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'Little Emperors?' Investigating Prefectoral Rule in the Departments

Gavin Daly

Created by the law of 28 Pluviôse Year VIII, the French prefectoral administration lies at the heart of understanding Napoleonic state formation and the nature of Bonapartism at a local level. At the height of the Empire, each of the 130 Imperial departments (88 French and 44 foreign) was ultimately the responsibility of a single *fonctionnaire* – the prefect. Important as the prefectoral institution was, however, Napoleonic historiography is not blessed with a rich vein of studies on the daily work of the prefects.¹ As with so many other aspects of the period, regional history, and with it the opportunity to gain a heightened sensitivity to the prefectoral administration, has traditionally come a distant second to the figure of Napoleon and his military campaigns. With few departmental histories to draw on, traditional understandings of the Napoleonic prefect have largely been derived from the official perspective of Paris.

Typically, the prefect has been portrayed as a powerful and loyal government official, endowed with great authority by the law of 28 Pluviôse Year VIII. Indeed, the phrase 'little' or 'miniature Emperor' became a stock description of the prefect.² Napoleon, no less, joked to Castellane, prefect of the Basses-Pyrénées: 'Castellane, you are a pasha here. Once they get more than 100 miles from the capital, prefects have more power than I do.'³ Alternatively, and less commonly, the prefect has appeared as a passive state servant, stripped of any real power or agency. Frédéric Bluche, for instance, claims, 'The prefect is a neutral figure, a simple cipher for information and enforcement... His sphere of competence is infinitely extendable but he wields no power of his own.'⁴ This interpretation, too, is derived from the law of 28 Pluviôse Year VIII and various ministerial circulars, but one that emphasises the government's desire to ensure the prefects did not act

as independent local authorities. Both interpretations, then, although markedly different, share readings of the prefectoral office from the law of 28 Pluviôse and ministerial directives, and shed little light on the grass-roots realities of prefectoral rule '100 miles from the capital'.

In recent years, however, several developments in Napoleonic historiography have, consciously or otherwise, re-opened the question of prefectoral rule. This renewed interest has come from studies of French and foreign departments⁵ – especially Italian and Rhenish – and from histories of the Napoleonic Empire focusing on core-periphery relations and the integrative dynamics of Napoleonic rule.⁶ While Napoleonic regional history, especially of French departments, remains an under-developed field, the findings and perspectives of these studies allow us to consider the nature of prefectoral rule across a wider number of departments, and to reflect upon and re-appraise key historical problems. To what extent did the daily work of prefects conform to, or deviate from, government ideals, laws and directives? What was the relationship between the prefects and the government in Paris, between the prefects and other state authorities, and between the prefects and local notables? And what was the extent and nature of prefectoral power in the departments?

This paper explores these issues in French, Rhenish and Piedmontese departments, and draws particularly on my own study of the Norman department of the Seine-Inférieure. In short, prefects were neither little Emperors nor passive state servants, but rather something in between. Prefects were powerful in some contexts while weaker in others, never committed exclusively to either the state or to the department, but forced to play a complex and at times contradictory role, balancing personal, state and local interests. Loyal and committed government administrators, the prefects also understood the reality of local power dynamics, and with it the need to consult, conciliate and collude with local notables, sometimes outside official institutionalised channels. Challenged at times by rival state authorities, the prefects nevertheless remained, especially during the period of the Empire, the single most important local government figures in ensuring the long-term stability and acceptance of the regime.

The law of 28 Pluviôse Year VIII was a turning point in the history of French administration.⁷ Drawing upon the local administrative reforms of the Directory, the law was designed to produce a professional, hierarchical and centralised administration directly accountable to the state. The department was retained as the chief local administrative unit, and headed by a new official, the prefect, directly chosen by Napoleon.

The law of 28 Pluviôse stated, 'The prefect will alone be responsible for the administration.'⁸ The prefect was the chief representative of state authority in the department, taking an oath of loyalty to the government, housed in the prefecture, granted a generous salary, dressed in a distinctive uniform, accompanied by honour guards during public ceremonies, and obliged to make an annual tour of the department. Their responsibilities were considerable, covering most aspects of local life: conscription, subsistence, law and order, taxation, the Concordat, industry, commerce and agriculture; education; the poor, roads and public works. They also scrutinised public opinion, disseminated government propaganda, oversaw plebiscites, and tried to heal the political and religious divisions of the revolutionary decade or the turmoil of military occupation and annexation.

