



Subprefects: (Trans)Regional Tools of Integration?

Abstract This chapter examines the Napoleonic subprefects who have been in office in the Netherlands and Northwest Germany. Within the prefectural system, these *sous-préfets* were the highest officials at arrondissement (district) level. Activities of subprefects, somewhat neglected by historians, give insight into how French tried to rally the locals, and how this affected the daily functioning of the Empire. Discussed are subprefects' sociocultural backgrounds, imperial careers, and perception of Napoleonic governance. Subprefects had to balance national, local, and personal interest. Integration at district level was hard when the letter of the administrative legislation and the precise instructions from above were rigidly adhered to. Subprefects traveling the Empire linked events in the Netherlands and Northwest Germany to developments elsewhere, promoting integration into the Empire. Circulation patterns reflect different ideas on the required level of integration. It is argued that the figure of the subprefect was a potential 'tool of integration'. That subprefects were close to the ground could contribute to the effectiveness of Napoleonic governance. But subprefects also coped with demanding prefects, and interference of other agents of the central state. Reversely, unwilling subprefects were in a position to hinder the integration process.

Keywords Subprefects • *Ralliement* • Circulation • Personal mobility
• Integration

BALANCING INTERESTS

The preceding chapter explored the role of prefects in the integration of the Netherlands and Northwest Germany. Further down the chain of territorial governance were additional administrative entities. Each French department was divided into *arrondissements* (districts), usually three to five, which were headed by a *sous-préfet* (subprefect). Whereas the Napoleonic prefects had to position themselves vis-à-vis the central authorities and other high state representatives, subprefects had the delicate task of being in direct contact with local communities. Even if these figures were not the most noticeable ones, the filling of their posts was of importance. For example, a subprefect had to ensure conscription was observed, municipal administration ran smoothly, and taxes were correctly levied. Under Napoleon, the role of subprefects further increased. Originally, it were the prefects who fulfilled the role of subprefect in the departmental capital, but from 1809 onward, an *auditeur* was appointed subprefect next to the prefect. Although this, of course, strengthened the grip of the central government, it was primarily a question of efficiency. Many prefects had indicated that they wanted to concentrate themselves on general matters of administration to speed up work.¹

As potential checks and balances between the interests of core and periphery, subprefects were noteworthy agents of the central state. Even more than in the case of the prefects, it was desirable that subprefects were able to establish a working relationship with the locals, without sacrificing the core values of the Napoleonic state model. Knowledge of foreign languages and of administrative practices were welcome qualifications for subprefects, to adequately fulfill their duties. Scholars of Napoleonic Europe have shown that the central state could only successfully assert its power if it entered into a relationship with older social, economic, and cultural structures, even if old systems had been abolished.² In many parts of the *Grand Empire*, bureaucrats and dignitaries came from the traditional socioeconomic elite. From their midst, experienced bureaucrats could be employed to staff the expanding imperial state apparatus. Without their knowledge and skills, the state could not function as well as it should. The pursuit of general support was called *ralliement*. Subprefects were

¹ Jean Tulard, *Napoléon et 40 millions de sujets: La centralisation et le premier empire* (Paris 2014) 119–126.

² Alexander Grab, *Napoleon and the transformation of Europe* (Basingstoke 2003) 208–209.

potentially significant figures in the departments for the advancement of *ralliement*, certainly in the imperial periphery, where Napoleonic governance was contested, which led to numerous gradations of *ralliement*.³

Ideally, from a Napoleonic viewpoint at least, local elites would unconditionally accept French culture. This process was called *amalgamation*. The endeavor was to mold new subjects into genuine Frenchmen.⁴ As shown earlier, *amalgamation* was by no means undisputed among French authorities. It is true that some French saw Germans as people ‘without a fatherland’, but not all aimed at a complete cultural assimilation. As for the Dutch, there was even less consensus on the extent to which *ralliement* should lead to *amalgamation*. Consequently, there were differences of opinion on the degree to which the new subjects could be allowed to govern themselves. Therefore, subprefects had to balance the interests of many actors.

Subprefects’ balancing skills were especially put to the test in early 1813 when a revolt started in Hamburg. While the French retreated behind the Elbe, Russian troops took Hamburg, whereupon uprisings broke out in other northern areas. Also in the Dutch departments unease grew. French managed to retaliate within a few months. Northwest German towns were punished after being recaptured, and repressive actions in the Netherlands intensified. These developments had direct impact on the functioning of subprefects due to their wide geographical distribution, and close local contacts.

This chapter investigates the selection, appointment, careering, and functioning of subprefects in the Dutch and Northwest German departments. In total, 66 individuals have been employed in the prefectorial system as subprefects in the northern imperial periphery, of whom 43 in the

³Gavin Daly, *Inside Napoleonic France. State and society in Rouen, 1800–1815* (Aldershot 2001) 64; Jeff Horn, ‘Building the new Regime: Founding the Bonapartist state in the department of the Aube’, *French Historical Studies* 25 (2002) 250–251. <https://doi.org/10.1215/00161071-25-2-225>; Michael Rowe, ‘Between Empire and home town: Napoleonic rule on the Rhine, 1799–1814’, *The Historical Journal* 42 (1999) 651–652. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0018246X9900850X>; Michael Rowe, *From Reich to state: The Rhineland in the revolutionary age, 1780–1830* (Cambridge and New York 2003); Stuart Woolf, *Napoleon’s integration of Europe* (London and New York 1991) 109–110; Leonard den Boef, *De (on)macht van de elite. De inlijving van het arrondissement Utrecht bij het Napoleontische Keizerrijk* (Thesis University of Amsterdam 2012).

⁴Michael Broers, ‘Cultural imperialism in a European context? Political culture and cultural politics in Napoleonic Italy’, *Past and Present* (2001) 154–155. <https://doi.org/10.1093/past/170.1.152>

Dutch departments and 23 in Northwest Germany.⁵ The provenance and sociocultural backgrounds of these subprefects will be discussed, and subsequently their mobility. To what extent has the circulation of subprefects across the Empire been instrumentalized to promote integration? Furthermore, their participation in the integration process will be examined. Prefects might have been the ‘tools of conquest’, or ‘tools of incorporation’, in their turn subprefects were potential ‘tools of integration’.

