

Michel Vergé-Franceschi, Pozzo di Borgo. L'ennemi juré de Napoléon, Paris (Éditions Payot) 2016, 413 p., ISBN 978-2-228-91651-6, EUR 24,00.

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Talitha Ilacqua, London

Michel Vergé-Franceschi's »Pozzo di Borgo. L'ennemi juré de Napoléon« is a fascinating and well-written book, which revolves around one of Napoleon's cousins, Carlo Andrea Pozzo di Borgo (1764–1842). Pozzo di Borgo, as he was known, was a key diplomatic figure in French and European politics during the Napoleonic era and the Restoration, and was Napoleon's arch-enemy, as well as one of the masterminds behind the fall of the first French emperor. Pozzo di Borgo's life, Vergé-Franceschi argues, can be divided into three stages, which are also the three parts into which the book is subdivided. The first part, called »Un gentilhomme corse«, goes from 1764, Pozzo's year of birth, to 1789, when he became deputy of the nobility for Corsica at the Estates-General in Paris. These were the years of Pozzo's formation in Corsica and in Pisa, Italy, where he graduated in philosophy and right. The second part, called »Deputé français. Ministre anglais. Aventurier européen«, goes from 1790 to 1804. This was the period of Pozzo's political formation, in Paris first, then back in Corsica, and finally across Europe, from London to Vienna, to Saint Petersburg. He was a deputy in the National Assembly and later in the Legislative Assembly from 1790 to 1792. In 1794 he was back in Corsica, where he welcomed the British, and became president of the Conseil d'État of the Anglo-Corsican kingdom (1794–1796). From 1796 to 1804, Pozzo wandered across the royal courts of Europe, making a name for himself, even though he was still mostly known for being Napoleon's cousin. In 1804, Pozzo di Borgo offered his expertise to the Russian tsar, who accepted it, and Pozzo moved to Saint Petersburg. With Pozzo's Russian adventure begins the third and final part of his life, which Vergé-Franceschi titled »Le diplomate russe«, and goes from 1804, the year when Pozzo moved to Russia, to 1842, the year of his death. This was the period of Pozzo's highest success as a diplomat, as counsellor in the Russian army during the Napoleonic wars and then as Russian ambassador in Paris during the Restoration. During these years, Pozzo di Borgo also received important honours. He became count in 1816 by order of Louis XVIII, »comte Pozzo di Borgo« in 1825 under Charles X, and count of the Russian Empire in 1826.

The book is centred around the relationship between Pozzo and Napoleon, from their friendly childhood in Corsica, to their hostile confrontation at the battle of Waterloo, where, the legend has it, Pozzo and Napoleon saw each other for the last time, to Napoleon's death in Saint Helena. Napoleon and Pozzo were friends, rivals and eventually arch-enemies. They were born five years apart, Pozzo in 1764 and Napoleon in 1769. They were both Corsican, an origin they both attempted to hide throughout their lives. Though cousins, their immediate families were distinctly different in ethos, and this shaped the education and mentality of the two. Pozzo di Borgo came from Alata, in the Corsican countryside. He was a member of the rural nobility, which he defended throughout the revolutionary upheavals, and was attached to the Catholic tradition and to Ancien Régime values. The Bonaparte family, on the contrary, was from an urban background, Ajaccio, where Napoleon was born and grew up in an enlightened and masonic environment. Here, Vergé-



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Franceschi argues, lies the key difference between the two men, as well as a rivalry, which haunted Napoleon all the way to Saint Helena. Pozzo di Borgo had a key role in the final defeat of Napoleon. He was the one who convinced Bernadotte to betray Napoleon in exchange of Sweden. He was also the one redacting the Declaration of Frankfurt, with which European leaders swore to fight against Napoleon, rather than France. Pozzo also persuaded the tsar to march on Paris in 1814, a fact Napoleon himself reported in his memoirs. And finally, it was Pozzo who came up with the idea to send Napoleon to Saint Helena after the One-Hundred Days.

After Napoleon was exiled in the South Atlantic, Pozzo di Borgo became Russian ambassador in Paris, a role Bonaparte had forbidden him to take whilst he ruled France, and participated in all major diplomatic decisions in Europe during the Restoration. And yet, Vergé-Franceschi argues, after Napoleon's death, Pozzo gradually lost the prestige he had during the years his cousin was the ruler of Europe. He was disappointed with the Restoration, because he saw its leaders as driven by mere self-interest. He later lost his influence under Charles X (1824–1830), and was hostile to the revolution of 1830. The years between 1824 and 1830, Vergé-Franceschi writes, were »sad« for Pozzo (p. 297). Despite Pozzo di Borgo's own achievements, the author compellingly suggests, his life, reputation and perhaps even his success were inextricably linked to his cousin's. The book indeed dedicates only the last chapter and a half (out of thirteen), less than thirty pages, to Pozzo's life after Napoleon, even though Pozzo di Borgo outlived Napoleon by twenty-one years, and the most successful period of his diplomatic career came after Napoleon's exile in Saint Helena. Pozzo's reputation peaked when Napoleon ruled over Europe. He thrived on opposition to his cousin's power, and, in a way, in his cousin's shadow. His success lay in part in his effort to become as great as Napoleon, even if he (un)consciously knew he would never succeed. His hatred of Napoleon followed him across Europe, but after his cousin's death, Pozzo di Borgo always denied it. In a letter in 1831, he wrote that he had never known such humiliating feeling as hatred, and unveiled his admiration for Napoleon, perhaps for that success he had never achieved.

Vergé-Franceschi skilfully places Pozzo di Borgo's fascinating story in a broader Corsican, French and European narrative, which serves to explain the context in which Pozzo took his decision and the environment which shaped his mentality and actions. What the author could have done more is to better set the history of Corsica in the context of the history of France, by means of more careful comparisons between Corsica and other regions of France, rather than simply between Corsica and »continental France« (p. 96). The book would also have benefited from a more structured introduction and conclusion, as well as from more rigorous footnoting. Finally, the narrative would have been more effective if provided with a more critical analysis of citations and more succinct quotes.

But overall, this is a fascinating book. It looks at Napoleon from a different perspective, from the point of view of a man Bonaparte feared and yet admired. It is also a book that links European political history with regional history, and biography with the history of nation formation. And most importantly, it gives much needed voice to Carlo Andrea Pozzo di Borgo, a man who Karl Marx lauded as »the greatest Russian diplomat of all times« (p. 17). Pozzo di Borgo was a complex figure, who thrived on his opposition to his cousin, Napoleon Bonaparte, and whose success and reputation were inextricably linked to the man he strove to defeat. His success in bringing Napoleon down brought him recognition but no admiration. After his death in 1842, the Russian ambassador wrote that Pozzo di Borgo was finally in hell,

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10.11588/frrec.2017.3.41471

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where the devil would tell him (p. 315): »My friend, you have exceeded my instructions!«

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