Despite this authority, the government from the very outset counselled against prefects having independent thoughts and actions. Jean-Antoine Chaptal at the session of the Legislative Body on 28 Pluviôse Year VIII (17 February 1800) stipulated, 'The prefect knows only the minister, the minister knows only the prefect. The prefect does not discuss the acts that are transmitted to him: he applies them, and he ensures and watches over their execution.'⁹ And Lucien Bonaparte, in a letter to the prefects on 6 Floréal Year VIII (25 April 1800), warned, 'All idea of administration and unity would be destroyed if each prefect takes, as a rule of conduct, his personal opinion on a law or act of the government. General ideas should come from the centre; it is from there that should come uniform and common direction.'¹⁰

On paper, then, the prefects enjoyed considerable authority and wide-ranging responsibilities; yet at the same time were controlled, directed and monitored from Paris. In practice, though, the exercise of prefectoral power was contingent upon many factors, of which state control was only one. These included the personalities of prefects and other government officials; the competency and experience of the prefects; competing state authorities in the departments; recent revolutionary history; the particular requirements of integrating annexed departments; and local notables, customs and socio-economic conditions. The prefect's role and the exercise of authority also varied across time, conditioned by the evolving history of the Consulate and Empire, and the changing international environment. In the French and foreign departments of the Consular period, the prefects faced the difficult task of overseeing the implementation and acceptance of the new regime, and coming to terms with the unresolved tensions and problems of the revolutionary decade or military occupation. In contrast, most prefects

during the middle Imperial years – with the exception of those in newly integrated departments – faced an easier task, running an already established system; while the prefects of the late Empire faced grave problems, dealing with rising conscription levies, falling public morale, and ultimately foreign invasion and the collapse of the regime itself.

It is clear that prefects faced varied and changing local environments, with prefectoral rule in practice never identical in any two departments. Yet in ruling their departments, prefects shared some important things in common. In asserting their authority, all prefects faced potential competition from rival state authorities.¹¹ With such all-encompassing responsibilities, the prefects were in constant communication with the ministerial departments in Paris – especially the Interior, War, Police, Finance and Justice – and with their representatives in the departments. The annexed departments were a special case: until September 1802, the prefects of the four Rhenish departments were overseen by commissioners for the Rhineland, an office created in 1797 to help oversee the establishment of civil rule in this former war-torn region;¹² and in Piedmont, a General Administrator based in Turin controlled the prefects until 1806.¹³ The centralisation of the Napoleonic state has recently been likened to a 'spider's web', with each thread, as it were, a particular arm of the government.¹⁴ With overlapping state jurisdictions at the local level, and with professional jealousies, egos and personalities thrown into the mix, there was always the potential for conflict over the exercise of power and the disclosure of knowledge.

The authorities most likely to come into conflict with the prefectoral administration were the military and the police. The question of prefectoral power in this regard has emerged as part of a wider historical debate over the nature of the Napoleonic state, the problem of law and order, and the relative importance of the civil administration versus the military and the police in consolidating the regime at a local level. Recent studies have stressed the regime's reliance on the police and the military, especially during the early Consulate in departments troubled by problems of law and order.¹⁵ In 1801, as part of the law and order agenda, 32 departments (23 French and 9 foreign) were placed under the jurisdiction of 'special courts' with powers to mete out summary justice against brigands.¹⁶ The regime's overriding concern was the restoration of order through repressing brigandage and rigorously enforcing conscription. When law and order problems prevailed, it is argued, the prefectoral administration was subordinate to the police and military forces, and reduced to a 'junior partnership' in local government.¹⁷ Moreover, law and order enforcement posed a threat

to the department and commune functioning as distinct operational administrative units.¹⁸ In fighting brigandage, the Military Divisions, which covered multiple departments, offered greater strategic command flexibility over a problem that failed to respect departmental boundaries; and the hunting of brigands often fell to the gendarmes, who operated at a cantonal level and were ultimately responsible to an external departmental authority – the Inspector-General of the Gendarmerie in Paris. The regime also faced the widespread problem of conscription fraud in small communes, and hunting deserters and draft evaders. These twin pressures favoured the canton – the jurisdiction of the Justice of the Peace and the gendarmerie – as the key local site for supervising and enforcing conscription.

The prefects clearly faced potential jurisdictional challenges from both the police and the military. Nevertheless, a number of points should be stressed. First, while law and order was a key concern in all departments, the regime identified it as a serious problem in only a minority of departments. These departments were concentrated in the south and west of France, and in the annexed regions. Only 23 of 88 French departments (26 per cent) were placed under the 1801 special criminal courts, and of these 9 were in the Vendée.¹⁹

Second, police and military repression was only one of a number of methods used by the new regime to establish itself.²⁰ Strong-arm tactics were essential to the establishment of the regime in crime-ridden French departments and to the incorporation of many recently annexed foreign départements. However, civil and police methods were not mutually exclusive tactics, and the majority of departments were integrated through a greater reliance on peaceful rather than coercive measures.²¹ In such circumstances, the prefectoral administration played the central role.

Third, the relative importance of coercive and civil strategies in Napoleonic rule changed over time. While the rhythms of fighting brigandage varied from region to region, in most departments where pacification through military and police means was necessary, the problem of law and order had been resolved by the end of the Consulate. Indeed, by 1807, authority had been widely established throughout the departments of the 'inner Empire'.²² And in those regions troubled by disorder, repression was a precursor to the long-term stable rule of the civil authorities.²³ Of course, the regime always maintained a strong security and surveillance presence over society; and during times of disorder, such as the subsistence crisis of 1812 and the problems of draft evasion and desertion in 1813, the police and military resumed an important

repressive role in the departments. But for most of the Imperial years the military and police authorities did not seriously challenge the overall authority of the prefectoral administration.