RECRUITING SUBPREFECTS FOR THE NORTH

The subprefect recruitment policy resembled that of prefects. The Ministry of the Interior selected prospective subprefects among talented *auditeurs*. Family and friendship relationships also were factors in the selection process. An impression of this can be found in the memoirs of Hyacinthe-Claude-Félix de Barthélemy, the son of a senator who was appointed subprefect of Lüneburg: ‘[Minister De Montalivet] welcomed me with great friendliness and offered me lunch; he congratulated me on my knowledge of German [...] At that time the Ministry was thinking of completely organizing the prefectoral system in Germany, by placing there the auditors with a knowledge of the language; all my patrons unanimously urged me to try my fortune in this direction. Baron [Nicolas-Marie Quinette, State Councilor] himself gave the minister the letter in which my father asked the sub-prefecture of Lübeck for me’.⁶ Actually, auditor De Barthélemy was appointed subprefect of Lüneburg, Lübeck was awarded to Marie Louis François Constant Himbert de Flégny, who had even stronger family connections, being the son of the prefect of the Vosges department, Louis-Alexandre Himbert de Flégny. Likewise, their

⁵The prosopographical, *casu quo* network research is based on name lists as published in the annual *Almanach impériale*. Newspapers, such as the *Allgemeine Zeitung*, *Journal du Soir*, *Journal de Paris*, and *Journal de l’Empire* reported on newly appointed subprefects, thus providing insight into their personal mobility. These data have been enriched with biographical information from various (online) sources (e.g., www.biografischportaal.nl; Wikipedia, and <http://resources.huygens.knaw.nl/repertoriumambtsdragersambtenaren1428-1861>). Findings are visualized geographically with the application *Palladio*, developed by Stanford University. See <https://hdlab.stanford.edu/palladio/>—the dataset is accessible online at <https://doi.org/10.17613/9zn2-r331>—entitled *Napoleonic prefects and subprefects in the Netherlands and Northwest Germany* (Palladio project), *Humanities Commons*, 17 September 2020.

⁶Hyacinthe-Claude-Félix de Barthélemy, *Souvenirs d’un ancien préfet (1787–1848)* (Paris 1886) 67.

direct colleague Armand de Salperwick, at that time subprefect of Montauban, was recommended to be posted in Bremen by his relative Félix Le Peletier d'Aunay, prefect of Tarn-et-Garonne.⁷ So, there was a well-defined pool of potential subprefects, namely the French auditors who were proficient in German, had an impeccable reputation, and were supported by high officials.⁸

In the Netherlands, Charles-François Lebrun, with his clientelist circle, was of course involved in suggesting possible subprefects. For the sake of creating support and continuity, it was obvious to retain skilled *kwartierdrosten* (the subprefect-like administrators in the districts of the former Kingdom of Holland), plus recruiting a certain amount of Frenchmen. Nevertheless, French authorities in the Netherlands were not always in agreement. For instance, Intendant Dalphonse and prefect De Stassart had suggested to appoint the Frenchman Defontaine as subprefect of Dordrecht. This man originally came from Vivarais, was married to a Catholic and distinguished Dutch woman. General-Governor Lebrun, in contrast, opted for the incumbent *kwartierdorst* Johan Repelaer to serve as subprefect. However, Repelaer would not live up to expectations; Minister De Montalivet reprimanded him a few years later because he was said to be insufficiently diligent. Defontaine later became deputy mayor of The Hague.⁹ When a new series of subprefects was appointed in April 1813, Lebrun and Dalphonse appear not to have been involved in the selection process—it seems to their regret.¹⁰

That for Northwest Germany ‘ambition’ and ‘high potential’ were crucial factors, as opposed to the factors ‘affinity’ or ‘experience’ in the Netherlands, is reflected in the ages of appointees. There, younger and less experienced men were posted compared to their colleagues in the Netherlands. On appointment, the median age of subprefects in the Netherlands was approximately 36 years. For the Northwest German subprefects, their median age was about 28 years. And whereas subprefects stationed in the Netherlands often already had started a career in

⁷Jean Vidalenc, ‘Les notables des départements hanséatiques’, *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine* 17 (1970) 789.

⁸Napoleon to Davout, 12 March 1811. Annie Jourdan ed., *Correspondance générale. Tome dixième. Un Grand Empire, mars 1810–mars 1811* (Paris 2014) 26202.

⁹Dalphonse to Lebrun, 30 May 1811. H.T. Colenbrander ed., *Gedenkstukken der algemeene geschiedenis van Nederland van 1795 tot 1840. VI: Inlijving en opstand 1810–1813* ('s-Gravenhage 1912) no. 1176; De Montalivet to Repelaer, 23 June 1813. *Ibid.*, no. 571.

¹⁰Lebrun to Napoleon, 16 April 1813. Colenbrander ed., *Gedenkstukken* VI, no. 408.

administration, in Northwest Germany, being subprefect was for many a first significant position. Historian Vidalenc has characterized many of the Hanseatic subprefects as career-driven: ‘a curious mixture of protégés and ambitious persons determined not to let themselves be forgotten in distant posts’.¹¹ Historian Stubbe da Luz has pointed out that many of them belonged to the highest-ranking group of *auditeurs de première classe*, permitted to attend *Conseil d’État* meetings presided by the Emperor.¹²

RALLYING THE LOCAL ELITES

Dutch Locals

Approximately 70 percent (30 individuals) of all subprefects stationed in the Dutch departments were of local origin. This proportion was initially even higher as during the incorporation progressively more non-Dutch subprefects were appointed. Many had experience in subnational administration of the Kingdom of Holland. A total of 11 *kwartierdrosten* were directly retained as subprefect. In many other cases comparable local administrators, such as mayors or departmental ‘assessors’, were called upon. And in one case, a former *landdrost* was appointed as subprefect.

The backgrounds of subprefects of Dutch origin were moderately diverse. When appointed, a Dutch subprefect was about 38 years of age. Politically, the group was a mixture of moderate revolutionaries and former Orangists. There was a blend of subprefects with a noble background and subprefects with a bourgeois background—as far as different sociocultural groups could be distinguished. The Dutch Republic had never known a prominent nobility. Borders between wealthy citizens and noblemen were blurred, even within families there were various branches of aristocracy and non-aristocracy. Nonetheless, a distinction can be made between the West and the East. In the urbanized West there were more non-aristocratic subprefects, in contrast to the rural East. In eastern districts, subprefects from the regional nobility governed in the manner of the eighteenth-century landed gentry. Sometimes they even resided in

¹¹ Vidalenc, ‘Les notables’, 789.

¹² Helmut Stubbe da Luz, *Franzosenzeit in Norddeutschland (1803–1814). Napoleons Hanseatische Departements* (Bremen 2003) 80.

their country houses, instead of governing, as intended, from their office in the district capital.¹³

Compared to subprefects elsewhere, there were surprisingly few extensive family relationships. Only in two cases (sub)prefects carried the same family name: both the subprefect of Almelo, Reinout Gerard van Tuyll van Serooskerken, and his third cousin Jan Maximiliaan, subprefect of Utrecht, came from the distinguished, noble Van Tuyll van Serooskerken family. And Coenraad Wolter Ellents Hofstede, subprefect of Assen (Ems Occidental) was the son of Petrus Hofstede who had been appointed prefect of the department Bouches-de-l'Yssel. This Coenraad Hofstede seems to have been an active subprefect, according to a military report on the progress of conscription.¹⁴ Both the limited number of family connections and the diversity in terms of political and sociocultural background can be explained by that, usually, districts built upon the existing political-administrative elite; groups that, given the federalistic past, were regional specific.

