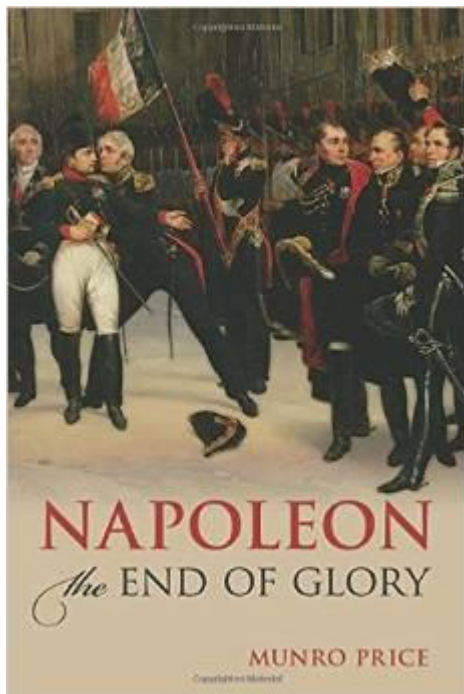


## Napoleon Series Reviews

### Napoleon, the End of Glory

Price, Munro. *Napoleon, the End of Glory*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University, 2014. 352 p. ISBN# 9780199660803. Hardback. £20



This book is a study of Napoleon's 1813 and 1814 campaigns leading up to his first abdication. The theme is best explained in the author's introduction:

“As well as offering an unfamiliar story, the conflict of 1813-14 also raises a central question. At several moments during these years, Napoleon's opponents offered him compromise peace terms, yet he consistently failed to explore them. Was this because they were patently insincere, and not worth pursuing? Or were they in fact genuine, and Napoleon's rejection of them merely arrogance and obstinacy? Whatever answer is given has major implications for one's view of the Napoleonic wars. If Napoleon's enemies had no intention of making peace with him, then the conflict was an irreconcilable

clash, which could only end with complete victory for one side and utter defeat for the other. If, however, the offers were honestly meant, then a settlement between France and her adversaries was possible, and the ultimate responsibility for their failure rests on a single man.

“This book seeks to resolve this question. It does so with the help of important new archival sources. Ironically, several of these remain untapped precisely because so much has been published about Napoleon. In the century after his death, the memoirs and many other papers of those who had known him appeared in print, leading to the assumption that the archives they were taken from contained nothing more of interest. This is emphatically not the case. The two best examples here are the papers of Caulaincourt, Napoleon's foreign minister in 1813-14, and Metternich, his Austrian counterpart and the leading diplomat of the coalition formed against France. Caulaincourt's memoirs were published in 1933, but these did not include a mass of autobiographical notes, including an entire section of several hundred pages on the 1813 campaign, and some important correspondence, now in the *Archives Nationales* in Paris. Eight volumes of Metternich's papers appeared in the 1880s, but this was only a small selection from his vast archive now in the Czech National Archives in Prague, the *Acta Clementina*, which has only recently been properly catalogued. Some of the most significant new material in this book comes from these two sources.”

There are 14 chapters, three from the end of the Russian campaign in December 1812 to the opening of the 1813 campaign; five covering the 1813 campaign and negotiations up to the battle of Leipzig; the final six covering the defence of France and the collapse of the Empire. There is also a short epilogue on the Hundred Days. In each section there are the three intertwined strands of the military campaign, the diplomatic negotiations and the politics of France. There are the necessary maps, (though the important one showing the historic and natural frontiers of France is completely incomprehensible) and also portraits and other illustrations, and a very helpful *Dramatis Personae* conveniently placed at the front of the book. At the back there are detailed notes to each chapter and a full list of sources and bibliography.

Of these, the military campaign contains the least new material, being mainly based on Chandler and Petre with some supplementation from more recent authors so there are no surprises there and, though I would question using a biography of Jomini to explain Ney's manoeuvres at the battle of Bautzen, the points of contention do not affect the main narrative. Only the campaigns in which Napoleon was commanding are covered, the actions in Spain and the south of France being mentioned only as they affect the negotiations.

The diplomatic narrative is the most important and detailed being based on the unpublished material mentioned above. As well as the Metternich papers, the unpublished memoirs of Clam-Martinić, aide-de-camp to Schwarzenburg, are used, which give further insight into the Austrian position. The book centres round the Austrians and French, there is very little material on the Russians and Prussians in the bibliography though their importance is by no means underestimated in the text. The argument is that while Metternich's memoirs suggest he had always intended Napoleon's downfall and had deliberately offered him conditions he could not accept, this appears to be hindsight and that his letters and actions of the time indicate that he was genuinely working for an equilibrium of power in Europe with France reduced to the 'natural frontiers' but still powerful. The difficulties he had in managing three monarchs with different characters and divergent agendas accounted for the ambiguities of the diplomatic offers from the Allies. At the beginning of 1813, up till the failure of the Congress of Prague, he was still hoping to negotiate a peace which would make it unnecessary for Austria to fight and even at the end of the year was trying to avoid an invasion of France.

