

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-35856-9 - The Rise and Fall of the Second Empire, 1852-1871

Alain Plessis

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

The Cambridge History of Modern France

3 The Rise and Fall of the Second Empire, 1852-1871

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-35856-9 - The Rise and Fall of the Second Empire, 1852-1871

Alain Plessis

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

The Cambridge History of Modern France

This is an eight-volume textbook series on the history of France from 1815 to the present day, co-published with the *Maison des Sciences de l'Homme*. Each volume is a translation of a title or titles from the series 'Nouvelle histoire de la France contemporaine' which has been in the course of publication by Editions de Seuil, Paris, since 1972. Authors are either historians at the top of their profession, but actively writing works of research, or younger scholars keenly involved with the topics concerned. Each shows a clear awareness of work currently being undertaken in the field, in English as well as in French. The series as a whole will form a comprehensive, coherent and up-to-date history of France since 1815.

- 1 Restoration and Reaction, 1815–1848*
ANDRE JARDIN and ANDRE-JEAN TUDESQ
Translated by Elborg Forster
- 2 The Republican Experiment, 1848–1852*
MAURICE AGULHON
Translated by Janet Lloyd
- 3 The Rise and Fall of the Second Empire, 1852–1871*
ALAIN PLESSIS
Translated by Jonathan Mandelbaum
- 4 The Third Republic from its Origins to the Great War, 1871–1914*
JEAN-MARIE MAYEUR and MADELEINE REBERIOUX
Translated by J. R. Foster
- 5 The Decline of the Third Republic, 1914–1938*
PHILIPPE BERNARD and HENRI DUBIEF
Translated by Anthony Forster
- 6 From Munich to the Liberation, 1938–1944*
JEAN-PIERRE AZEMA
Translated by Janet Lloyd
- 7 The Fourth Republic, 1944–1958
JEAN-PIERRE RIOUX
Translated by Godfrey Rogers

Titles marked with an asterisk are also available in paperback

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-35856-9 - The Rise and Fall of the Second Empire, 1852-1871

Alain Plessis

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

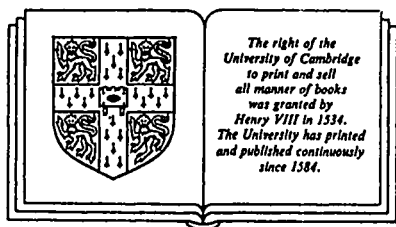
The Rise and Fall of the Second Empire, 1852–1871

ALAIN PLESSIS

Professor, University of Paris VIII

Translated by

JONATHAN MANDELBAUM



CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge

New York Port Chester Melbourne Sydney

EDITIONS DE

LA MAISON DES SCIENCES DE L'HOMME

Paris

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-35856-9 - The Rise and Fall of the Second Empire, 1852-1871

Alain Plessis

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Published by the Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge CB2 1RP
40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011, USA
10 Stamford Road, Oakleigh, Melbourne 3166, Australia
and Editions de la Maison de Sciences de l'Homme
54 Boulevard Raspail, 75270 Paris Cedex 06

Originally published in French as *De la fête impériale au mur des fédérés, 1852-1871*

by Editions du Seuil, Paris, 1979

and © Editions du Seuil, 1979

First published in English by Editions de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme and Cambridge University Press 1985 as *The Rise and Fall of the Second Empire, 1852-1871*

First paperback edition 1987

Reprinted 1989

English translation © Maison des Sciences de l'Homme and
Cambridge University Press 1985

Library of Congress catalogue card number: 84-11412

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

Plessis, Alain

The rise and fall of the Second Empire, 1852-1871

—(Cambridge history of modern France)

1. France—History—Second Empire, 1852-1870

I. Title II. *De la fête impériale au mur des fédérés (1852-1871)*. English

944.07 DC276

ISBN 0 521 25242 3 hard covers

ISBN 2 7351 0075 8 hard covers (France only)

ISBN 0 521 35856 6 paperback

ISBN 2 7351 0225 4 paperback (France only)

Transferred to digital printing 2001

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-35856-9 - The Rise and Fall of the Second Empire, 1852-1871