Given their provenance, Dutch subprefects were known as respectable administrators, but some did display undesirable behavior, upon which the government took firm action. Take Amsterdam's subprefect, Jan Frederik Abbema, who was somewhat of an outsider. *Arrondissement* Amsterdam was in fact a district of little importance since the city itself, as the third capital of the Empire, fell directly under the prefect; Amsterdam's mayor Van Brienen was higher in hierarchy than the subprefect. Abbema, formerly secretary of the cabinet of King Louis Napoleon, had recently been married to Louise de Narbonne-Lara, an illegitimate granddaughter of French King Louis XV, through her father Louis Marie de Narbonne-Lara, an *aide-de-camp* of Emperor Napoleon. Abbema's father was a Dutch Patriot who had lived in exile in Paris during the French Revolution.¹⁵ Abbema was dismissed for 'having taken the liberty of receiving payments prohibited by law', incarcerated in Amsterdam's house of correction.¹⁶ He was succeeded by a subprefect from an old Amsterdam family, Willem Cornelis de Witt.

¹³Ton Reichgelt, 'De rol van de onderprefect van Zwolle bij de centralisatie van het bestuur in de Franse tijd', *Zwols Historisch Jaarboek* 6 (1989) 59, 67.

¹⁴C. F. Gijsberti Hodenpijl, 'De Fransche overheersching I-X', *Elsevier's Geïllustreerd Maandschrift* (1910) VI, 136.

¹⁵P. J. Blok and P. C. Molhuysen ed., *Nieuw Nederlandsch biografisch woordenboek. Deel 4* (Leiden 1918) 2-4.

¹⁶Colenbrander ed., *Gedenkstukken* VI, no. 1244.

The most significant *arrondissement* in the Dutch departments was Rotterdam. There, former *landdrost* of Drenthe, aforementioned Jan Adriaan van Zuylen van Nijevelt, was appointed subprefect. He regularly came into conflict with his immediate superior, prefect De Stassart of Bouches-de-l'Meuse. Van Zuylen van Nijevelt addressed the Interior Minister directly about the tone of Stassart's correspondence, and his sometimes arbitrary behavior. Intendant Dalphonse mediated and indicated Van Zuylen van Nijevelt detested having been demoted from *landdrost* to subprefect. Dalphonse supported him, upon which Minister De Montalivet expressed his confidence in the subprefect.¹⁷

Zuyderzée's prefect, Antoine de Celles, was also greatly annoyed by the Dutch subprefects in his department. De Celles urged Minister De Montalivet to reprimand the subprefects for being openly dissatisfied. For instance, he described the subprefect of Hoorn, Edzard Jacob Rutger Mollerus, as 'a poorly brought up child', and the subprefect of Haarlem, Ewout van Vredenburg, as weak.¹⁸ The prefect put great pressure on his subordinates. Amersfoort's subprefect, Albert Carel Snouckaert van Schauburg, complained that De Celles demanded excessive labor for the recruitment of volunteers for the army and had behaved inappropriate toward him. Snouckaert van Schauburg tried to resign whereupon Lebrun intervened and reprimanded De Celles.¹⁹

Prefect De Celles had the most trouble with the subprefect of Utrecht, Jan Maximiliaan van Tuyll van Serooskerken, another Dutch subprefect of a distinguished lineage. Van Tuyll van Serooskerken had difficulty transmitting harmful measures to the *maire*, while at the same time having to force them to provide him with information. The subprefect tried to align the needs of the French with those of the local community. When the *maire* of Utrecht continued to respond slowly to inquiries, Van Tuyll van Serooskerken wrote: 'I [dare] to flatter myself, that I always work to divert the unpleasantness, to which you are often exposed [...] I need your special cooperation, as without it I am unable to answer the orders by higher authority'.²⁰ Strikingly, in his correspondence with prefect De Celles, he seems to have kept up appearances, and to have done just enough to be

¹⁷ De Montalivet to Van Zuylen van Nijevelt, 3 February 1813. *Ibid.*, no. 1591.

¹⁸ De Celles to De Montalivet, 14 April 1813. *Ibid.*, no. 635.

¹⁹ Lebrun to De Celles, 4 February 1813. Amsterdam University Library, manuscript collection, inv. no. 50G 1; Gijsberti Hodenpijl, 'De Fransche overheersching I-X', I, 258.

²⁰ Van Tuyll van Serooskerken to the *maires* in his district, 22 September 1812. Het Utrechts Archief, Onderprefektuur Utrecht. Cf. Den Boef, De (on)macht van de elite.

taken seriously. Subprefect Van Tuyll van Serooskerken sent reports every two weeks that resembled previous ones, as if nothing extraordinary ever happened. According to him, local sentiments were consistently excellent and the population was extremely willing to meet French wishes. In fact, young men would enthusiastically perform their military service, and some taxpayers were grieved they did not earn enough to pay taxes to their beloved Emperor, the subprefect claimed.

Of course, the prefect understood Van Tuyll van Serooskerken's actions were not beneficial to the imperial cause. As of 1813, the recalcitrant subprefect of Utrecht was obliged to send De Celles six confidential letters each month, on all potentially important matters. Without result, because Van Tuyll van Serooskerken continued to write similar reports. This to the dismay of prefect De Celles, who insisted that subprefect 'should not limit [himself] to repeating incessantly that everything is peaceful', and stop copying previous reports over and over again.²¹ Van Tuyll van Serooskerken felt grieved De Celles treated him like a 'rascal', and in April 1813 submitted his resignation. This was not granted as it was considered criminal to resign at that difficult moment.²²

The above examples are mainly set in an urban context. In rural areas, subprefects often came from the provincial elite. Take the subprefect of the district Heerenveen, Tinco Martinus Lycklama à Nijeholt, in the department Frise. As a rural subprefect, staffing the prefectoral system was a concern. Throughout his term of office, he struggled to find competent local administrators. The French had brought with them many administrative gremia, with many posts, in a relatively sparsely populated region. Quite some candidates for administrative positions refused. The subprefect had to appoint persons in several municipalities simultaneously, otherwise a shortage was imminent. Lycklama à Nijeholt's correspondence with municipalities also shows aptly that, although the subprefect correctly passed on orders to the *maires*, he did hardly come back to matters very proactively or ask for further information. He did exactly what was minimally expected of him, and nothing more.²³ Heerenveen's subprefect was hardly the only one who displayed this kind of behavior.

²¹ G. J. W. Koolemans Beijnen ed., *Historisch gedenkboek der herstelling van Neêrlands onafhankelijkheid in 1813. Vierde deel* (Haarlem 1913) 356–357.

²² Gijsberti Hodenpijl, 'De Fransche overheersching I-X', I, 258.

