OTHER REVIEWS


In The grand strategy of Philip II Parker seeks to penetrate the manner in which Philip II ruled the first global empire, what his priorities were, and how decisions were reached. Part I examines Philip's own attitudes and predispositions as against the circumstances of his reign – his crushing workload, the court and its factions, the problems of distance, and the available machinery of government. The question: did Philip (actually) have a grand strategy is not precisely answered, but the narrative sections rather show him reacting to successive contingencies. The damaging effects of these priority switches were increased by his rigid adherence to ideology which restricted his freedom to compromise (p. 12). Festering conflicts were perpetuated. In assessing Philip's policy making, Parker repeatedly employs modern anachronistic comparisons. Since the past does not derive from the future, this method, albeit erudite, is intrusive and distracting. Similarly, in attempting to classify Philip's attitudes and errors, the author resorts to unbearable jargon such as: 'agent versus structure', 'zero-defects mentality', 'strategic culture', 'prospect theory', and 'cognitive rigidity'. No quirky language is required to say that Philip II was obstinate, dogmatic, and ultimately reckless.

Philip's guiding principles derived, notoriously, from the political testament of his father, the Emperor Charles V, whose maxims were, to some extent, contradictory. Furthermore, they were formulated in 1548, before diversity of religion had seriously fragmented policy and confused traditional conflicts. By the same token, his testament also preceded the revolt of the Netherlands. Philip II failed to absorb the lessons of his father's reign comprised in the religious peace of Augsburg, 1555, which Charles himself evaded signing. This climacteric measure permitted the existence of Protestant states in the Germanic empire. How to deal with heresy, which could not be eliminated, was probably the most serious, novel problem of the sixteenth century. To Philip, however, heresy was an evil to be resisted. As he declined to address himself to the intractable problems which it raised, it became the rock upon which he foundered.

Considerations of 'strategic culture' are pursued in Part II through the interrelated examples of Philip's relations with the Netherlands, to 1577, and Scotland and England, to 1588. Since the attempted invasion of England was the greatest of all Philip's undertakings in respect of scale, expenditure, and – maybe – folly, this is above all an Armada book. Indeed, it may well be the definitive summary account of the Armada in its origins, preparation, departure, failure, and aftermath. All this is unfurled with great narrative skill, based on an unrivalled knowledge of archive sources as well as of the works which appeared in and after 1988.

In seeking to suppress the revolt of the Netherlands, which England sustained, and in launching the great Armada, Philip observed his father's injunction to defend what he held and to add other lands of 'great quality and importance'. This, of course, was all in the name of religion and the service of God. Inevitably, Philip became a victim of his own propaganda since he could not abandon it; besides, wars had to be justified, and the support of the papacy was essential. Furthermore, the religious formulation of policy
permitted him to leave it aspirational and incomplete. Thus, while Philip intended to suppress the revolt of the Netherlands, he failed to conceive of any practicable settlement. Similarly, he sought to dethrone Queen Elizabeth without considering how any pro-Spanish substitute could impose his or her authority. Sheltering behind his exalted formula, Philip repeatedly commanded the impossible to be executed promptly. As God would provide for his own service, miracles were an integral part of Philip’s ‘strategic culture’ (pp. 106–7). It was not however God, but Philip’s much abused servants who delivered the miracles – only theirs were not of the requisite variety.

It would be taxing to defend the claim that Philip II acted from religious motives when he sacrificed Parma and the Netherlands in a fantastical attempt to seize the throne of France. Henry IV shared Philip’s fundamental problem: how both to serve God while recognizing hard reality; but this was not apparent to the Spanish king. Henry of Navarre had always been Philip’s enemy and could become a dangerous rival. That was the bottom line, not French Catholicism which was only endangered by its own divisions which Philip vigorously fostered. Little is said about the role of ambition and fear, except for the fear of losing territory and reputation. Yet these were driving factors in Philip’s long hostilities with England and France, countries which must, at all costs, be kept apart. But for Philip’s ‘blinded intransigence’, these wars could well have been avoided since neither country wanted war, and neither could afford it. Henry IV, incidentally, did not convert specifically to secure the surrender of Paris ‘allegedly remarking’ that ‘Paris is well worth a Mass’ (p. 12). Albeit a far cry from the Armada, that is too much to overlook.

This book contains thirty-three illustrations, seven tables, five figures, a chronological list of events, a comprehensive bibliography, and an index; it is also a mine of information on many subjects. The print is uncomfortably small and, regrettably, the notes, which are an essential adjunct to the text, are in the wrong place.

