of the new departments and territories. Menou is, probably, the major example of such men. He was colourful in the extreme, treated civilian officials with thinly disguised contempt while in Turin and did not change his ways after he went to Tuscany, Prince Eugene – Josephine’s cold fish of a son, and Napoleon’s reliable viceroy in Milan – reported to Napoleon of Menou’s conduct in Florence. That

...he forgets his place a bit, neglects the business he doesn't understand, lives openly with a dancer, and in all these ways, he compromises his dignity and by this kind of conduct, he undermines the consideration and respect necessary for an official of his rank.²⁶

- 15 Significantly, as long as a major rebellion threatened in Tuscany – as it did until 1810 – Napoleon kept Menou at the helm there.²⁷ He was not alone. Menou's 'right-hand-man', General Radet – who had been entrusted by Napoleon with the reorganisation of the Gendarmerie in the French interior in 1800 – went south from Tuscany, to organise the Gendarmerie in the Papal States and the Kingdom of Naples, when Menou headed north to Venice. Radet had a reputation for tough, effective policing, but there was little love lost between him and many civilian officials anxious to establish a more orderly, less aggressive form of imperial rule on 'the new frontier' of southern Italy. He drew real invective from Antoine Roederer, the Prefect of the Trasimeno (Umbria):

Radet is a rotten braggart who will finish badly, likely as not. I don't know how the Emperor doesn't still know about him or, if he does know, why he doesn't put him in his place. This man is dishonourable, real dirt, whatever his important position or his power.²⁸

- 16 It must be said, that Radet wrote a trenchant defence of himself, too controversial to be published in his lifetime, and even the sanitised version published by his family reflects his combative character.²⁹ This outburst came in the context of the Prefect's complaints about corruption in the local Gendarmerie which did not seem to interest Radet at all. 'His place', however, continued to be at the forefront of the battle against brigandage, leading mobiles columns all over southern Italy. It took a certain sort of character to revel in all this. Modesty and hesitance were not cardinal virtues of characters like Radet, even when they sat down as old men to write their memoirs. Here is Manhès, the 'arch-enforcer' of the Kingdom of Naples, on taking up his first command of the war on brigandage:

Swiftly and with a clear eye, I decided to go straight to the areas infested by these numerous bands of assassins...Thanks to my natural verve, to my youthful vigour, to a certain ability to win over the locals, and being somewhat familiar with the language, I undertook a mission that would have discouraged the most hardened politician and paralysed a soldier's courage. I used my natural ability, and Heaven gave me so much success, that peace and order were soon restored.³⁰

- 17 God was lucky to get a mention. That, however, is what it took to tame Western Europe. The 'wild west' of the ever-expanding imperial frontier made room for those attracted to the power and danger offered by the process of pacification in its early stages. Menou, Radet and Manhès were all of a type, and they all followed the Imperial frontier when the 'imperial heartland' became too tame, but there was never an opportunity for the Napoleonic regime to dispense with their services, all together. Some part or other of the Napoleonic Empire was always a colonial frontier, and it was in such environments that the Gendarmerie was forged.

The Gendarmerie in action

- 18 The evolution of the Gendarmerie from a colonial force, occupying a hostile region and keeping watch over an alien, dangerous populace, into an imperial corps, serving integrated communities, turned on the success of another highly developed set of

Napoleonic strategies for pacification, following the absorption of a given region into the imperial sphere of hegemony.