²³ Gemeentearchief Heerenveen, Gemeente Heerenveen 1812-oktober 1816, inv. no. 155.

German Locals

About a quarter of all Northwest German *arrondissements*, not counting ‘Dutch’ Ostfriesland, had already been familiarized with French-inspired territorial governance via the Grand Duchy of Berg and the Kingdom of Westphalia. Former subprefects from these states were consequently potentially well-suited to introduce Napoleonic governance in the newly incorporated departments. Six subprefects (26 percent of the subprefects posted in Northwest Germany) came from Germany. Of the six native German subprefects, four had previously served as subprefect in a Napoleonic vassal monarchy. The aristocrat Clemens von Oer became subprefect of Steinfurt. After a career in Münster’s army, he was, in the short time that Prussia governed Münster, *Landrat* of Beckum. With the establishment of the Kingdom of Westphalia he became subprefect of Coesfeld, likewise near Münster. Von Oer thus had local roots, a Prussian past, as well as Westphalian experiences. Also of Westphalian nobility was Otto von Gruben who became subprefect of Bremerlehe. Previously he acted as Westphalian subprefect of Bremervörde.²⁴

Not from the nobility, but from the small bourgeoisie, was Johann Christian Friedrich Eisendecker. This Hanoverian had had a good education, as he was fluent in French, and had made a career in Hanover’s bureaucracy. He had been subprefect of Nienburg prior to the incorporation of northern parts of the Kingdom of Westphalia. In 1811 he became subprefect of the Quackenbrück district. Eisendecker, was seen as a sincerely committed person, who was active and maintained good relations with everyone.²⁵

The fourth former Westphalian subprefect was appointed in May 1812, namely Clamor von dem Bussche. This former lieutenant in the Prussian army had been subprefect of Minden but was initially not continued after the incorporation, because he was said to be not competent enough. Prefect Keverberg successfully lobbied for him nonetheless.²⁶

²⁴ Vidalenc, ‘Les notables’, 789.

²⁵ Antoinette Joulia, ‘Les institutions administratives des départements hanséatiques’, *Revue d’histoire moderne et contemporaine* 17 (1970) 886–887.

²⁶ Antoinette Joulia, ‘Ein französischer Verwaltungsbezirk in Deutschland: Das Oberemsdepartement (1810–1813)’, *Osnabrücker Mitteilungen* 80 (1973) 69–70; Bärbel Sunderbrink, *Revolutionäre Neuordnung auf Zeit: gelebte Verfassungskultur im Königreich Westphalen: das Beispiel Minden-Ravensberg 1807–1813* (Paderborn 2015) 322.

Among the native German subprefects, there were only two without experience with French-inspired territorial governance. The first was Michael Anton von Tenspolde, a former Prussian *Kriegs- und Domänenrat* in Münster, who was appointed subprefect of Neuenhaus. The second was Adolf Christian Börries Otto von Grote, who came from old Hanoverian nobility and was appointed subprefect of Lingen.²⁷ Prefect Von Keverberg was very appreciative of Von Grote who he considered to be ‘full of zeal and devotion to imperial service, one of the promptest and most outspoken men in the three Hanseatic departments for the government’.²⁸

Despite the small share of native German subprefects, there was a certain continuity in the Northwest German bureaucracy, but mainly in the lower echelons. In addition, the departmental council and the district council included many established names. This local administrative elite was consulted by French authorities, not only as a sign of goodwill toward them, but also out to tap into their knowledge.²⁹

APPOINTING FOREIGN SUBPREFECTS

Foreign Subprefects in the Dutch Departments

Regarding the origins of the minority (13 = 30 percent) of non-Dutch subprefects in the Dutch departments, six came from ‘Old’ France, five from ‘New’ France, and two subprefects had a German background.³⁰ A few French subprefects had a longer record of service, such as the 50-year-old Louis Gaston de Bonnechose. Former page of Louis XVI and from an ancient noble Norman family, he had made a career as cavalry Lieutenant Colonel. During the Terror, De Bonnechose temporarily fled to the Dutch Republic and married a Dutch woman. De Bonnechose was appointed

²⁷ Joulia, ‘Les institutions administratives’, 886.

²⁸ Vidalenc, ‘Les notables’, 783.

²⁹ Burghart Schmidt, *Hamburg im Zeitalter der Französischen Revolution und Napoleons (1789–1813)* (Hamburg 1998) 482–483; Joulia, ‘Ein französischer Verwaltungsbezirk’, 33.

³⁰ Alexander Diederik van Omphal van IJzendoorn, born in Tournai in the Southern Netherlands, is classified as a Dutch subprefect, since troops from the Dutch Republic were stationed here between 1713 and 1781, including his father Major Anthony Frederik. Joan Carel Gideon van der Bruggen van Croy, born in Colombo (Ceylon) as the son of a colonial administrator is equally classified as a Dutchman.

subprefect of Nijmegen and would later become subprefect of Yvetot.³¹ Other Frenchmen started their careers in the Dutch departments. Charles Henri David De Gestas, from Paris, was 23 years old when appointed subprefect of The Hague in April 1811. He stayed there until the collapse of French rule in November 1813, and would become subprefect of Reims after the Hundred Days. Twenty-five-year-old François Louis Joseph de Bonnegens, from Saint-Jean-d'Angle (Charente-Inférieure) gained experience as a subprefect in Dutch Gorinchem. In April 1813 he was able to take up that post in Quimperlé (department Finistère) and Gorinchem received another French subprefect: Talleyrand's *protégé* Alexandre-Pierre-Amédée Godeau d'Entraigues, former subprefect of Lille, born four years before the Revolution in the Province of Berry.

The 'Belgian' subprefects had gained experience with the prefectoral system after the incorporation of the Southern Netherlands in 1795. Most came relatively late to the North, in 1812 or 1813. Although the Belgian subprefects were a minority, some key posts were assigned to them. In the departmental capitals, the *préfectures*, where besides the subprefect other important Napoleonic institutions were also present, a subprefect of a non-Dutch origin was often appointed next to a Dutch prefect. Many were from the Southern Netherlands: Edouard Charles Marie Ghislain de Carnin de Staden in Zwolle; Jean Patrice O'Sullivan de Grass in Arnhem; and Edmond Delacoste in Groningen. In Frise, several years prefect Verstolk van Soelen, for reasons unknown, had no (neo)-French subprefect next to him, in contrast to most prefects in the North. This was not known in Amsterdam for a long time.³² The Belgian *auditeur* Philibert François Jean Baptiste Joseph Van der Haeghen de Mussain, from Mons, finally took up this post in July 1813; aged 52, he was considerably older than other subprefects from the Southern Netherlands.

Whereas prefects of Belgian origin encountered much resistance, and hence were not always able to fulfill their tasks properly, subprefects from the South operated more efficiently. Zwolle's subprefect De Carnin de Staden, from an esteemed West Flemish family, was committed to the Napoleonic case. On two occasions he even received a gratuity for

³¹ *Annales de la littérature et des arts* XXXI (Paris 1828) 351–352.