Hitchins’s magisterial work is indispensable reading for anyone who wishes to understand how the pre-communist legacy of Romania affects the current efforts of the post-communist regime there to consolidate democracy. His work provides us with an understanding of the social, cultural, economic, and international legacies of modern Romania. He emerges as somewhat of a new institutionalist and shows us in some detail how the interplay of a variety of factors resulted in the emergence of political institutions which shaped the foundations of the modern Romanian state. In doing so, Hitchins discusses the economic and social changes which occurred in Romania from 1774 to 1866, which were responsible for changes in the institutional structure of the country. While he focuses on the socio-economic bases of change in Romania, he also seems to be an advocate of the great man theory of history. Hitchins describes the role of different individuals and personalities who either attempted to maintain the rather patriarchal system of values that had constituted the mainstay of the old social order for centuries,
or those who advocated revolutionary change, such as Tudor Vladimirescu, the leader of the 1821 Revolution, as well as ‘forty-eights’, such as Ion C. Bratianu and Mihail Kogalniceanu.

Hitchins provides us with an exhaustive discussion of the effects of the modes of economic production on change during this period, especially the system of agricultural production. He focuses on the changeover of Romania from an agrarian society ruled by an aristocratic caste of great boiers to a society which was marked by a more entrepreneurial spirit, characterized by the prevalence of industrial and urban values. He delineates how this shift was brought about by changes in the modes of economic production as factories began to emerge in urban centres, and as market towns sprang up to meet the needs of a growing population. But Hitchins is obviously not an economic determinist because he clearly describes how individual personalities had an enormous impact upon the transformation of Romania from a feudal to a modern society. Perhaps the most important personality who fits into this mould was Prince Alexandru Cuza, who unified the two principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia in 1859. One of the defining moments in Romanian history occurred in 1866, when Cuza was forced to abdicate by a coalition of conservatives, liberals, and the military. But by then, as the Romanians looked for a foreign prince who would be willing to assume the throne, the basic political institutions of the modern Romanian state were in place.

Hitchins is also interested in investigating how a shift in mental attitudes or values contributed to the transition that Romania underwent from a medieval type of society to a modern state based on a sense of ethnic identity and community. Romanian nationalism was stimulated by the Transylvanian School, which was based upon an effort to develop an ethnic sense of community as opposed to defining a nation in terms of religion or legal status. The Romanians, in forging a nation, sought their identity in their descent from the ancient Dacians and the Roman colonists. The Latin language, as Hitchins points out, was seen as the repository of the culture and the identity of the Romanians. Romanian nationalism also owed much to the ideas of the Enlightenment and Romanticism, which captured the imagination of liberal intellectuals, the sons of boiers who were educated in Paris, and who seized upon France as the model for their political development. These ideas came to a head in the Revolution of 1848. The Revolution, which failed, was designed to rid the principalities of both Russian and Ottoman influence, and turn the country toward Europe. The ‘forty-eights’ were especially anti-Russian since, following the Treaty of Adrianople of 1829, the principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia found themselves transformed into a Russian protectorate. The principalities were weak states, which were located at the crossroads of great empires that treated them as objects whose territory could be bartered to maintain the balance of power in the region. As Ottoman rule weakened, the Romanians were emboldened first to unite the principalities through the double election of Cuza, and then to eliminate Ottoman suzerainty by regaining their autonomy and then their independence. As the Ottoman empire grew weaker, other great powers, such as Britain and France, became more interested in Romania and the Eastern Question. The Romanians tended to pursue a policy of playing the great powers off against each other in their drive for independence. This policy eventually succeeded when, following the Crimean war, the Treaty of Paris of 1856 resulted in the placing of Romania under the international guarantee of the great powers. Hitchins ends his story with the overthrow of Prince Alexandru Cuza in 1866, and the ascendancy of Prince Charles of the Hohenzollern–Sigmaringen dynasty to the throne.
If one lesson emerges from this book, it was the over-optimism in the ability of the political institutions which emerged as Romania underwent the transition from a medieval to a modern nation-state to lay a solid foundation for the democratization of society. In conclusion, this book, together with Hitchins’s earlier work, *Romania, 1866-1947* (1994), stands as an indispensable classic in the field, the result of an impressive demonstration of scholarship based on the use of Romanian, Hungarian, German, and Russian sources, and capped by superb bibliographical essays.