- 19 Almost everywhere they occupied and declared their intention to annex, the French were met with fierce and widespread, if usually short lived collective resistance. There were important exceptions to this rule, as in central Germany, where the creation of the Grand Duchy of Berg met no popular resistance, or in the Hanseatic ports, where it was futile.³¹ Elsewhere, particularly south of the Alps, popular violence followed quickly on the first phase of French administrative, as opposed to purely military, occupation. Piedmont in 1800-1802, Liguria in 1805, the Piacentino in 1805-1806, Tuscany in 1808, the revolt of Tolfa in the Papal states in 1809, and the rebellions in the Abruzzi and Calabria, in the Kingdom of Naples all conform to this pattern.³² Recent research has also shown the intensity and diffusion of popular, open and collective revolt in the Netherlands, following the deposition of Louis Bonaparte and the annexation of his satellite kingdom of Holland to France, in 1810.³³ Where open rebellion was crushed, but not entirely extirpated, it splintered into its initial, constituent parts. Urban revolts, epitomised by the resistance of Zaragoza in 1808 – or even Madrid – were suppressed definitively, if not quite with ease,³⁴ and what collective resistance remained, retreated to the remoter peripheries, and became dominated by traditionally independent peasant communities and their natural leaders.³⁵ It is in this second phase that older local sources of lawlessness proved vital for the perpetuation of collective disorder. Effectively, this usually meant the presence of banditry and smuggling, but also, paradoxically, of local traditions of resistance to the authority of the same old orders that the resistance was now ostensibly fighting to restore. The persistence of such cores of resistance could, in favourable circumstances, did much to disrupt the workings of Napoleonic rule. The presence of well-established bands of bandits, semi-military units disloyal to the new governments, or guerrillas of any sort, provided rallying points for far larger numbers of young men determined to avoid conscription. If bandits or other rebel groups of reasonably permanent character welcomed them, these groups could find much wider support networks than they might otherwise have been able to rely on.³⁶ Thus, the potential to spread disorder more widely than pre-war patterns of banditry became distinctly possible. The task the French then faced was to hem in these remaining cores of resistance, to isolate them geographically, if possible, but always to force them into actions more harmful than supportive to the communities that provided their support networks. If French rule was to work, and if the second phase of collective resistance was to be dissipated and destroyed, it first had to be transformed into pure, desperate criminality, where support for it was embedded in the wider community. The transformation of collective resistance into these successive phases made the task of pacification at once less overtly dangerous for French rule, but also progressively more difficult to achieve in the context of normalising the character of their rule and establishing confidence in its worth among their new subjects.
- 20 Most of the revolts against the new regime, be they in France itself or in its new acquisitions, were not dealt crushing blows by the massed ranks of the Grande Armée; the defeated peasant rebels were not cut down or trampled over by the overwhelming force of French regulars, still less their elite units. Rather, they were beaten by hastily assembled reserve troops, composed of what every garrison units were to hand, sometimes with local help, sometimes without. Nonetheless, they had developed shock tactics that enabled them to respond energetically. The key to French counter-insurgency

was not to sit and wait: When peasant forces descended from mountain peripheries to try to take provincial centres, the French did not entrench themselves behind urban walls and either simply defend or launch sporadic strikes from these strongholds. Early in the Vendean revolt, they had developed the *colonne mobile*, and if any single thing characterised their approach to counter-insurgency it was mobility and, above all, a mobility that drove deep into the countryside.³⁷ The French believed in pursuit and penetration, and the *colonne mobile* was their chosen weapon. As long as there was a core of experienced regular troops to graft less hardened units around, the column could work. It was often a microcosm of the Napoleonic army corps, composed of cavalry and some mobile artillery as well as infantry, and so able to switch from skirmishing to open combat, to limited siege tactics, as it harried the rebels from one sort of position to the other. The *colonne mobile* was designed to chase, harry and displace rebels; it worked on the sensible assumption that it would not crush all of them in one place, that they would retreat to their original, often near-impregnable positions, and that the way to beat them was to keep up the pursuit and to confront them with different weaponry and battle tactics, as the terrain changed. It might be noted at this point, that the *colonne mobile* remained a feature of routine rural policing throughout the period, even after the successful pacification of a given area. The principles of mobility and penetration of the countryside underpinned the workings of conscription, throughout the empire, and throughout the period. The *colonne mobile* was the 'cutting edge' of the conscription process, as it were. At least three times per year – four in the last, desperate years of the regime – the prefects toured their departments, spending several days in each of the *canton chefs lieux*, the seats of the justices of the peace, to carry out the *tirage*. They moved from one to the next at the head of a *colonne mobile* composed of the regular troops of the reserve company established in each department, supported by the Gendarmerie, and more regular troops in difficult areas. The operation could – and often did – switch from an administrative process to a military occupation and localised counter-insurgency campaign, almost at will.