³² Johan Joor, *De Adelaar en het Lam: onrust, opruiming en onwilligheid in Nederland ten tijde van het Koninkrijk Holland en de inlijving bij het Franse keizerrijk (1806–1813)* (Amsterdam 2000) 112.

demonstrated diligence during his conscription activities.³³ Deventer's subprefect Pierre Louis Joseph Servais van Gobbelschroy, originally from Louvain, also had a good name. Their fellow Belgian subprefect Edmond Delacoste in Groningen made similar efforts. Whereas the Dutch prefect and subprefects were reluctant to take action against men who dodged conscription, *sous-préfet* Delacoste ordered his mayors to forcibly apprehend runaways and hold accomplices responsible.³⁴

In all probability, loyal subprefects contributed to the replacement of their 'weak' Dutch prefect. When necessary, Belgian subprefects were seen as instruments to 'steer' Dutch prefects. One example is Arnhem's subprefect Jean Patrice O'Sullivan de Grass, from Brussels, with Irish ancestors. When Napoleonic rule in the Netherlands slowly crumbled, Intendant Dalphonse reminded him of his specific position to monitor the prefect's functioning and to secretly report any obstacles.³⁵

Lastly, two subprefects with a German background were posted in the Netherlands. Their activities were very limited though. Firstly, Johann Gerhard Druffel, from Münster, had in Prussian times been *Geheime Staatsreferendar*, and had become acquainted with the prefectural system as a Secretary-General in former Grand Duchy of Berg. Subsequently, in the short period Münster was part of the Dutch departments, Druffel acted as subprefect of Almelo (Bouches-de-l'Yssel), but quickly returned to his native town to become Secretary-General of Lippe.³⁶ Secondly, Gerhard von Lommessem, subprefect of Aachen in the Rhenish department of the Roër, was in April 1813 appointed subprefect of Goes (Bouches-de-l'Escaut). The *auditeur* Von Lommessem replaced deputy Pieter Adrianus Ossewaarde, a native of Goes, who, according to the commissioner general of police, was not devoted enough, nor on good terms with the local military commander.³⁷ But Von Lommessem showed little interest in Goes, was often absent and delegated his powers to local employees. Under the guise of being ill, he returned to Aachen. When, in

³³ Reichgelt, 'De rol van de onderprefect', 59–63.

³⁴ Koolemans Beijnen ed., *Historisch gedenkboek* IV, 375–376.

³⁵ Dalphonse to O'Sullivan de Grass, 7 October 1813. Colenbrander ed., *Gedenkstukken* VI, no. 1612.

³⁶ Johannes Katz, *Das letzte Jahrzehnt des Fürstbistums Münster. Unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Tätigkeit des Geheimen Staatsreferendars Johann Gerhard Druffel* (Digital reprint of 1933 doctoral dissertation, 2019) 140. [https://www.lwl.org/hiko-download/HiKo-Materialien_016_\(2019\).pdf](https://www.lwl.org/hiko-download/HiKo-Materialien_016_(2019).pdf)

³⁷ Donny to Savary, May/June 1811. Colenbrander ed., *Gedenkstukken* VI, no. 755.

October 1813, prefect Pycke summoned him back, Von Lommessem politely refused.³⁸

Foreign Subprefects in the Northwest German Departments

Contrary to the large proportion of locals in the Dutch departments, subprefects stationed in Northwest Germany largely came from Old France. Of the 23 subprefects in Northwest Germany, no less than 17 were of French origin (74 percent). Not surprisingly, they often came from border regions such as the Alsace, but not seldom also from the French heartland.³⁹ For example, Marie Louis François Constant Himbert de Flégny was among the first wave of French to be sent to Northwest Germany, initially as employee of Intendant De Chaban, and soon as a subprefect of Lübeck. Himbert de Flégny came from an old noble family, as earlier mentioned, his father was prefect of the Vosges department.⁴⁰

These French subprefects were given a more challenging task than their colleagues in the Netherlands, or their counterparts in earlier incorporated German areas, such as the Rhineland. In Northwest Germany, the French language and culture were less prominent. Moreover, Napoleonic France of 1810 was more demanding and repressive than the revolutionary France with which the German-speaking southern Low Countries and the Rhineland had had to deal. The distance between the Northwest German population and the French government was accordingly greater. Thus, lower-ranking German administrators, who had grown up without central state control, felt their freedom curtailed by superiors such as subprefects, which led to annoyances.⁴¹

The sometimes difficult relationships between the French and the Germans are exemplified in egodocuments of Lüneburg's subprefect De Barthélemy. At the start of his term, he wrote his father: 'We are little

³⁸ P. Scherft, *De archieven der Prefectuur van het Departement der Monden van de Schelde en der onderprefecturen van de arrondissementen van Middelburg en Goes 1810–1814* ('s-Gravenhage 1968).

³⁹ No place of birth is recorded for some lesser-known subprefects, but on the basis of the family name, it

can be concluded that they, or their direct ancestors, originated from northeastern France. To simplify, one French-speaking subprefect of Swiss origin, Jacob Bouthillier de Beaumont, is counted here as a Frenchman.

⁴⁰ Stubbe da Luz, *'Franzosenzeit' in Norddeutschland*, 113.

⁴¹ Vidalenc, 'Les notables', 778.

pasha's here', the population treated him with great respect. However, the *maire* of Lüneburg, 53-year-old Georg Ludwig Kruckenbergh, looked down on the subprefect, and refused to correspond with a young man like De Barthélemy. The *maire* directly addressed the prefect, who, however, pointed out mayors had to answer to the subprefects. This caused quite a stir. Consequently, Governor Davout had to underline the authority of the subprefect toward the old administrative elite. Apart from clashes between locals and foreigners, subprefect De Barthélemy also noticed the delicate relationship between French themselves. The subprefect was critical of misbehaving French soldiers, but was keen on remaining on good terms with the military authorities.⁴²

Not all French subprefects in Northwest Germany were necessarily brilliant officials in the making. Take the young nobleman Alfred Louis Jean Philippe de Chastellux, who was appointed subprefect of Hamburg. De Chastellux, son of a well-known Marshal of the same name, was supposed to serve in the army but managed to obtain a rare exemption from military service. During the evacuation of the Bouches-de-l'Elbe in March 1813, the General-Government had retreated to Osnabrück for two months. De Chastellux, however, cautiously withdrew to Paris claiming he wanted to put himself at the Minister's disposal. He only slowly returned to his post at the insistence of the Minister and the new prefect Le Tonnelier de Breteuil, who was surprised not to find him in Osnabrück. As compensation, he joined the army and was employed in the recapture of Hamburg. Briefly, he was reappointed subprefect, but Le Tonnelier de Breteuil was glad to be able to send him back to France after a few months.⁴³

It could be expected that exchanges of subprefects occurred between the Netherlands and Northwest Germany, given the relative geographical proximity, mutual intelligibility between Dutch and Low German, and recent common experiences. Arguably, an experienced former Dutch *kwartierdrost* could have helped to bridge the gap between traditional political culture and Napoleon governance in a nearby German district. Remarkably, however, the Netherlands and Northwest Germany were entirely separate clusters within the imperial prefectural network. Not a single subprefect in the years under scrutiny was stationed both in the Netherlands and in Northwest Germany. The separate spheres are further

⁴² Barthélemy, *Souvenirs*, 75–76.