Constantinesco discusses one of the most critical periods in Romanian history. He deals with a period that is marked by the reopening of the Eastern Question and the Romanian war for independence in 1877. This is a time in which Romania finds its national identity and gains recognition by the international community as a sovereign state. The defeat of Russia in the Crimean war had resulted in the loss of its claim to exercise a protectorate over the principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia, which was replaced by the collective guarantee of the great powers. But at the same time the Romanians still found themselves subjected to the suzerainty of the Ottomans. Constantinesco discusses how Romanian efforts to break away from the Ottoman claim of suzerainty and gain recognition of its sovereignty by the international community were sacrificed to suit the ambitions of the great powers in the Balkans. For example, Vienna agreed to the retrocession of the southern provinces of Romanian Bessarabia to Russia in the secret Reichstadt agreement which was concluded between Russia and Austria-Hungary in 1876. As Constantinesco observes, Russia wanted to control Bessarabia in its bid to dominate the Straits either directly or indirectly in order to protect its commerce, and also as a sign of great power status. This also dovetailed with Russian foreign policy efforts to achieve this objective by creating a string of satellite states in the Balkans, including both Romania and Bulgaria.

As the clouds of a new Russo-Turkish war gathered, Romania experienced a great deal of pressure not to compromise its neutral status by aiding the Bulgarian revolutionaries who had risen up against the Ottoman empire in 1876. But what does emerge in Constantinesco’s discussion of the events that led to Romania’s involvement in the Russo-Turkish war of 1877 is that a combination of threats, diplomacy, and financial incentives were employed by the Russians to persuade Bucharest to grant passage to Moscow’s troops to cross Romanian territory to face the Ottomans. The Romanians viewed this request with a great deal of trepidation because they feared that once established on their territory, Moscow might reinstate the protectorate which it had wielded in the 1830s and the 1840s. Therefore, there were prolonged negotiations between Romania and Russia to spell out the terms and conditions under which Russian troops would be allowed on to Romanian territory. The agreement which the Romanians reached with the Russians took the form of a military convention (April 1876). The military convention was also accompanied by a political agreement in which the Russians promised to respect the territorial integrity of Romania. The Romanians interpreted this as meaning that the Russians would not demand the re-annexation of the three provinces of southern Bessarabia, which they had ceded to Romania in 1856. Constantinesco describes how, as events developed, Romanian foreign policy shifted from neutrality to alignment with Russia. The Russians, who dealt with Romania in a rather high-handed manner, had also made it clear that in the absence of an agreement they would occupy the country by force. Therefore Romania had no choice, because of its geopolitical position, but to conclude an agreement with Russia, since it could not count upon the great powers to help it to maintain its neutrality. Just as the Romanians...
had feared, the Russians demanded the return of the southern provinces of Bessarabia after the war. Russia offered as compensation to Romania parts of Dobruga and the Danube delta. But Constantinesco supports the Romanian position that the return of southern Bessarabia to Russia as stipulated in the Treaty of San Stefano (1878) was a violation of the agreement that the two countries had reached. However, the Russians insisted that their promise to guarantee Romanian territorial integrity had been directed against Ottoman attempts to acquire Romanian territory.

One of the major consequences of the war was the declaration of independence by the Romanian assembly on 21 May 1877. But Romania’s declaration of independence was not favourably received by the great powers, which viewed it as a violation by Bucharest of existing international treaties. In any event, the great powers forced Russia to accept a revision of the Treaty of San Stefano at the Berlin Congress, which opened on 13 June 1878, to restore the balance of power in the Balkans. At the Berlin Congress, Romania’s political independence was not recognized by all of the great powers, but was made contingent upon the extension of political and civil rights to its non-Christian minority or Jews, who numbered about 300,000. According to Constantinesco, the Romanian government viewed this as an intolerable interference in its internal affairs. Moreover, Berlin insisted on withholding its recognition of Romanian independence, until Bismarck resolved to his satisfaction the repayment of German investment in the development of the Romanian railway system. But by 1880 all of the great powers had finally extended diplomatic recognition to Romania, thereby establishing it as an independent actor on the European stage. In summary, Constantinesco’s work, which is based upon meticulous research in the diplomatic records, archives, and memoirs of the period, provides a fascinating case study of Romania’s efforts to resolve its security dilemma and take its place in the community of nations.