- 21 The need for para-military policing and ruthless tactics that amounted to military occupation did not finish with the end of open, widespread revolt. The second phase of resistance was the splintering and regrouping of recalcitrant elements into banditry, usually in very difficult terrain to police. The French responded to this with a new tactic and a very new, virtually novel weapon. The weapon was the Gendarmerie, and the tactic it embodied and enforced was dissemination, as opposed to the penetration of the *colonne mobile*. Its targets were the fragmented pieces of collective resistance, and where it could not stamp out banditry or other forms of guerrilla quickly, its permanent presence in their heartlands usually forced the bands into blatant criminality, often manifested in kidnapping members of the local elite for ransom, less discriminating highway robbery, common crime directed at the most vulnerable – from widows to isolated farms – all of which eroded their support networks. In other words, the Gendarmerie's contribution to the continuing process of counter-insurgency was to make the counter-revolutionary guerrilla appear ever more less politicised and ever more criminalised, to strip the 'social' away from Eric Hobsbawm's 'social bandit'.³⁸ From the outset of resistance to the new regime, the French revolutionaries had branded all those who opposed them as brigands and common criminals;³⁹ a key component of the Gendarmerie's role in the second phase of counter-insurgency was to turn this into a widely perceived reality for local communities.

- 22 It is hard to understate the innovative nature of the Gendarmerie, or to underestimate the impact it made on rural Europe, in the Napoleonic period or afterwards. Reviving and reforming the moribund, makeshift corps he had inherited from the revolutionaries was one of the first tasks Napoleon set himself, and with good reason. As his ruthless counter-insurgency campaigns in France, Piedmont, Belgium and the Rhineland began to work, he saw he needed to move to the dissemination of coercive force, if the new system of conscription created by the Jourdan Law of 1798 was to work. By it, each department was to provide a fixed quota of men, three times a year, based on its population. Such an operation could not work, if entrusted mainly to transient, mobile, *colonnes mobiles*: The new *colonnes mobiles* had to move into generally orderly areas. Moreover, with overt resistance coming to an end, the target now had to be sporadic or highly localised disorder. As French rule established itself in other parts of Europe, the pattern was repeated. From 1801 in Piedmont onwards, the Gendarmerie was always in place, prior to annexation.
- 23 The policing of rural Europe before the advent of the corps had been characterised by two, usually inadequate, approaches. One was simply to use regular troops to ‘sweep’ difficult areas, and this only intermittently either when mass revolt broke out, or when troops or revenues were needed and not forthcoming. The other, embodied by the Italian *sbirri*, represented attempts to create proto-Gendarmeries in the hinterlands, by placing groups of armed men in strategic areas, but the inability of weak *ancien régime* governments to control them, or to pay them, saw such forces degenerate into nothing more than ‘licensed bandits’. Often numerous, well-armed and powerful, they were of no use of to the state, and less to the communities they were meant to serve. The Gendarmerie was anything but loved, either, its major purpose under Napoleon being to collect the ‘blood tax’ – to enforce conscription – together with a host of other loathed innovations, whatever their connection to the advance of modernity. It was this task, and this relationship centred on conscription, that made the Gendarmerie an arm of counter-insurgency long after it was meant to settle into the role of routine policing.
- 24 Yet, in direct contrast to the *colonnes mobiles*, the Gendarmerie was permanent, sedentary and did regular patrols of its small, circumscribed area, the *canton*. It could amalgamate with other, neighbouring brigades in the face of serious disorder, and summon regular troops from their urban garrisons. They formed the core of *colonnes mobiles* during the process of conscription. Above all, the Gendarmerie was the direct physical presence of the state at the most localised level possible. It made the law, as represented by the justices of the peace and the civil administration, and as represented by the *maires*, a reality, and the corps was usually more ready to enforce the former and sustain the latter, than their civilian counterparts. The Gendarmerie walked the knife-edge that separated the success of counter-insurgency from its failure: It could change from being the powerful strong arm of the new regime in the heart of the periphery, to a beleaguered, almost besieged outpost of a distant, tenuous authority, often worse armed than the bandits or rebels it was there to eradicate. There was nothing inevitable about the former reality triumphing over the latter, but where it did, much else followed. In the first instance, it assured the genuine pacification of a given region. Its ability to enforce conscription, to stamp out organised banditry, to inculcate into hitherto rebellious, independent communities the futility of violent, collective opposition to authority, marked the success and the end of the second phase of counter-insurgency. This was the result of dissemination. There was more, however. The permanence of the corps in the