Alain Plessis

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Contents

	Chronology	page ix
	Foreword	xvii
1	The regime of Napoleon III	1
	1. <i>Late 1852</i>	1
	A restoration? New times. The unity of the Second Empire.	
	2. <i>Napoleon III</i>	
	The sphinx. The antithesis of the 'men of stature'. 'Napoleonic ideas'.	
	3. <i>The spirit of the regime</i>	11
	4. <i>Institutions: authoritarian features</i>	15
	The suspension of liberties. The emperor's powers. The constitutional role of ministers. The assemblies (the Senate, the Conseil d'Etat, the Legislative Body).	
	5. <i>Democratic features</i>	21
	The means of expression of universal suffrage. Official candidacies.	
2	The political personnel and political life of the Second Empire	25
	1. <i>The governing personnel</i>	25
	The position of ministers. The key men of the regime.	
	2. <i>The membership of the assemblies</i>	34
	The senators. The <i>conseillers d'Etat</i> . The deputies.	
	3. <i>The role of the three assemblies</i>	38
	The Senate's lethargy. The myth of the Conseil d'Etat. The revenge of the Legislative Body.	
	4. <i>The administration</i>	42
	Civil servants. The prefects. The <i>conseillers généraux</i> and local notables.	
		v

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-35856-9 - The Rise and Fall of the Second Empire, 1852-1871

Alain Plessis

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

vi	<i>Contents</i>	
	<i>5. Conclusions</i>	53
	Political weaknesses. Winning over the affluent classes.	
3	Economic progress and change	58
	<i>1. Prosperity and expansion</i>	58
	A stable population. The role of the State. A favourable economic cycle. The various facets of imperial prosperity.	
	<i>2. Money</i>	71
	The stock exchange. Company financing. The banking revolution. Capitalist concentration. Capital exports.	
	<i>3. The railway revolution</i>	83
	<i>4. Industrial growth</i>	88
	The rise of big industry. The evolution of traditional sectors. General assessment.	
	<i>5. The limits of economic change</i>	95
4	Living standards, life styles and attitudes	98
	<i>1. Average living standards and disparities</i>	98
	A better-fed and sturdier population. The decline of illiteracy. Disparities.	
	<i>2. The rural world</i>	104
	Agricultural progress and backwardness. Was the peasantry 'deproletarianized'? Attitudes and ways of life.	
	<i>3. Workers and towns</i>	113
	The working-class standard of living. Social repression. The transformation of the big cities; Paris.	
	<i>4. Bourgeoisie and civilization</i>	125
	The varied world of the bourgeoisie. Artists and writers. Literary and artistic renewal.	
5	The good years, 1852-61	132
	<i>1. The first legislature (1852-7)</i>	132
	The seizure of the country. The alliance of throne and altar. Weaknesses of the oppositions. The regime's policy course and the Crimean War.	
	<i>2. The phase of initiative</i>	143
	The elections of 1857. Orsini's assassination attempt and the law of general security. Intervention in Italy to 1860: the break. The customs <i>coup d'état</i> . Foreign ventures. Towards a more liberal regime.	

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-35856-9 - The Rise and Fall of the Second Empire, 1852-1871

Alain Plessis

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

	<i>Contents</i>	vii
6	Decline and fall	152
	1. Deterioration (1858–63)	152
	Causes. Facing the rising tide of opposition. The elections of 1863.	
	2. The regime's failures	158
	An uncertain policy. The failure of social policy. The failure of reform (1867–8). The elections of 1869.	
	3. The 'liberal Empire'	165
	4. Collapse	168
	5. The Commune	170
	Notes	175
	Bibliography	181
	Index of names	191

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-35856-9 - The Rise and Fall of the Second Empire, 1852-1871

Alain Plessis

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Chronology

1852

14 January	Constitution promulgated.
2 February	Organic decree on elections.
17 February	Decree on the press.
29 February	Election of Legislative Body.
25 March	Charter for prefectoral administration. Decree banning gatherings of more than twenty persons.
7 November	Senatus consultum calling for restoration of the Empire.
21–22 November	Second plebiscite.
2 December	Empire proclaimed.
25 December	Senatus consultum increasing emperor's powers.
30 December	Decree reinstating theatre censorship.