⁴³ Stubbe da Luz, 'Franzosenzeit' in *Norddeutschland*, 79–81; Vidalenc, 'Les notables', 789.

exemplified by looking at German-speaking Ostfriesland (Ems-Oriental), which was formally supervised from Amsterdam, but tellingly did not count subprefects of Dutch descent. Ems-Oriental's subprefects resembled the profile of subprefects in the other German departments. Emperor Napoleon had, in fact, explicitly ordered his Minister of the Interior to appoint subprefects from Old France in Ems-Oriental, providing they spoke German.⁴⁴ There was quite a bit of anti-Dutch sentiment among the population. Jan Remees Modderman, Dutch subprefect of Winschoten (Ems-Oriental), reported discontent in the border region Reiderland/Rheiderland, a former Prussian area that had been added to the Dutch department of Groningen in 1807. Like other parts of the former Province of Ostfriesland, Dutch rule had not been warmly welcomed. Modderman reported that old military Prussian songs were sung, and that there was a desire to return to the German language and old forms of government.⁴⁵

CIRCULATION OF SUBPREFECTS ACROSS THE EMPIRE

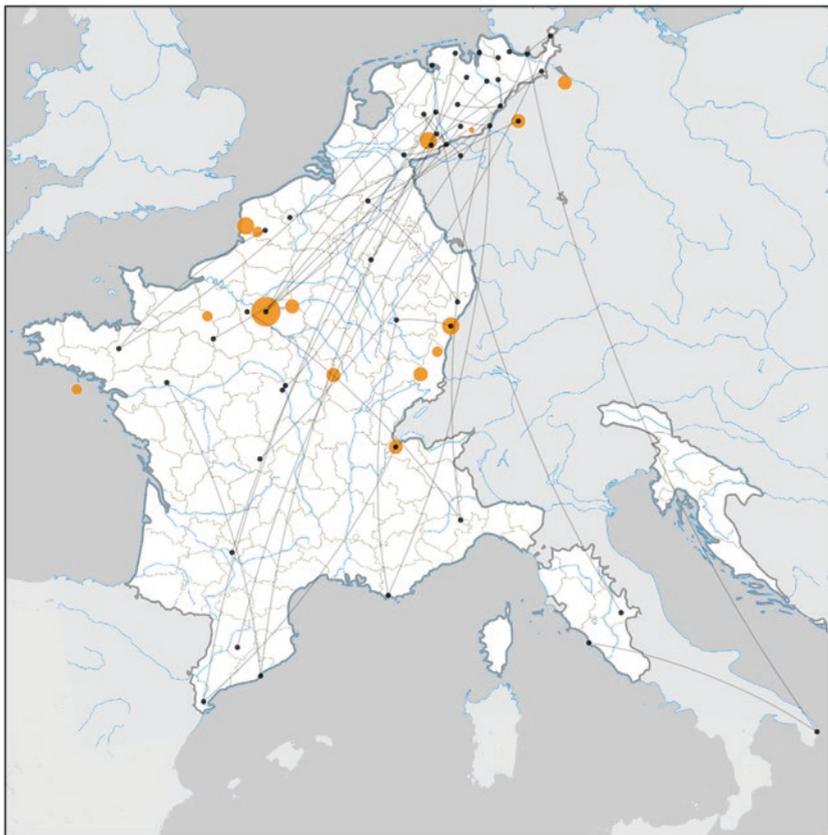
Besides the distinction between native and non-native subprefects, it is also relevant to explore the circulation of subprefects, in other words, the personal mobility within the Empire. Of the 23 subprefects who have been active in Northwest Germany, 10 were also appointed in other parts of the Empire (43 percent) at other moments. In contrast, in the Netherlands, of the 43 subprefects who have been active, 11 also were posted outside the Dutch departments (26 percent).

Maps 6.1 and 6.2 show the origins and geographical mobility of people who were appointed subprefect, respectively in Northwest Germany and in the Netherlands. Black lines visualize the individual administrative careers, which gives insight into the circulation of subprefects within the Empire. Orange circles represent birthplaces; the larger their size, the more often a person from that location was appointed to a new post—or multiple persons, in the case of shared places of birth.

Map 6.1 shows that subprefects active in Northwest Germany traveled over great distances and circulated between Catalonia, Italy and Northwest Germany. The majority originated from Central France. In particular, a group of primarily Old French officials played a surprising linking role

⁴⁴Napoleon to De Montalivet, 14 May 1811. Jourdan ed., *Correspondance générale* X, 27060.

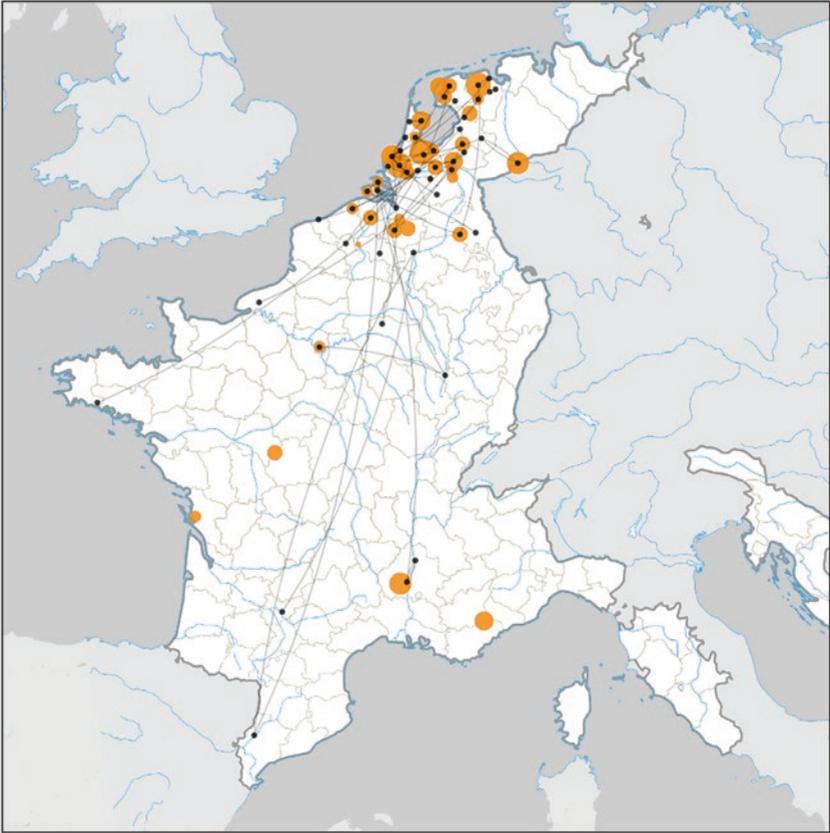
⁴⁵Modderman to Wichers, February 1813. Colenbrander ed., *Gedenkstukken* VI, no. 1592.