hinterlands meant that things would never be the same again: Communities no longer policed themselves; the days of independence by default were gone for the European peasantry, where the Gendarmerie in its sedentary form took root. There is a tendency among historians and political scientists to refer to the centralised state, to the modern state, and to the Weberian concept of the monopoly of violence as residing in the state in too abstract a manner. Weber saw one of the key characteristics of the modern state as its sole control of coercive force. The close study of the Napoleonic Gendarmerie in action is the hard, usually brutal reality behind such theories. It also lends real credence to Weber's theory, however, for where the Gendarmerie established itself, this became the reality. Indeed, where its effectiveness as a disseminated, sedentary corps succeeded, no successor regime to Napoleon ever disbanded it. Where it had failed to do so, as in Spain, even the most anti-Napoleonic rulers did not delay overlong in copying it.⁴⁰

- 25 The Gendarmerie working as it was intended was the model the French and their satellite regimes set themselves as the essential target of counter-insurgency. This gave the new regime its focused goal: When the *colonnes mobiles* gave way to the sedentary Gendarmerie, the turning point had been reached. This was seldom as clear cut as a schematic approach makes it seem, yet it can and was charted in clear institutional and operational terms. Once the corps became sedentary, it was able to devote itself to the protection of persons and property, as well as counter-insurgency.

Conclusion

- 26 Much has been written in many national contexts about the importance placed by the state on the image of these para-military police forces, and their central importance for the process of nation-building, particularly in nineteenth century Europe. Napoleon began this process, and it is important to note that it began in an imperial context: The Gendarmerie as Napoleon conceived it was meant to weld an empire together through the image its men presented; this function was only transferred to national contexts after 1814 by its successor corps. Napoleon's regime made great efforts to ensure that the gendarmes 'looked the part': Gendarmes had to be tall, and great efforts were made to ensure that height requirements were met, to provide an imposing powerful presence in the most basic way among the communities they policed. They were to be properly – and elegantly – uniformed which, combined with their height, was meant to produce an impression of reliability, professionalism and even glamour, among those they policed; they were also to be well armed with carbines – rather than the cumbersome, inaccurate muskets borne by troops-of-the-line.⁴¹ Indeed, the elite character of the Napoleonic Gendarmerie received the highest possible accolade from the Emperor, in that the Gendarmerie of the Imperial Guard was considered 'the elite of the elite' as it were.⁴² In concept, at least, the Napoleonic Gendarmerie was meant to be the embodiment of imperial splendour, military glory, and solid, civic dependability. In theory, it was not meant to be a second-rate repository for the debris of the army, hidden on remote frontier postings. Quite the reverse.
- 27 The wear-and-tear of active service, together with the straightened finances of a regime at war all over Europe, meant that gendarmes were, in fact, often threadbare and less well armed than many peasants with their hunting rifles. There are many reported instances of bandits and army deserters who were able to pass themselves off as gendarmes to peasant households, so better armed and uniformed were they compared to the real

police who were in pursuit of them. Equally, individual gendarmes seldom met the high standards set for them by the Napoleonic regulations: They were often too small, semi-literate; nor were they as well disciplined as was desired, and there were many nasty moments between civilian officials and the members of the corps, about the mistreatment of suspects and ordinary people, especially in areas with a history of smuggling, rebellion, violent crime or – most often – all three. Nevertheless, they were all experienced soldiers, accustomed to military discipline, loyal to the Napoleonic regime, and – almost invariably – remarkably brave in the face of danger. The mixing French and non-French men in the brigades was a tool of imperial integration, as well as a policy of expediency. For Wirion, who began the process in Belgium and continued it in the Rhineland and Piedmont, the mixture of Frenchmen and locals was “an infallible method of cementing the spirit of concord and fraternity that we are trying to re-establish between the old and the new departments”.⁴³

