

Jean-Paul Pellegrinetti (dir.), Pour une histoire politique de la France méditerranéenne, Rennes (Presses universitaires de Rennes) 2021, XVI-730 p., ill., cartes, couv. ill. en coul. (Histoire), ISBN 978-2-7535-8166-1, EUR 39,00.

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This weighty volume is the final product of a major research project funded by the French Agence nationale de la recherche in 2012–2016 and titled »Identités et cultures en Méditerranée. Les élites politiques de la Révolution française à la V^e République«. Sixty French specialists have pooled their findings on sixteen French departments (including three in Algeria before 1962), with four major themes: regional and comparative studies of political élites; case-studies of short- and long-term political trends; changing notions of electoral and administrative boundaries; and the core of the collection: studies of collective and individual political identities, traditions, and behaviours. The result is a rich and expert compendium. The sixty contributions cover an extraordinary range of aspects of political life across more than two centuries, testifying to the richness of southern French political culture, even if the volume's editor Jean-Paul Pellegrinetti is notably reluctant to suggest any distinctively *méridional* dimensions to that culture. As he states judiciously, »Il n'y a, à nos yeux, aucune identité donnée et immanente, mais toujours construite, selon des degrés de conscience et d'objectivation divers. Le risque d'essentialisation est grand, surtout relativement à une région qui a fait les frais, comme on l'a rappelé, de tant de stéréotypes« (p. 14).

The volume contains a collection of sixteen maps of election outcomes, from the presidential elections of 1848 to the legislative elections of 2012 (earlier elections are very difficult to interpret because of restricted suffrage or, during the French Revolution, low participation). The shifts in political choice are striking. In the words of Bruno Dumons, »après un siècle et demi d'une histoire politique tournée vers les idéaux issus de la Révolution française et acquise à la Montagne de 1849–1851, la France méditerranéenne est désormais passée de gauche à droite, d'un bastion républicain à un fief de droite, conservateur et nationaliste« (p. 291). This conclusion has been reinforced by the results of the 2022 elections. In the first round of the presidential elections, on 10 April, Marine Le Pen was the front-runner in every department along the Mediterranean littoral, plus the inland departments of Provence; only the Ariège placed Jean-Luc Mélenchon in front. Further north, in the mountainous hinterland, Emmanuel Macron was the first-placed candidate. The first round of the National Assembly elections two months later reinforced this picture. Along the coastline, only Marseille and the areas in and around Montpellier preferred Mélenchon's left-wing NUPES alliance to the Rassemblement



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national of Le Pen. In contrast, the backcountry from the Ariège to the Drôme via the Tarn, the Aveyron, the Lozère and the Ardèche voted left. This is a dramatic reversal of the political history of the Midi from 1849 to 1981 when, as a rule, the coastal departments from the Pyrénées-Orientales to the Var were the heartland of the left, while inland departments such as the Aveyron and the Lozère were solidly centre-right.

This fundamental shift from the durable image and reality of the Midi *rouge* to the new actuality of the Mediterranean littoral as dominated by the nationalist right-wing is the single most significant change in the political history of the region, but it is largely unexplored in this collection, except by Dumons and Jean Sagnes. There is no close analysis of the new right-wing political élites which have emerged with this political change. Contributions to the section on »traditions politiques« examine the spectrum from communism to Christian democracy, but there is no analysis of the Front national nor of its successors, no analysis of its ideology, leadership or membership. Most significantly, the reasons for the profound shift from left to right over the past half-century are unexplored: there is no discussion of migration from Northern France and North Africa, of the impact of mass tourism and economic change, let alone of the place of racial attitudes and stereotypes. Ethnicity is referred to only in terms of indigenous populations and cultures. With few exceptions, the contributors to this volume have preferred to concentrate on earlier, more congenial times and themes.

Despite this regrettable unwillingness to identify and explain these general shifts in Mediterranean political life since the 1970s, this volume is to be welcomed for the quality and breadth of its contributions. The authors range from senior specialists to new researchers; their chapters vary from broad syntheses to original research findings. Not surprisingly, many of the highlights come from the research project's core focus on political élites: there are delightful brief pen portraits of legendary figures such as Adolphe Thiers, Gaston Defferre and Georges Frêche (by Éric Anceau, Anne-Laure Ollivier and Sabine Jansen respectively). One is tempted to conclude that a durable aspect of southern politics has been for party machines to produce larger-than-life individuals such as these who end up creating a personal status greater than their parties, often through the clientelism seen as distinctively Mediterranean. There are particularly interesting discussions of the political dimensions of popular culture (by Pellegrinetti, Emmanuel Fureix and Laurent Sébastien Fournier). There will be frequent recourse to the volume by those with an interest in the political cultures and history of a region often stereotyped, even stigmatised, in public discourse and yet as fascinating, complex and varied as its geographical micro-regions.



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