Map 6.1 Circulation of the Napoleonic subprefects in the Northwest German departments

between the southern periphery of the Empire and the Northwest German departments.

To begin with, the young Pierre Emmanuel Frochot was appointed subprefect of Oldenburg. Frochot was the son of prefect of the Seine department, Nicolas-Thérèse-Benoît Frochot, a protégé of Charles-François Lebrun. Early 1811, the young Frochot was appointed subprefect of Angers, but held that post for only a few months as he applied for a position as special envoy (*service extraordinaire*) in Barcelona, which was about to



Map 6.2 Circulation of the Napoleonic subprefects in the Dutch departments

be formally incorporated into the Empire.⁴⁶ His Catalan achievements contributed to his promotion to auditor first class, and subsequently his assignment in Oldenburg. A French contemporary there remembered him as a ‘rather spoiled young man, hot-tempered and distrustful’; in the national-colored German memory he became ‘a well-thinking, finely-built young man’. It seems, Frochot preferred the path of gradual integration, like

⁴⁶ Jean Sibenaler, *Les premiers préfets du Maine-et-Loire: naissance d’un département français* (2000) 34, 159–160.

many protégés of Lebrun, aiming at true *ralliement*. When in March 1813 French troops tactically withdrew, Frochot had to flee Oldenburg. The subprefect passed on his authority to a committee of five renowned local dignitaries, who called on the population to keep the peace. However, when Oldenburg was recaptured, their attempts to keep the peace were interpreted by the returning military authorities as a call to rebellion. Frochot was unable to protect the locals from a show trial by the army. Two of them, Christian Daniel von Finckh and Albrecht Ludwig von Berger, were shot, the others imprisoned.⁴⁷ In the last year of French rule in Northwest Germany, Frochot's freedom of action must have been limited.

In Minden, Constantin Marie Louis Léon de Bouthillier-Chavigny was installed as subprefect. De Bouthillier-Chavigny came from a distinguished old French military family with close ties to the Bourbons. After the French Revolution, he fought against revolutionary France in the royalist Army of Condé, just like Lippe's prefect Lasteyrie du Saillant. During this close cooperation with Austrian troops, De Bouthillier-Chavigny most likely became (somewhat) proficient in the German language. With Napoleon's seizure of power, he considered the time ripe to return to his fatherland, where he lived for several years without official function. Financially, he was forced to seek a position, on which he was appointed in Autouillet (department of Yvelines), then subprefect in Alba (department of Stura, in Piedmont).⁴⁸ He may not have been a loyal supporter of Napoleon, but his military upbringing and international experiences must have contributed to his relocation from Alba to newly incorporated Minden.

Late 1811, Jules David, eldest son of painter Jacques-Louis David, was appointed subprefect of Stade. David had started his career in 1805 as vice-consul in Civitavecchia (Papal States) and three years later in Otranto (Kingdom of Naples). This considerable experience in Italy contributed to Intendant De Chaban's calling David to Northwest Germany, first as an employee of the General-Government, and then to managing the integration process in Stade.⁴⁹

Less is known about other subprefects circulating between Southern Europe and Northwest Germany. Louis Zoé Ducros, former subprefect of

⁴⁷ Stubbe da Luz, *'Franzosenzeit' in Norddeutschland*, 190–191.

⁴⁸ *Biographie des hommes vivants, ou histoire par ordre alphabétique de la vie publique...* I (Paris 1816) 460–461; Joulia, 'Les institutions administratives', 886.

⁴⁹ Stubbe da Luz, *'Franzosenzeit' in Norddeutschland*, 239–242; Vidalenc, 'Les notables', 789.

Spoletto (capital of the Trasimeno department), was appointed subprefect of Emden (capital of Ems-Oriental). Ducros came from a wealthy family, and was on the Breton island of Belle-Isle-en-Mer.⁵⁰ In the district of Lingen Jacob Bouthillier de Beaumont was appointed as subprefect. This Swiss-born came from the old Geneva bourgeoisie. Bouthillier de Beaumont started his career as subprefect in Geneva, before traveling to Northwest Germany via Tortosa, a town in the very south of Catalonia.⁵¹ A little-known figure, François Maurice Billig (likely from the Alsace), had been subprefect in Solsona, in the interior of Catalonia. His new task was to act as subprefect in Nienburg.

Map 6.2 reveals that most subprefects active in the Netherlands came from the Low Countries, the majority from the Provinces that had formed the Dutch Republic. The visualization of their personal mobility shows that many of them were relatively less mobile, compared to their colleagues in Northwest Germany. Subprefects of Dutch descents seldom traveled over great distances. This is partly explained by the denser urban network in the Netherlands. Also, the General-Government's wish for continuity and *ralliement* has to be taken into account. In this way, the appointment policy reflected different views on integration.

Illustratively, the limited circulation across the Empire of subprefects active in the Dutch departments was a thorn-in-the-eye for some—take prefect De Celles of the department of Zuyderzée. In a letter to high police official Réal, De Celles wrote the French were right to rally many Dutchmen, but stressed that *fusion* could be accelerated if the French custom of circulating state officials was fully embraced. ‘The inhabitant of the South is transported to the North, that of the East to the West, and in a department one finds very seldom natives’, De Celles stated, ‘I would further observe that the Dutch employees in the various administrations have preserved ancient, and rude forms’. Here, De Celles shows the typical Napoleonic preoccupation with ‘modernization’, wanting to replace ‘archaic’ institutions.⁵² Another example is the subprefect of Zierikzee, Alban de Villeneuve-Bargemon, born in the southern French town of

⁵⁰Michael Broers, *The Napoleonic empire in Italy, 1796–1814: Cultural imperialism in a European context?* (Basingstoke 2005) 203; Aurélien Lignereux, *Les impériaux: administrer et habiter l'Europe de Napoléon* (Paris 2019) 207.

⁵¹Lignereux, *Les impériaux*, 34.

⁵²De Celles to Réal, 18 February 1813. Colenbrander ed., *Gedenkstukken* VI, no. 835.