- 28 These were the circumstances that moulded its character, its tactics and its sense of purpose, and they were imperial, neo-colonial circumstances, above all because the Gendarmerie was regarded as hostile, but above all as alien, by many of the communities it served, and so its cantonal brigades became bastions of empire, foreign entities in an alien countryside. However, its role in the community, the regular patrols it carried out, and above all, its permanent presence in the hinterlands of Europe, also made it something more complex than the lowest level of a mere military occupation. The Napoleonic Gendarmerie was an arm of colonialism, through the policies it enforced and because of its alien presence in the community; it was an imperial entity, by its role in the civilizing mission of the Napoleonic empire, and by virtue of the example it was meant to set to a subject population in the process of integration. It was an alien, often hated presence throughout Napoleonic Europe, but it was not transient.

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NOTES

1. Emsley (1999).
2. Emsley (1999).
3. Most of the leading textbooks have very little or nothing to say about the Gendarmerie : Woolf (1991), Ellis (2003), Esdaile (1994), Grab (2006). Two exceptions are Broers (1996) and Boudon (2008).
4. Even general works as concerned with the formation of the Empire as Woolf (1991) or Broers (1996) do not actually outline the actual process of annexation in bureaucratic terms. This reflection is drawn directly from the archives, especially series F1e (Pays réunis et annexes) of the Archives Nationales, Paris.
5. For a comprehensive compendium : Luc (2002). For a regional example : Broers (1997, p. 284-293), Broers (1999, p. 179-187).
6. On Spain : Martin (1898) is a remarkable, almost blow-by-blow account of the defence of the main highways through the blochaus. On the Kingdom of Naples : Davis (2006), Garrigoux (1999).
7. Broers (2002), Broers (2001, p. 152-180).
8. Forrest (1988) ; Woloch (1986, p. 101-129) ; Grab (1995, p. 25-54) ; Broers (1997, p. 318-325).
9. For treatment of the region under the Directory and early Consulate : Brown (2006), Lucas (1978, p. 1-25).