Finally, the prefectoral administration itself played a significant role in the enforcement of law and order. This was the case not only in departments deemed as 'normal', but also in those singled out by the government as trouble spots. The department of the Seine-Inférieure is instructive in this respect.²⁴ Although never troubled with law and order problems on a scale comparable to many southern and western French departments, the Seine-Inférieure had relatively high levels of brigandage during the Directory and early Consulate, and was on the doorstep of the *Chouannerie* in southern Normandy. Consequently, in 1801 it was among the 32 departments placed under the jurisdiction of special criminal courts.

Despite this, the prefectoral administration remained at the forefront of the campaign against brigandage. Correspondence from government ministers passed across the prefect's desk; however, the prefect was not simply acting as a cipher of information or merely being kept abreast of independent police and military activities in the department. The Minister of Police constantly wrote to the prefect requesting information on brigandage, and asking what measures the prefect had implemented. The prefect and mayor were responsible for policing in Rouen and the surrounding rural areas, and it was not uncommon for the prefect to request that the gendarmerie be put into action. The prefect also played a crucial role in the organisation of highway patrols and stagecoach escorts. The Seine-Inférieure was under the jurisdiction of the 15th Military Division, yet the military were hesitant agents in combating brigandage, regarding it as a civil rather than military affair. The use of soldiers to guard stagecoaches was particularly irksome to General Lucotte, commander of the 15th Military Division, who believed, 'The blood of our brave soldiers flows needlessly.'²⁵ Indeed, the Ministry of War informed all Divisional Commanders in Prairial Year VIII that the war on brigandage was ultimately the responsibility of the National Guard:

It is essentially the responsibility of the National Guard to put a stop to this disorder, and to assume the role of the regular troops who have been called up to the armies. I invite you, consequently, citizen General to consult with the prefects of the departments which are part of your command, in order to give to this armed force the activity and the strength that it should have according to the law, and to ensure the maintenance of order and public security.²⁶

This was precisely what happened in the Seine-Inférieure. With limited numbers of soldiers, and only 114 gendarmerie available, the Divisional Commander prevailed upon Beugnot to draw upon the department's 36,000 guards and to organise their role as stagecoach escorts.²⁷

If prefects remained important officials in the fight against brigandage, then they were indispensable in conscription regulation. The government made it clear that prefectural performance was ultimately judged by the department's conscription levies.²⁸ The compilation of lists of classes, the medical examination of potential draftees, the ballot, and the incorporation of conscripts into the army – these were all the responsibilities of the prefectural administration.²⁹ It is true that Napoleonic conscription regulations placed more importance on the canton than the commune as an administrative unit. Yet the previous role of the municipalities was now largely subsumed by the prefectural administration. It was the sub-prefect who collected the names of conscripts from the communes, and who supervised the ballot and the examination and processing of the conscripts in the chief town of each canton. Above these regulatory practices, the council of recruitment – comprising the prefect, the department's military commander and an army major – reviewed all health exemptions. Prefects helped coordinate gendarmes in the pursuit of deserters and draft-dodgers, and sometimes initiated repressive measures – for instance, the use of *garnisaires* and even the imprisonment of the parents of deserters³⁰ – in their efforts to ensure that the local population complied with conscription. In all, the prefect remained the most important local figure in the field of conscription.

The prefectural administration, therefore, played an important role in law and order regardless of the gravity of the situation. Clearly, the greater the problem of law and order in a department, the greater was the likelihood of the police and the military asserting more authority and control relative to the civil administration. Yet such circumstances were not typical. Civil administrative power was at its greatest during periods of internal social peace and stability: for most departments, this was the case for nearly the entire Napoleonic period; for departments troubled by crime, this was the case for most of the Imperial years.

In establishing a productive relationship between state and society, more was needed than authoritarianism and a strong security presence. As Adrien de Lezay-Marnésia, prefect of the Rhin-et-Moselle and later Bas-Rhin, idealistically wrote, 'For any people, it is only by administration that the government can be loved.'³¹ Government ministers and generals were distant and faceless, yet the prefects were permanently on the ground in the departments, acting as the public 'face of

the Napoleonic bureaucracy'.³² Above all, effective administration at a grass-roots level required the prefect to 'conciliate, consult, negotiate, collaborate and even collude with local power dynamics.'³³

The drive behind this civil administrative strategy came from several directions. On the one hand, prefects were officially following the government line on *amalgame* and *ralliement*, considered essential to providing a stable social base for the regime.³⁴ Guided by this social policy, prefects were expected to heal the political divisions of the past; whether between Jacobins and royalists in France or between patriots and the anti-French in annexed departments, and to integrate the notables into the regime's institutions and values. To assist these integrative processes, the prefectural administration identified and categorised the 'masses of granite', compiling lists of the department's 600 highest taxpayers, greatest landowners and 'most distinguished' families, property-owners, administrators, professionals, merchants, industrialists and military officers.