What justifies a 385-page study on a historian who is definitely out of fashion, almost forgotten, though who was, it has to be admitted, immensely popular among the educated middle classes in Britain in the second half of the nineteenth century? It is well known that Gladstone, the man who was the first modern English politician to give a courageous as well as constructive answer to the Irish question, read and reviewed most of Lecky’s voluminous works such as The leaders of public opinion in Ireland (1861) or the eight-volume History of England in the eighteenth century (1878–90). While the debate on home rule for Ireland was heating up, Gladstone repeatedly referred to Lecky’s interpretation of modern Irish history and Anglo-Irish relations. He stated publicly how much Lecky had influenced and informed him about Ireland’s history, especially the rather dubious pre-history of the Union of 1801. According to Gladstone neither Macaulay nor Carlyle, but Lecky had this ‘real insight’ into the true character of historical and philosophical issues. Gladstone’s unconcealed appreciation of Lecky’s historical writing which, as he was only too pleased to note, was never free of philosophical and moral undertones, is, in Benedikt Stuchtey’s view, reason enough to reassess the ideas and methodological approach of a Victorian historian who, in his own
words, did not put the emphasis on the discovery and critical interpretation of new source material. Instead, Lecky was primarily interested in representing various aspects of some intricate problem, not without passion, but certainly by striving for fairness and understanding. This approach, curiously enough, led Lecky to call German historiography rather derogatorily ‘documentary history’ and he accused it of lacking ‘artistic charm’. But how could he know? True, he visited Germany frequently, but he neither read nor spoke the language. His contacts with German historians were practically non-existent, although not so with French colleagues.

However, for Stuchtey the protagonist of his doctoral dissertation, supervised by Ernst Schulin of Freiburg University, has more to offer. For him, Lecky personifies, in his thinking and prolific writing as well as in his work in the Commons between 1896 and 1902, the Anglo-Irish dilemma of our time. Lecky saw himself as an intermediary between Ireland and England, a supporter of the undiminished authority of the established order and the stability of the Empire but, nevertheless, as an advocate of moderate improvements in Ireland’s social and economic situation. Lecky, a Protestant and minor landowner himself, wanted more autonomy for his country of birth, preferably following the political and social precepts of Henry Grattan, but definitely not the clerical subservience of the home rule movement whose rapid development and parliamentary politics he watched with little sympathy. He (an absentee Irish landlord after all) was dismayed when Gladstone struck a deal with Charles S. Parnell, incidentally also an Anglo-Irish landowner and Protestant, and introduced his first Home Rule Bill in 1885. Lecky pleaded for progress, enlightenment, and rationalism in somewhat general terms. A closer examination of his thinking and writing clearly shows that he was a conservative after all, an ‘Old Whig’, deeply influenced by Edmund Burke. According to Stuchtey, Lecky was, to all intents and purposes, a man of the eighteenth century and indeed unable to give political guidance for the modernization and democratization of contemporary Irish society. For Lecky, as Stuchtey points out, home rule had nothing to do with secularization, modernization, and the fight against cultural backwardness and denominational antagonisms.

The fact that Lecky, right up to the end of his life, was constantly torn between the conflicting interests and diverging aspirations of the people in the two islands he felt profoundly attached to explains much of the ambiguity in Lecky’s writing. Stuchtey demonstrates this in great detail, carefully basing his argument on the vast published and unpublished literary output (including many letters to The Times) of a man who seems to have had unlimited faith in the power of the written word and saw himself as a true ‘public moralist’, in fact a ‘leader of public opinion’, though one with somewhat outdated answers to various ‘Irish questions’. Without any doubt, Stuchtey has produced an admirably well-documented and well-researched account of the life and work of someone who might aptly be called a gentleman historian of independent means, certainly one of the last of this rare species. With great care, imagination, and scholarly persistency Stuchtey traces the influences on Lecky’s mind, his convictions, and his ‘Weltbild’ in general, putting him firmly into the context of his time. The result is a sound piece of intellectual history which in its methodical approach and subtleties of interpretation is strangely reminiscent of Friedrich Meinecke, the unsurpassed master of this kind of historiography. For many years to come Stuchtey’s intellectual biography of Lecky will have the rank of a reference work. It provides a vivid account of the working of Lecky’s mind and his political ideas, but also of the obvious limits and deficiencies of his thinking and writing on current affairs. However, considering the fact
that Lecky occupies a prominent position in British and Irish historiography, one wonders whether it was a wise decision to publish Stuchtey's important, perhaps somewhat unfashionable study in German. One does not have to be a prophet to predict that this will deter many from reading it.