1853

20 January	Napoleon III marries.
1 June	Law on industrial tribunals.
2 June	Fleet sent to Dardanelles.
9 June	Law setting up pension fund for civil servants.
1 July	Hausmann becomes prefect of the Seine.
5 July	Opéra Comique plot.
	Victor Hugo writes <i>Les Châtiments</i> .

1854

27 March	War declared on Russia.
14 June	Education law.
22 June	Law renewing obligation for workers to carry employment record (<i>livret de travail</i>).
26 June	Franco-British force occupies Greece.
8 July	Vienna Protocol between allies and Austria.
20 September	Battle of the Alma.
5 November	Battle of Inkerman.
14 November	Morny becomes president of Legislative Body.
	First publicly-floated government loan.
	Viollet-le-Duc begins <i>Dictionnaire raisonné de l'architecture française</i> .

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-35856-9 - The Rise and Fall of the Second Empire, 1852-1871

Alain Plessis

Frontmatter

[More information](#)**x** *Chronology***1855**

- 26 January* Alliance between France, Britain and Sardinia.
April Allies defeated outside Sebastopol.
 Napoleon III contemplates leaving for the Crimea.
26 April 'Exemption' system replaces military service by proxy.
28 April Pianori assassination attempt.
2 May Laws on public works in Paris and patent rights.
May–November World Fair in Paris.
27 August Slate-quarry workers' rising at Trélazé.
10 September Sebastopol captured.
 Year of poor harvests.

1856

- 26 February–30 March* Congress of Paris.
16 March Birth of imperial prince.
17 July Senatus consultum on regency.
26 July Legislation on business companies reformed.
October Flaubert publishes *Madame Bovary*.

1857

- 19 January* Law on the Landes region.
April Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du Mal* published.
29 April Legislative Body dissolved.
9 June Law extending special charter of Banque de France.
21–22 June Election of Legislative Body.
6 August Tibaldi and Ledru-Rollin sentenced.
September Napoleon III and the tsar meet in Stuttgart.
December Franco-British intervention begins in China.

1858

- 14 January* Orsini assassination attempt.
1 February Decree setting up Privy Council.
7 February General Espinasse appointed Minister of the Interior and of General Security.
19 February Law on general security.
13 March Orsini executed.
25 April Legislative by-elections in Paris.
11 June Espinasse leaves Ministry of the Interior.
24 June Ministry for Algeria created.
21 July Napoleon III and Cavour meet at Plombières.
Summer Paris Conference on Rumanian principalities.
15–19 August Napoleon III visits Brittany.
 Proudhon, *La Justice dans la Révolution et l'Eglise*.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-35856-9 - The Rise and Fall of the Second Empire, 1852-1871

Alain Plessis

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Chronology

xi

1859

- 23 January Franco–Sardinian alliance.
 9 February Pamphlet on *L'Empereur Napoléon III et l'Italie*.
 18 February French occupy Saigon.
 25 April Work begins on Suez Canal.
 3 May War on Austria declared.
 4 June Battle of Magenta.
 11 June Law establishing co-operation between railway companies and the State, the latter guaranteeing interest on future bonds.
 24 June Battle of Solferino.
 12 July Villafranca conversation.
 15 August Amnesty decreed.
 10 November Treaty of Zurich.
 22 November *Le Pape et le Congrès* pamphlet.
 31 December Letter from Napoleon III to Pius IX.
 Société Générale founded.
 Mistral, *Mireille*; Ingres, *Bain turc*.

1860

- 1 January Paris city limits extended.
 Pius IX's speech on France's Italian policy.
 4 January Thouvenel, an Italophile, replaces Walewski as Foreign Minister.
 23 January Commercial treaty with Britain.
 30 January Veillot's *L'Univers* banned.
 10 February Return to military rule (*gouvernement général*) in Algeria.
 24 March Treaty handing over Nice and Savoy to France.
 Summer France occupies Syria.
 18 September Italian troops rout Papal zouaves at Castelfidardo.
 24 November Decree granting assemblies right of address.
 Bessemer converter tried out for first time in France.