On the other hand, prefects were drawn to the elites because they could not rule their assigned departments from above, detached and removed from local society. Effective long-term rule required more than dictating to the locals – it was also dependent upon co-opting local elites. The notables' local knowledge, experience and influence were vital to the day-to-day running of the regime. They were needed as prefectural administrators, general councillors and electoral colleges presidents. They were especially needed as mayors, to assist with local policing and conscription, although the regime consistently struggled to find suitably qualified and experienced candidates. Furthermore, the notables' disclosure of knowledge was vital to the regime's growing statistical culture; and they were needed in times of crisis, such as the subsistence scare of 1812, when their wealth helped ease grain shortages in departments where central government help was slow or not forthcoming.³⁵

Prefects were also drawn to the notables through personal ties, a consequence of not only working but also living and socialising in the departments. In the Seine-Inférieure, Beugnot interacted with the notables on an intellectual level, sitting as president of the Academy of Rouen and the administrative bureau of the lycee; his successor, Savoy-Rollin, was also a member of the local learned societies.³⁶ In the Rhenish departments, Masonic lodges were important sites for prefects interacting with local elites.³⁷ In the Aube, the first prefect, Charles-Louis Bruslé, had been in the department only six months when his commitment to integrating royalists into the new regime took on a very personal note: he married the daughter of Louis-Joseph de Bossancourt;

a local marquis and émigré.³⁸ In Rouën, Beugnot was president of the Chamber of Commerce and invested 12,000 francs in a local sugar refinery, thereby linking his own economic fate to that of the city's sugar industry.³⁹ Through such actions, the prefects attached themselves to local society, mixing with elites in social, cultural and economic spaces outside official, political or administrative institutions. Such social interaction had important political consequences for it drew prefects and notables together, helping to establish a closer working relationship. And the longer the prefects stayed in the departments, the more difficult it was for them to extricate themselves from these local connections.

Thus, government policy, the practicalities of rule and social interaction all drew the prefects closer to the local elites. The challenge for the prefects, as it was for the government, was to 'win over' the notables. The general reforms of the regime went a long way towards ensuring this. The establishment of law and order, the preservation and sale of *biens nationaux*, new economic opportunities, the amnesty for émigrés, the Civil Code, the electoral colleges, and the creation of the Imperial nobility – all drew members of both French and foreign elites closer to the regime.⁴⁰ In wooing local elites, the prefects had at their disposal seats in the department's general council, municipalities and the presidencies of the electoral colleges. These local positions, together with membership of the new Chambers of Commerce and various economic consultancy bodies, conveyed to the notables a sense of agency, ownership and local participation in government.⁴¹ And it was the prefects who either directly appointed notables to local office or provided Napoleon with a list of recommended names. In the departments of the Rhineland and Piedmont, the prefects did not always have ultimate say over local appointments, with nepotism and traditional patronage networks a powerful reminder of the ways of the past.⁴² Still, in the main, it was ultimately the prefects who oversaw local appointments, and through such means they were able to reward property, wealth and service, and attach a degree of prestige to office holding. In the Roer department, so successful was the administration's strategy of connecting local office holding with status that the prefects were forced to spend time sorting out local squabbles over precedence.⁴³

In gaining the confidence and support of the local elite, it was important that prefects listened to local concerns and needs. The general council was an important forum for notables to air their grievances, and prefects such as Chazal in the Hautes-Pyrénées, Méchin in the Roer and Beugnot in the Seine-Inférieure established close relations with the councils.⁴⁴ The prefect's annual tour of the department provided many

opportunities to meet and consult with notables throughout the *arrondissements*. Unofficially, too, through chambers of commerce, learned societies and Masonic lodges, the prefects were exposed to local issues.

However, the need to shore up the support of the notables often meant that prefects went far beyond merely listening. It was crucial for prefects to demonstrate that they had the notables' best interests at heart, and would actively champion their causes. A consequence was that the prefect could become fully a part and defender of local society. This sometimes meant that prefects moderated, opposed or even subverted government laws and policies. In a sense, prefects here were adopting the same flexible and pragmatic approach to local rule that the Napoleonic state itself practised in regards to ruling the Empire and satellite kingdoms. The need to rule in collaboration with local elites necessarily moderated the Napoleonic blueprint for society and established the parameters of rule. As Stuart Woolf has noted of the Empire: 'The price of collaboration was the acceptance of limits.'⁴⁵ This was particularly true of the satellite states and departments created in the mid- to late Empire. Beugnot, for example, in the Grand Duchy of Berg, took a cautious approach to abolishing feudalism, sensitive to the old feudal structures.⁴⁶ Far greater uniformity was imposed on French and early annexed departments, yet even here there were exceptions: the low conscription quotas of the Vendéan departments provide a classic example of how the Napoleonic state moderated its uniform model in the light of local history and concerns.⁴⁷