The state of France and the internal politics form the third strand: the Malet conspiracy is here linked with two lesser-known failed republican plots, explained in detail, to seize the ports of Toulon and Marseille in spring 1813 and hand them over to the English. It is suggested that, from this point, the government was more worried about republicans than royalists. Throughout the campaigns and the negotiations Napoleon was receiving reports on the state of public opinion from the police and also from the reports sent in by his prefects and these have been used extensively to demonstrate how public opinion changed during the course of the two years as the people became increasingly desperate for peace. This is also supported by the difference between the conscription at the end of 1812 which went well and that of the following year which had many problems, even leading to riots in some areas. At the end of 1813 the Senate and Legislative Body were given the records of the diplomatic negotiations to study, the Senate dutifully backed Napoleon's position but the Legislative Body composed a strong report in favour of peace which was promptly suppressed. This incident is given full weight with the help of the notes of Lainé, leader of the group, showing the belated re-emergence of the liberal spirit which prompted it. It is also shown how the Royalists exploited the unrest to promote the impression of a Royalist revival and how even liberals such as Lainé were prepared to co-

operate with this in the interest of obtaining peace.

If it is accepted that the Allies' were prepared to negotiate in good faith then the next question is why Napoleon failed to make peace while he could. His position was stated early in 1813 in a conversation with Schwarzenburg "If I made a dishonourable peace I would be lost.....If I signed a peace of this sort, it is true that at first one would hear only cries of joy, but within a short time my government would be bitterly attacked..." This obsession, combined with the insistence on the need to preserve the frontiers gained by the Republic survived all the evidence presented to him of the rising demand for peace. From Caulaincourt's memoirs, notes and letters it can be shown how impossible Napoleon made the task of both Metternich and his own negotiators, repeatedly delaying responses, sending new counter-proposals and including secret conditions which were highly unlikely to be acceptable: such as France keeping three bridgeheads over the Rhine – this in December 1813 – his family connections still holding their satellite kingdoms and the lands awarded to his supporters being retained by them. On the other side it is shown that Metternich baited the Frankfurt proposals by adding that England was prepared to recognise 'freedom of commerce and navigation' without any authority from England and that he boasted in his memoirs that the offer was never meant seriously; the author insists that this contradicts Metternich's actions at the time but finds it hard to explain how he expected to get England to agree, he suggests that if Napoleon had accepted the terms promptly England would have been isolated and forced to join the negotiations. This remains speculative since Napoleon did not reply promptly and in the meantime Castlereagh heard about it and objected and the relations between Austria and Russia became too strained for the Tsar's lukewarm support for the proposals to hold.

One thing that does seem clear is that there was never any point in the two years at which the parties got together and even began serious negotiations, neither at Prague nor at Chatillon, there were always delays, procedural arguments, incomplete powers, impossible terms and disagreements between the Allies, not to mention the fluctuating fortunes of war. The only point at which a treaty could be concluded in the end was at Fontainebleau, with the Allies occupying Paris, Wellington in the south of France and Bordeaux in the hands of the Royalists and even then, under pressure from his own supporters Napoleon would only sign a conditional abdication in favour of his son. It is not mentioned here, but according to Caulaincourt's memoirs even this was a delaying tactic while Napoleon was preparing to give battle; Marmont's defection was the last straw which forced Napoleon to sign the full abdication. The account of the abdication negotiations is the weakest point of the book, I had hoped for some new material from the Allied side to clear up some of the disputed points but it is almost entirely told from the French side, and mainly from memoirs, not even Caulaincourt's being used in the detail they could have been. It is at this point that I would make a criticism of the source material: Sorel's *L'Europe et la Révolution Française* is given as the source for the 'mutiny of the marshals' but checking the source (volume and page number given) shows that Sorel has given a dramatic description but no sources other than a reference to Houssaye and Ségur at the beginning of the chapter. The material is recognisably Ségur (*Du Rhin à Fontainebleau*) but he had the material second-hand and is well-known for an over-active imagination. There seems to be no reliable first-hand source for the beginning of the scene, before Macdonald came in: I was disappointed that such a hackneyed and unreliable account should be used without any acknowledgement of the weakness of the evidence, particularly given the amount of unpublished archive material used elsewhere in the book.

The conclusion of the author is that "Napoleon believed that peace on these terms, [the pre-revolution frontiers] would goad the French people to rise up and overthrow him. He

was catastrophically wrong, and his mistake had terrible consequences for himself, and worse ones for the thousands of soldiers and civilians who perished in the last two years of the struggle.” On the basis of the facts presented this seems a fair conclusion: while I would say the author shows a mild bias, a slight tendency to give the benefit of the doubt to Metternich more often than to Napoleon he does present Napoleon's position and difficulties fairly. He sets out to show that Napoleon's threats of a Jacobin uprising was a genuine belief, not just an attempt to strengthen his hand in negotiations. The verdict against Napoleon is echoed by one of his most loyal and hard-working officials, Caulaincourt, who wrote in an unpublished preface to his memoirs: “The Emperor did not want peace not because he did not see its necessity, but because he thought the one under discussion was incompatible with his [here the word “honour” is erased and replaced, significantly, with “survival” – author] and with the establishment of his new dynasty which, as he said, should not have to blush in front of our old republicans, having appealed to the pride and to the glory of the nation.”

This is a substantial and satisfying book, the military, political and diplomatic aspects each being presented clearly and in readable style. I would strongly recommend it.

Reviewed by [Susan Howard](#)

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