Grasse.⁵³ The loyal Villeneuve-Bargemon had been sent to Zierikzee to replace a Dutch subprefect (Samuel Boeye) who was suspected of smuggling.⁵⁴ He enjoyed the privilege of corresponding directly with the Minister of the Interior. Zierikzee's subprefect was unpleasantly surprised by the lack of cooperation from the old elite families. Although the population was generally obedient and law-abiding, he believed increasing the share was Frenchmen was necessary.⁵⁵

Alban de Villeneuve-Bargemon also complained about the lack of French officials with his superior Pycke, prefect of Bouches-de-l'Escaut. Early 1812, he argued that although Zeeland had already been incorporated for a year and a half, and that many institutions had been successfully introduced, the long-term project of integration needed a different approach: 'More than eighteen months have passed today since Zeeland's reunion with the Empire. [...] But the regeneration of a corrupt people cannot be the work of a few years. [...] To entrust this country for a long time only to French civil servants or employees [will hasten the return of political morals and give a more secure guarantee to the government]'.⁵⁶ Villeneuve-Bargemon would receive a new post five weeks later, on 12 February 1812. He was promoted to prefect of the new Catalan department of Bouches-de-L'Èbre—one of the few (sub)prefectoral movements between the Dutch departments and Catalonia departments. This indicates Villeneuve-Bargemon's Dutch experiences were seen as valuable for the integration of Catalonia into the Empire. And in his place came, significantly, not a Dutchman but a Frenchman, Joseph Laurent Hippolyte de la Boissière, originally from Vivarais, who had been appointed the year before as subprefect of Neufchâteau in the Vosges.

POTENTIAL TOOLS OF INTEGRATION

From a strictly institutional viewpoint, the implementation of the French *arrondissement* framework was reasonably successful; in essence, the Napoleonic model was adopted in the North. Nevertheless, behind this seemingly well-organized structure, numerous problems were hidden,

⁵³A. Rampal, 'Le comte de Villeneuve-Bargemon. Préfet des Bouches-du-Rhône (1815–1829)', *Provincia. Revue trimestrielle d'histoire et d'archéologie provençales* 9 (1929) 141–172.

⁵⁴Napoleon to De Montalivet, 16 April 1811. Colenbrander ed., *Gedenkstukken* VI, no. 225.

⁵⁵De Villeneuve-Bargemon to De Montalivet, 6 August 1811. *Ibid.*, no. 533.

⁵⁶De Villeneuve-Bargemon to De Montalivet, 8 January 1812. *Ibid.*, no. 534.

such as imprecise territorial demarcations, unclear and slow information flows, and a recurring shortage of competent local staff—especially in rural areas. In times of adversity, subprefects were also the first to be under attack from below. This required diplomatic, linguistic, and technical skills to make the pursuit of *ralliement* truly a success. Within this context, a successful subprefect could demonstrate his qualities extensively, therefore the office was a sought-after step in an imperial career.

The filling in of the corps of subprefects in the Netherlands shows that the existing political-administrative elite was preserved where possible, supplemented with Old and New Frenchmen, who ideally had a certain affinity with the Dutch. Subprefects in Northwest Germany, on the other hand, were mainly ambitious young auditors from Old France. Consequently, the subprefects in the Netherlands were generally older and more experienced: a mixture of well-to-do urban citizens and rural noblemen. They carried out their work, but usually did not excel in their diligence. In some cases, there was so much ‘inertia’ that conflicts broke out with French superiors or colleagues. This was less the case in Northwest Germany. There, eager and skilled Frenchmen were a good choice, to build the prefectorial system from scratch. Few subprefects were of German origin; Germans had to make do with lower positions. Over time, the Dutch situation became more like the Northwest German situation as the central government appointed more subprefects of (neo-)French descent.

An explanation for the differences in the composition of the corps of subprefects is that a French-inspired system of territorial governance already existed in the Netherlands. The *kwartierdrosten* could quite easily be absorbed into the Napoleonic system. Also, Governor Lebrun was one of the most outspoken supporters of maintaining local officials. In contrast, the proportion of Germans with similar experiences was limited to a small number of former Westphalian subprefects. Moreover, the intermediary government in Hamburg pursued the policy to selecting many Frenchmen. And when *ralliement* was pursued, this did not mean that local subprefects were given equally important posts. In general, the more important a district was, the greater the chance that an experienced Old French subprefect was appointed, especially when the department’s prefect was of non-French origin.

Just as with the prefects, distinctive patterns in the circulation of subprefects can be distinguished in the northern part of the Napoleonic Empire. There are striking differences between both regions under

scrutiny. In the Netherlands, highly mobile subprefects were a minority. Nor was there much personal mobility between the Netherlands and other outlying imperial areas. However, in Northern Germany, officials from elsewhere were much more clearly present in the prefectural system. Subprefects posted in at some time in Northwest Germany, often traveled over great distances. Connecting different parts of the Empire, such subprefects were truly ‘transregional’ actors helping to hold together the Empire.

Strikingly, the Dutch cluster and the Northwest German cluster within the imperial network of subprefects were entirely unconnected. It seems that, for instance, the distance between Emden and Spoleto (1250 kilometers) was more easily bridged than the distance between Emden and Groningen (45 kilometers). And, for example, Lingen and Tortosa (1400 kilometers apart) were, for a Napoleonic subprefect, closer to each other than Lingen and Almelo (47 kilometers apart). These circulation patterns have been congruent with the opinions on integration, as reflected in ego documents. Circulating Napoleonic high officials often held more pronounced ideas on powerfully integrating the northern *departments réunies*. Also, subprefects in the Northwest German departments, more often than in the Netherlands, had a military background. Thus, differences in the composition, and mobility, of the subprefects’ corps bear evidence of conflicts within the Napoleonic state machinery concerning the advancement of integration and *ralliement*—and thereby effectively reveal conflicts about the nature of Napoleonic governance itself.

Just as prefects have been Napoleon’s ‘tools of conquest’, as Stuart Woolf pointed out (or perhaps ‘tools of incorporation’), subprefects were potential tools of integration. The actual implementation of measures of all kinds often depended on the commitment of subprefects. Subprefects were able to directly monitor mayors and interfere personally in case a for the local community harmful policy was not fully implemented. And subprefects could operate independently of the prefect if, in their view, the prefect did not adhere to the official line. As such, a skilled and loyal subprefect was invaluable to the central government in Paris.

All this was also the Achilles heel of the system of (trans)regional subprefects. Higher authorities were quite dependent on the willingness of individual subprefects. To do justice to the official *ralliement* efforts, pre-existing political elites had to be persuaded to cooperate, but in doing so, state-power was partly surrendered. As with other parts of the Napoleonic administration in the northern periphery, there was no overarching figure or authority who could genuinely oversee the entire area that had been

incorporated in 1810. Consequently, regional variations were considerable, both between the Netherlands and Northwest Germany, as well as within each area. The lack of coordination and uniformity led to a degree of integration that differed from district to district, depending on the profile, the balancing skills and the network connections of the subprefect in question.

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