Prefects defended and promoted the interests of the local notables through various means. Both Méchin in the Roer and Beugnot in the Seine-Inférieure encouraged their department's general councils to speak freely and voice their concerns.⁴⁸ Beugnot, on a number of occasions, cautioned the government against undermining the role and authority of the council. In the Year XII, for instance, he took to the defence of the council's prerogatives after the government restricted the council's discretionary powers over the departmental budget. Sensitive prefects also took into account local customs. In 1804, for instance, the prefect of the Roer advised the government against imposing penalties on the municipal councillors of Suchteln after they had allocated themselves a salary in keeping with the local tradition.⁴⁹

The local economy was often a source of tension between the government and local business communities, with the prefect caught in the middle. In the annexed departments, the prefects had to sell to the local elites the advantages of being integrated into the French economic system. The economic results were mixed: textile manufacturing in the Rhineland prospered through protection from foreign competitors

and access to the French market,⁵⁰ but the Piedmontese silk industry was another story as it struggled against French competition from Lyons.⁵¹ Yet foreign departments could also pose a threat to French departments: the cotton manufacturers of Rouen in the later years of the Empire struggled against competition from Ghent in Belgium and Mulhouse in the Haut-Rhin.⁵² And prefects in the departments along the Atlantic coast had the thankless task of trying to appease local merchant communities devastated by the long-term impact of international war and the British naval blockades.⁵³

Prefects were therefore sensitive and attentive to local economic conditions, and took up concerns on behalf of the local business élites. This is evident in both the Seine-Inférieure and the Rhineland, centres of powerful commercial and industrial interests. In Rouen, Beugnot was president of the Chamber of Commerce and supported its campaigns for more effective local industry protection from English textiles and for changes to the government's tariff policy.⁵⁴ All the prefects of the Seine-Inférieure constantly reminded the government of the detrimental impact of the war and British blockades on local commerce. In Cologne, prefect Méchin supported the Chamber of Commerce's campaign to retain the city's traditional privileged trade and tariff status on the Rhine.⁵⁵ He helped organise representatives in Paris to plead the city's case, and encouraged the Chamber to petition and lobby Napoleon when he visited the city in 1804. He juggled national and local concerns; writing to the Chamber: 'If we formulate only just demands which are not in opposition to the interests of national commerce, then success is certain.'⁵⁶ In the end, the Chamber's campaign was successful, and Méchin, among others, was thanked for his commitment.

There is also evidence to suggest that to appease local élites, some prefectural administrations may have even turned a blind eye to various forms of what might be called, 'white-collar crime': elite complicity in conscription fraud and contraband. The evidence is not conclusive and largely limited to the Seine-Inférieure amongst existing departmental studies,⁵⁷ but it further highlights the general prefectural approach of accommodating local élites, and the extremes to which this could be taken.

In 1812, a special *commissaire* arrived in Rouen and began an 18-month investigation into conscription fraud. Over 200 local notable families were involved, having purchased false medical certificates from military officers, prefectural staff and the recruitment council itself. The leading accused was Dumest, the head of the military bureau of the Rouen prefecture. Indeed, police authorities had suspected conscription

abuses in the Rouen prefecture from at least 1807. The prefect in 1812, Girardin, tried to keep the scandal as quiet as possible, fearful of its impact on local society: He also deeply resented the presence of the *commissaire* in the department and tried to protect his staff from the investigation. A similar thing occurred in the department of the Roer, again during the final years of the Empire, when the prefect Laoucette took exception to a secret investigation by a special *commissaire* into allegations of conscription fraud in the recruitment council.⁵⁸ In the case of the Seine-Inférieure, the *commissaire* was very uneasy about the conduct of the prefect throughout the investigation, writing to Count Réal, in charge of the First Police Arrondissement of the Empire: 'What will be my position if I prove through a new investigation that the prefect is deceptive both in his reports to the government and through retaining his staff while the judiciary decides on their fate.'⁵⁹

There is no evidence to suggest that Girardin was guilty of participating in the fraud. However, the many years the fraud had occurred over, the number of wealthy families and officials involved, including officers sitting alongside the prefect on the recruitment council, and the prefect's own actions once the affair had emerged, all suggest at least indifference on the part of the prefectural administration to such abuses. Prefects were responsible for enforcing universal conscription laws, yet as the local notables had no desire to see their sons conscripted, it was in the interests of the local authorities to tolerate such abuses.