In the propaganda and educational texts issued by the Vichy government between 1940 and 1942 the emphasis given to the French empire may well seem like the wishful thinking of a regime deprived of any stature of its own. Martin Thomas in this rigorous political and diplomatic history puts the point succinctly: ‘Vichy France was now an imperial rather than a continental power.’ As such Vichy’s efforts to maximize its imperial authority must be a central part of its history, something which was difficult to trace or understand in its full complexity until this thorough and authoritative book arrived. Similarly, and contradictually, General de Gaulle in London, from 18 June 1940 onwards, looked to the empire for legitimization and a territorial foothold. The struggle for France was played out not just in the ruelles of Lyon and the forests of the Margeride, but also in the sub-Saharan isolation of Chad and the much abused island of Madagascar, just two of the many sites of imperial conflict within the guerre franco-française. Nor was this just a French affair. British naval and strategic planning; the residue of Anglo-French colonial rivalry, actively rekindled; the expansionary Japanese, and the anti-Gaullist Americans, were all vital players in this global entanglement. It is little surprise that the rights and aspirations of the indigenous peoples were either exploited for tactical reasons or repressed, but it still remains one of the shocking facts of the French at war that the struggles for imperial ascendancy convinced the post-war French Republic of the continuing necessity of empire rather than the urgency of decolonization.

This is the huge canvas on which Martin Thomas meticulously paints the details of events from Martinique to Indo-China, via north, west, and equatorial Africa, the Middle East mandates of Syria and the Lebanon, and the islands of the Indian Ocean. He has been scrupulous in his research into colonial and foreign office archives, and although the predominance of this official evidence limits the social and cultural dimensions of the whole story, and although this is not a book with any underpinning in colonial or post-colonial theory, it makes for a compulsive and endlessly revealing empirical account of little-known, or lesser-known, outposts of war.

There is an excellent and much-needed chapter on the Syrian campaign and the Free French administration in the Levant, and an investigative history of the Anglo-Gaullist dispute over Madagascar which further exposes the manipulative suspicions of these two ‘distrustful and intransigent Allies’. In the chapter on ‘Operation Torch’, when the Vichy North African empire surrendered to the Allies and the fiercely contested leadership of the French succession was played out between Darlan, Giraud, and de Gaulle, it is clear that the new French authorities were culpable in their arrogant disregard for the Algerian hopes raised by the war and the successes of the Free French. The murderous uprising at Sétif on the day that the war against Germany ended, and the subsequent horrors of the massive French retribution, were symptomatic of...
everything that was worst in the relations between colonizers and colonized, and must lead to the conclusion ‘that de Gaulle’s disdain for events in Algeria typified an outlook common amongst triumphant politicians and officials in Paris who had spent much of the war in detention, in resistance or in uniform and who were now relishing life at the heart of French politics’. The French failure in Algeria, as Thomas recounts it, still induces incredulity at the provisional government’s sheer mismanagement of what should have been their most obvious ally in the creation of a viable liberational strategy for the French empire, the reasonable expectations of Algerian Muslims. These were now permanently replaced by implacable hatred.

Several months later in 1945, the frustrated plans for a combined French and British liberation of Indo-China reveal complacency and confusion in French strategy rather than the visceral arrogance of Sétif, and here the other global players, in particular the new American President Harry Truman, display their own petulance, in this case towards France, excluding the rehaborative de Gaulle from the all-important Potsdam Conference. The tragic descent into the Indo-China war was a path paved by inter-allied bungling, rivalry, and mistrust, no less than French imperial obstinacy. If America still posed ideologically as the scourge of imperialism, it was now from within and behind an imperial agenda which was increasingly guilty of all the bludgeoning tactics and moral self-righteousness that it had classically condemned in the early twentieth century. France refused to acknowledge in Indo-China an end of empire: America was savagely critical while in effect establishing its own. The mistakes and illusions among the Western powers nourished what Thomas describes as ‘the fatal complacency towards Vietnamese nationalism’. It is not a surprising judgement, but it is well documented and clearly presented.

There were liberational moments in the French empire, notably in the Caribbean and in West Africa, which chime with the rhetoric and achievements of the Gaullist resistance, but this book is mainly about those that did not. Thomas indicts ‘the work of Gaullist officials, ex Popular Frontists and former Free French colonial administrators who remained united in their belief that the trauma of the Second World War should not be allowed to unravel the bonds of empire’. For those looking for similarities in attitudes to empire which contest the historical polarity of Vichy and Gaullist France, there is material in abundance in this detailed and penetrating study.