1861

- 13 January Speech by Keller to Legislative Body.
 14 January Ollivier offers to rally to Empire.
 1 March Anti-clerical speech by Prince Napoleon before the Senate.
 25 April *Le Temps* founded.
 21 July Franco–Spanish agreement on Mexican debts.
 16 October Circular from Persigny directed against Saint-Vincent-de-Paul charity.
 17 October Letter from Tolain concerning scheme to send workers' delegation to London.
 14 November Fould appointed Finance Minister.
 31 December Senatus consultum increases Legislative Body's powers in financial matters.
 Building of Paris Opéra commences under supervision of Garnier.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-35856-9 - The Rise and Fall of the Second Empire, 1852-1871

Alain Plessis

Frontmatter

[More information](#)**xii** *Chronology***1862**

- 23 February Inaugural lecture by Renan at Collège de France.
 29 March Franco-Prussian commercial treaty.
 5 May Defeat at Puebla (Mexico).
 5 June Annam hands Cochinchina over to France.
 July-October Workers' delegation at London Exhibition.
 15 October Cabinet crisis. Drouyn de Lhuys replaces Thouvenel.
 30 October Napoleon III proposes a common mediator in American Civil War.
 November Napoleon III pardons striking typographers.
 Victor Hugo, *Les Misérables*.

1863

- 11 April France imposes protectorate on Cambodia.
 23 May Law authorizing limited liability companies.
 30-31 May Legislative elections.
 23 June Persigny withdraws. V. Duruy becomes Education Minister.
 13 October Death of Billault, Minister of State.
 18 October Rouher appointed Minister of State.
 Crédit Lyonnais founded.
 Salon des Refusés set up. Manet, *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe*.

1864

- 11 January Speech by Thiers on necessary freedoms.
 17 February Manifesto of the Sixty.
 25 May Law on unions (right to strike).
 15 September Franco-Italian convention stipulating evacuation of Rome.
 28 September First International Working Men's Association founded.
 8 December *Quanta Cura* encyclical and *Syllabus* published.

1865

- 26 January Death of Proudhon.
 10 March Death of Morny.
 15 May Speech by Prince Napoleon at Ajaccio.
 1 September Walewski president of the Legislative Body.
 October Student congress in Liège.
 October United States demands withdrawal of French troops from Mexico.
 October Napoleon III and Bismarck meet in Biarritz.
 Law recognizing value of cheques.
 Claude Bernard, *Introduction à la médecine expérimentale*.
 Manet, *Olympia*.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-35856-9 - The Rise and Fall of the Second Empire, 1852-1871

Alain Plessis

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Chronology

xiii

1866

7 and 11 March

Privy Council and ministers condemn liberal reforms.

19 March

Liberal amendment of the Forty-Five rejected.

12 June

Franco-Austrian convention on Venetia.

3 July

Sadowa.

18 July

Senatus consultum on the right of amendment.

5 August

Napoleon III demands left bank of the Rhine as compensation.

20 August

Napoleon III demands Luxemburg and Belgium.

3-8 September

Congress of International in Geneva.

12 December

Le Moniteur announces army reform.

13 December

Evacuation of Rome completed.

Crédit Mobilier collapses.

Offenbach, *La Vie Parisienne*.

1867

10-13 January

'Talks between Napoleon III and Ollivier.

19 January

Letter from Napoleon III announcing liberal reforms.

20 January

Niel becomes Minister of War.

February

French troops leave Mexico.

14 March

Senatus consultum increases Senate's powers.

April-November

World Fair in Paris.

19 June

Maximilian, emperor of Mexico, executed.

12 July

Ollivier attacks Rouher in Legislative Body.

26 July

Law exempting limited companies from government authorization.

10 August

Law on primary education.

2-7 September

Second congress of International in Lausanne.

October

Secondary education extended to girls.

3 November

French rout Garibaldians at Mentana.

5 December

Speech by Rouher on occupation of Rome.

19 December

Army reform bill discussed.

1868

14 January

Niel law voted.

31 January

Speech by Cassagnac on freedom of the press.

March

Senate debate on materialist courses at Faculty of Medicine.