Contraband may provide a similar example. The effective policing of contraband laws continually plagued the Napoleonic regime, whether trying to shield the French textile industry from cheaper English cottons, prohibit smuggling in the departments along the Rhine, or enforce indirect taxes on wine, salt and tobacco in Piedmont. In all these instances, the authorities struggled to make any inroads. This is commonly explained by the size and difficulties of policing the Empire's economic borders, and the entrenched nature of smuggling in many communities, especially in borderland regions. Yet what also needs to be considered is the extent to which the civil and police authorities lacked not only the means, but also the will to address this problem. The government ordered the local authorities to wage a war on contraband, and the prefects, of course, dutifully wrote to Paris of their commitment to the cause, despite the many problems. Yet the reality of the civil authorities' commitment seems to have been otherwise, and the key here may lie with local élites. As Michael Broers has noted of the Piedmontese departments, contraband united both élites and the common people,

with notables, especially mayors, involved in contraband networks.⁶⁰ Elite involvement in contraband is also true of merchants in the departments along the Rhine and cotton manufacturers in Normandy. In the department of the Seine-Inférieure, prefects' reports informed the government that English cotton yarn, much cheaper than its French counterpart, could be found in nearly all of Rouen's textile warehouses.⁶¹ Indeed, the majority of Rouen's manufacturers were thought to profit by it, including the department's leading cotton spinner, the Englishman Valentin Rawle. Powerful local business interests were at stake. In Rouen there were very few warehouse searches and arrests made by the local authorities; and in the Rhineland the courts handed out soft sentences.⁶² Contraband, like conscription fraud, could be construed as yet another illicit concession that the civil authorities made to appease local elites.

How successful were the prefects in gaining the support of local elites? It is sometimes difficult to distinguish the prefect's distinct contribution to local affairs from the government's general policies. Moreover, *ralliement* varied according to time, place, motive and social group.⁶³ In France, and in foreign departments close to the 1789 French borders, *ralliement* was generally strongest amongst the professional classes and businessmen, and weakest amongst the aristocratic landowners. On the whole, however, the prefects, as both government agents of *ralliement* and independent defenders of local interests, were successful in winning support from amongst a broad cross section of the notables. Amongst the prefects, of course, there were exceptions: the first prefect of the Manche, Magnytot, lasted until only July 1801 after complaints from local notables that he was favouring certain regions, aristocrats and refractories.⁶⁴ Yet notables were sometimes only too aware of the pivotal and positive role that competent prefects had played in the process of *ralliement*. As the regime disintegrated in 1814, local notables of the Roer escorted prefect Ladoucette from Aachen and 'wished the prefect and France well'.⁶⁵ In the Seine-Inférieure, the notables clearly demonstrated their allegiance to former prefects. Only from 1812 did Rouen's notables oppose the regime, disillusioned with the domestic economic and social consequences of war. In the circumstances of the late Empire, there was little that the incumbent prefect, Girardin, could do to alleviate the high conscription levies, crippled state of international shipping or struggling textile industry, and the local elites realised this. For in finally turning their backs on the regime, the notables did not turn their backs on the department's Napoleonic prefects. Both Beugnot and Girardin were elected as deputies of the Seine-Inférieure during the Bourbon

Restoration, indicating the high regard in which the local notables held them.⁶⁶ The former prefects were again called upon to promote and protect local interests, except this time as politicians for their adopted department.

Much work remains to be done on departmental histories of Napoleonic France. We are now well served by studies of foreign departments of the 'inner Empire', but the heartland of the Empire remains relatively neglected. Further regional studies can only add to our appreciation of the role of the prefectoral administration. What has emerged, though, from studies in recent decades is a richer and more nuanced understanding of the role of the prefects within both the Napoleonic state, and French and European society.

We have come a long way from considering the prefects as 'little Emperors'. The power of the prefects, like that of the regime itself, was far from omnipotent. The prefects were restricted by human and structural constraints, from the international environment to recalcitrant village mayors, from rival state authorities to entrenched local elites. Yet the prefects enjoyed a degree of power and success. Operating in a world freed from the entrenched privileges of the old regime, the prefects were more powerful than the intendants had ever been. And despite the presence of other government representatives, the prefects, more so than any other officials in the department, were responsible for laying the foundations of Bonapartism at the local level.

Yet this was neither a straightforward nor uniform process. The role of the prefect was complex and difficult. The Napoleonic prefectoral administration was an institution, professional and accountable, adhering in principle to universal rules and standards, and representing a rational and centralised modern state. Yet successful long-term Napoleonic rule was dependent on the support of the local notables, and this helped shape both the role of the prefect and the implementation of government policy.

The challenge of the Napoleonic prefect was to juggle the dual roles of official government representative and unofficial local representative. Prefects were loyal and professional state administrators, yet they also faced dilemmas over divided loyalties. The most successful prefects were those who understood that the long-term interests of the state, local elites and their own administrative careers were not always best served by rigidly implementing state policy. Prefects adapted to local conditions and needs. The Napoleonic regime, in many senses, left a lasting and uniform imprint throughout the departments. Yet regional variations existed whenever a balance needed to be struck between national

and local interests. The universalising claims of Napoleonic reform were therefore tempered and limited to a degree by consultation and cooperation between the prefectoral administration and the 'masses of granite'. It was the prefects who practised the subtle arts of long-term state and societal integration, overseeing the daily give and take between rulers and ruled.