10. Combier (1892, p. 99).
11. *Ibid*, p. 100.
12. *Ibid* (p. 132).
13. On Radet in Parma : Broers (2004, p. 86-87). On Radet in Calabria : Caldora (1960, p. 45-57).
14. Combier (1892, p. 515).
15. Said (1978).
16. Combier (1892, p. 492-493).
17. On Corsica : Wilson (1988).
18. Archivio di Stato, Cuneo Mazzo 227 (Polizia), Jubé to Boissard, 5 July, 1803.
19. AG Xf 128 (Gendarmerie), dossier : dépt. de l'Arne, 'Tableau et Rapport', Feb. 1814.
20. Emsley (1999, p. 57-60).
21. *Ibid*, p. 58-59.
22. *Archives Nationales de Paris* (ANP) F1e 10 (Pays et Départements Réunis, Belgique), Dossier 'Organisation de la Gendarmerie. Papiers communs aux neuf départements', Gen. Wirion to the Administrator-General, Brussels, 22 pluviôse year IV/11 February 1796.
23. Archives de la Guerre, Xf 150 (Gendarmerie), Wirion to the Minister of War, 19 thermidor year IX/7 August 1801.
24. On Menou, see : Rigault (1911). On the teams and the frontier : Broers, (2001b, p. 153-68).
25. For the genesis of these institutions and tactics in southern France, under the Directory and early Consulate : Brown (2006). For their subsequent use in Piedmont : Broers (1997, p. 370-82).
26. AG C3-6 (Ordres et correspondance du Prince Eugène, 1805-10), Eugene to Napoleon, 28 December 1808.
27. Broers (2004, p. 101-122) for Menou's career in Piedmont and Tuscany.
28. ANP, Archives Privées, Fonds Roederer, 29-AP-15, A. Roederer to P-L Roederer, 15 March 1812.
29. Combier (1892, p. 518).
30. Garrigoux (1999, p. 58).
31. On Berg : Schmidt (1905). On the Hansa : Vidalenc (1973, p. 281-307) ; Schmidt (1994, p. 49-84).
32. For an overview of the revolts in the départements réunis : Broers, (2004, p. 46-58). On Tolfa : Morra (1942). On the Veneto : Bullo (1898, p. 353-369, 441-467 & 721-745). On the Abruzzi : Coppa-Zuccari (1928). On Piedmont : Ruggiero (1974).
33. Joor (2000).
34. Esdaile (2004, p. 62-65).
35. For a regional case study : Tone (1994).
36. For the Piedmontese case, where these tactics were ultimately successful : Broers (2004, p. 341-404). From the bandits' perspective : Ruggiero (1968). For two cases on the periphery of the Empire where they failed : Tone (1994) on Navarre. Davis (2006, p. 212-9), on the Sila region in Calabria.
37. For the origins of these tactics in the Vendée : Martin (1987, p. 184-7). On their successful use in the 1799 revolt in southwestern France : Brown (2005, p. 54-78). Throughout the Midi : Brown (2006).
38. Hobsbawm (1972).
39. Forrest (2005, p. 25-44).
40. Emsley (1999, p. 149-222) ; Luc (2002, p. 401-44). On Spain : Ruiz (1973, p. 83-162).
41. On this subject in a French context : Luc (2008).
42. Lachouque and Brown (1997, p. 43).
43. *Archives Nationales de Paris* (ANP) F1e 10 (Pays et Départements Réunis, Belgique), Dossier 'Organisation de la Gendarmerie. Papiers communs aux neuf départements', Gen. Wirion to the Administrator-General, Brussels, 22 pluviôse year IV/11 February 1796.

ABSTRACTS

This article examines the functions of the French gendarmerie in occupied territories during the Napoleonic wars. Focusing on the writings by two early gendarmerie commanders who were in charge of building up gendarmerie forces in the Italian peninsular and the Rhineland, the article demonstrates how that the French gendarmerie was thought of by its senior commanders as both a colonial force as well as the bearer of a civilizing mission to spread French ideals and institutions. These texts also reveal the complex and multifaceted functions of the gendarmerie including crime fighting, notably against banditry, as well as pacification of local populations. In particular the relationship with local populations led to conflicts between commanders who preferred that the gendarmerie remained distant from the population they policed, and individual gendarmes who developed personal ties to the local populations, and in many cases integrated and married into local communities. The civilizing mission was applied not only in occupied territories, but also in areas of France that were seen as backwards and not sufficiently under the control of Paris. The gendarmerie thereby became an important tool in both national and imperial integration.

Cet article examine le fonctionnement de la gendarmerie française dans les territoires occupés durant les guerres napoléoniennes. En s'appuyant sur les écrits de deux des premiers commandants de la gendarmerie chargés de l'organiser dans la péninsule italienne et en Rhénanie, l'article montre que la gendarmerie était conçue par ses officiers supérieurs à la fois comme une force coloniale et comme une force porteuse d'une mission civilisatrice visant à répandre les institutions et les idéaux français. Ces textes révèlent également la complexité et la polyvalence de la gendarmerie qui englobait la lutte contre la criminalité – en particulier le brigandage – ainsi que la pacification des populations locales. Les relations avec ces dernières conduisaient du reste à des conflits entre les commandants – soucieux de maintenir une distance entre la gendarmerie et les populations visées – et les gendarmes pris individuellement – qui développaient des liens personnels avec elles et, dans de nombreux cas, s'intégraient et se mariaient localement. La mission civilisatrice s'appliquait non seulement aux territoires occupés mais aussi aux régions de France perçues comme attardées et insuffisamment contrôlées par Paris, de sorte que la gendarmerie est devenue un important instrument d'intégration nationale et impériale.

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