20 March

French section of International sentenced on appeal.

11 May

Press law.

30 May

First issue of Rochefort's *La Lanterne*.

6 June

Law on public meetings.

18 June

International sentenced a second time.

31 July

Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes founded.

14 August

Rochefort sentenced.

6-17 September

Third congress of International in Brussels.

13 November

Gambetta plea in Baudin affair.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-35856-9 - The Rise and Fall of the Second Empire, 1852-1871

Alain Plessis

Frontmatter

[More information](#)xiv *Chronology***1869**

<i>23–24 May</i>	Legislative elections.
<i>June</i>	Disturbances after second round of elections.
<i>16 June</i>	Strike at Ricamarie works. Troops open fire (14 dead).
<i>12 July</i>	Message from emperor announcing reforms. Rouher resigns.
<i>6–12 September</i>	Fourth congress of International in Basle.
<i>8 September</i>	Senatus consultum on liberal reforms.
<i>September</i>	Negotiations between France, Austria and Italy.
<i>30 September</i>	Emperor host to Ollivier at Compiègne.
<i>16 November</i>	Suez Canal inaugurated.
<i>29 November</i>	Legislative Body reconvenes.
<i>8 December</i>	Vatican council opens.
<i>27 December</i>	Napoleon III appoints Ollivier premier.

1870

<i>2 January</i>	Ollivier government.
<i>5 January</i>	Hausmann dismissed.
<i>10 January</i>	Victor Noir murdered.
<i>7 February</i>	Rochefort arrested.
<i>21 March</i>	Napoleon III announces constitutional reform. New strike at Le Creusot.
<i>5 April</i>	Draft of liberal senatus consultum discussed.
<i>8–9 April</i>	Buffet and Daru resign.
<i>20 April</i>	Senatus consultum on emperor's powers.
<i>8 May</i>	Plebiscite, followed by demonstrations.
<i>21 May</i>	Senatus consultum establishes liberal Empire.
<i>5 July</i>	International sentenced a third time.
<i>12 July</i>	Leopold of Hohenzollern renounces Spanish throne.
<i>13 July</i>	Ems telegram.
<i>19 July</i>	War declared on Prussia.
<i>4 August</i>	Battle of Wissemburg.
<i>6 August</i>	Battles of Froeschwiller and Forbach.
<i>9 August</i>	Fall of Ollivier.
<i>14–19 August</i>	Fighting around Metz.
<i>30 August–2 September</i>	Battle of Sedan.
<i>4 September</i>	Empire overthrown. Republic proclaimed.
<i>19 September</i>	Siege of Paris begins.
<i>27 October</i>	Metz capitulates.

1871

<i>28 January</i>	Armistice and capitulation of Paris.
<i>12 February</i>	National Assembly convenes in Bordeaux.
<i>17 February</i>	Thiers becomes premier.
<i>26 February</i>	Preliminary peace talks.
<i>3 March</i>	Central Committee of National Guard set up in Paris.
<i>10 March</i>	Bordeaux Pact.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-35856-9 - The Rise and Fall of the Second Empire, 1852-1871

Alain Plessis

Frontmatter

[More information](#)*Chronology*

xv

18 March

Paris revolt: Commune begins.

26 March

Municipal council elected.

5 April

Decree on hostages.

10 May

Treaty of Frankfurt.

21-28 May'Week of bloodshed' (*Semaine sanglante*).

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-35856-9 - The Rise and Fall of the Second Empire, 1852-1871

Alain Plessis

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Foreword

Every period presents its own particular difficulties for anyone seeking to understand it. This is perhaps truer of the Second Empire than of any other period, and it is no accident that a recent conference on historiography should have chosen it as its special theme.¹

The history of the Second Empire is undergoing rapid change. For a long time it was written by the Empire's adversaries, and it suffered from its tragic ending (Sedan, the Commune). Today, it is being almost totally revised. While the myths that encumbered its 'black legend' have been debunked one by one, new interpretations are revealing a period astonishingly rich in contrasts. I shall endeavour to describe it in all its complexity, even at the cost of sacrificing somewhat the narrative of important but already familiar events.