Notes

1. The most notable early works are P. Viard, *L'administration préfectorale de la Côte-d'Or sous le Consulat et le Premier Empire* (Paris, 1914); R. Durand, *Le Département des Côtes-du-Nord sous le Consulat et l'Empire, 1800-1815*, 2 vols (Paris, 1926); and J.-F. Soulet, *Les premiers préfets des Hautes-Pyrénées, 1800-1815* (Paris, 1965).
 2. See for instance, J. Godechot, *Les Institutions de la France sous la Révolution et l'Empire* (Paris, 1968), p. 589.
 3. Quoted in C. Church, *Revolution and Red Tape: The French Ministerial Bureaucracy, 1770-1850* (Oxford, 1981), p. 273.
 4. Quoted in M. Broers, *Napoleonic Imperialism and the Savoyard Monarchy, 1773-1821: State Building in Piedmont* (New York and Ontario, 1997), p. 436.
 5. For France see G. Daly, *Inside Napoleonic France: State and Society in Rouen, 1800-1815* (Aldershot, 2001); C. Lecomte, 'L'administration départementale, acteur du renouveau en Seine-et-Oise, 1800-1815', *Revue Historique*, 576 (1990), pp. 305-32; J. Horn, 'Building the new regime: Founding the Bonapartist State in the department of the Aube', *French Historical Studies*, 25 (2002), pp. 225-63. Also, two French theses have relatively recently appeared: R. Carrier, 'Une île au milieu de l'Empire. Le département de l'Aveyron sous le Consulat et l'Empire (1800-1813): contribution à l'histoire de l'administration préfectorale' (Toulouse-I, 1993), and François de Lannoy, 'L'administration préfectorale de la Manche l'aveyron sous le Consulat et l'Empire (1800-1815)' (Paris-IV, 1992).
- For Italy, see Broers, *Napoleonic Imperialism and the Savoyard Monarchy*; 'Italy and the Modern State: The experience of Napoleonic rule', in F. Furet and M. Ozouf. (eds), *The French Revolution and the Creation of Modern Political Culture*, vol. 3, *The Transformation of Political Culture, 1789-1848* (Oxford, 1989), pp. 489-503; 'The police and the Padroni: Italian Notabili, French Gendarmes and the origins of the centralised state in Napoleonic Italy', *European History Quarterly* 26 (1996), pp. 331-53; and 'Policing Piedmont: "the well ordered police state" in the age of revolution, 1794-1821', *Criminal Justice History*, 15 (1994), pp. 39-57. See also Alexander Grab, 'Army, State and Society: Conscription and desertion in Napoleonic Italy, 1802-1814', *Journal of Modern History*, 67 (1995), pp. 25-54; 'State Power, Brigandage and Rural Resistance in Napoleonic Italy', *European History Quarterly*, 25 (1995), pp. 39-70. For the Napoleonic Rhineland see Michael Rowe, *From Reich to State: The Rhineland in the Revolutionary Age 1780-1830* (Cambridge, 2003), and his 'Between Empire and Home Town: Napoleonic Rule on the Rhine, 1799-1814', *Historical Journal*, 42 (1999), 643-74.

6. S. Woolf, *Napoleon's Integration of Europe* (London, 1991); M. Broers, *Europe under Napoleon, 1799-1815* (London, 1996); and A. Grab, *Napoleon and the Transformation of Europe* (Basingstoke, 2003).
7. For a detailed discussion of the law of 28 Pluviôse Year VIII, see Godechot, *Les Institutions*, pp. 586-99.
8. Quoted in Godechot, *Les Institutions*, p. 589.
9. Quoted in J. Tulard, *Dictionnaire Napoléon* (Paris, 1987), p. 1386.
10. Quoted in M. Reboüillat, 'L'établissement de l'administration préfectorale dans le département de Saône-et-Loire: les deux premiers préfets', *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine*, 17 (1970), p. 860.
11. Woolf, *Napoleon's Integration of Europe*, pp. 100-1.
12. J. Diefendorf, *Businessmen and Politics in the Rhineland, 1789-1834* (Princeton, N.J., 1980), pp. 84-92.
13. Broers, *Napoleonic Imperialism and the Savoyard Monarchy*, p. 309.
14. *Ibid.*, *Europe under Napoleon*, p. 55.
15. *Ibid.*, 'Policing the Empire: Napoleon and the pacification of Europe', in Philip G. Dwyer (ed.), *Napoleon and Europe* (London, 2001), pp. 153-68, and Howard G. Brown, 'From organic society to security state: The war on brigandage in France', *Journal of Modern History*, 69 (1997), pp. 661-95.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 63.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 71.
18. *Ibid.*, pp. 66-71, and *idem.*, 'Policing the Empire', pp. 157-59.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 63.
20. Horn, 'Building the new regime', p. 227.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 227, and Lecomte, 'L'administration départementale, acteur du renouveau en Seine-et-Oise'.
22. Broers, *Europe under Napoleon*, p. 62. Michael Broers' notion of the inner Empire comprises France, Belgium, Holland, Northern Italy and Western Germany - regions acquired before 1807.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 77.
24. Daly, *Inside Napoleonic France*, pp. 65-80.
25. Quoted in Broers, *Europe under Napoleon*, p. 75.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 75.
27. *Ibid.*, pp. 74-6.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 225, and Rowe, 'Napoleonic rule on the Rhine', p. 667.
29. For the role of the prefectoral administration in conscription, see Daly, *Inside Napoleonic France*, pp. 222-31.
30. *Ibid.*, pp. 228-29.
31. Quoted in Bergeron, *France under Napoleon*, p. 30.
32. Marco Meriggi, 'State and society in post-Napoleonic Italy', in David Laven and Lucy Riall (eds), *Napoleon's Legacy: Problems of Government in Restoration Europe* (Oxford, 2000), p. 55.
33. See Woolf, *Napoleon's Integration of Europe*, pp. 114-15; Daly, *Inside Napoleonic France*, pp. 50-3; Rowe, 'Napoleonic rule on the Rhine'; Horn, 'Building the new regime', pp. 262-63; and Diefendorf, *Businessmen and Politics in the Rhineland*, pp. 104-5.
34. For *ralliement* and *amalgame* in the foreign departments, see Woolf, *Napoleon's Integration of Europe*, pp. 109-15; Broers, *Napoleonic Imperialism and the*

- Savoyard Monarchy*, pp. 406–65; and Rowe, 'Napoleonic rule on the Rhine', pp. 651–55.
35. Daly, *Inside Napoleonic France*, pp. 164–65, 217–18.
 36. *Ibid.*, pp. 44–48.
 37. Diefendorf, *Businessmen and Politics in the Rhineland*, p. 196.
 38. Horn, 'Building the new regime', pp. 251–52.
 39. Daly, *Inside Napoleonic France*, p. 46.
 40. See, for instance, the case of the Rhenish notables in Rowe, 'Napoleonic rule on the Rhine', p. 649.
 41. Diefendorf, *Businessmen and Politics in the Rhineland*, p. 131, and Broers, *Europe under Napoleon*, p. 51.
 42. Broers, *Napoleonic Imperialism and the Savoyard Monarchy*, pp. 263–66, and Michael Rowe, 'The Napoleonic legacy in the Rhineland and the politics of reform in restoration Prussia', in Laven and Riall (eds), *Napoleon's Legacy*, p. 131.
 43. Rowe, 'Napoleonic rule on the Rhine', pp. 652–53.
 44. Soulet, *Les premiers préfets des Hautes-Pyrénées*, p. 67; Diefendorf, *Businessmen and Politics in the Rhineland*, p. 104; Daly, *Inside Napoleonic France*, pp. 60–1.
 45. Woolf, *Napoleon's Integration of Europe*, p. 115.
 46. Broers, *Europe under Napoleon*, p. 90.
 47. *Ibid.*, p. 63.
 48. Diefendorf, *Businessmen and politics in the Rhineland*, p. 104; Daly, *Inside Napoleonic France*, pp. 60–1.
 49. Rowe, 'Napoleonic rule on the Rhine', p. 662.
 50. Martyn Lyons, *Napoleon Bonaparte and the Legacy of the French Revolution* (Basingstoke, 1994), pp. 248–49.
 51. Broers, *Napoleonic Imperialism and the Savoyard Monarchy*, pp. 416–17.
 52. Daly, *Inside Napoleonic France*, p. 187.
 53. *Ibid.*, pp. 134–56.
 54. *Ibid.*, pp. 179–90.
 55. Diefendorf, *Businessmen and politics in the Rhineland*, pp. 174–79.
 56. Quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 176.
 57. Daly, *Inside Napoleonic France*, pp. 240–42.
 58. Rowe, 'Napoleonic rule on the Rhine', p. 668.
 59. Quoted in Daly, *Inside Napoleonic France*, p. 242.
 60. Broers, *Napoleonic Imperialism and the Savoyard Monarchy*, pp. 329, 333.
 61. Daly, *Inside Napoleonic France*, pp. 192–94.
 62. Rowe, 'Napoleonic rule on the Rhine', p. 657.
 63. See for instance, Bergeron, *France under Napoleon*, pp. 125–33; Broers, *Europe under Napoleon*, pp. 125–38; Geoffrey Ellis, 'Rhine and Loire: Napoleonic elites and social order', in G. Lewis and C. Lucas (eds), *Beyond the Terror: Essays in French Regional and Social History, 1794–1815* (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 240–41.
 64. François de Lannoy, 'Après la Révolution: les débuts de l'administration préfectorale dans la Manche', *Annales de Normandie*, 39 (1989), pp. 401–3.
 65. Diefendorf, *Businessmen and Politics in the Rhineland*, p. 202.
 66. Daly, *Inside Napoleonic France*, pp. 46, 50, 53.