THIS BOOK originates in a conversation with the late Christopher Bayly, who, around ten years ago, asked me a series of stimulating questions about the place of France in the world in the nineteenth century. I am still deeply grateful for the way in which his insightful suggestions redirected my research interests towards the global and imperial dimension of French history. The book also owes a lot, more than I could express here, to the pioneering scholarship and warm encouragement of Emma Rothschild.

As the project developed, it benefited from the suggestions and criticisms of too many scholars for me to recall, let alone list here. Still, I would especially like to thank Jeremy Adelman, Sunil Amrith, David Armitage, Andrew Arsan, David Bell, Maxine Berg, Hélène Blais, John Brewer, Martin Daunton, Nicolas Delalande, Quentin Deluermoz, James Fichter, Michael Goebel, Jerome Greenfield, Jean Hébrard, Simon Jackson, Harold James, François Jarrige, Colin Jones, Michael Kwass, Michael Ledger-Lomas, Claire Lemercier, Renaud Morieux, William Nelson, Patrick O’Brien, Ozan Ozavci, Gabriel Paquette, Jennifer Pitts, Lucy Riall, Anne-Isabelle Richard, Pernille Røge, Stephen Sawyer, John Shovlin, Pierre Singaravélou, Melissa Teixeira, Frank Trentmann, Francesca Trivellato, Alexia Yates, and the late Donald Winch, because I can still associate each of them with distinct major or minor points I make in the book. I am also very grateful to the organizers of several seminars and conferences where I presented aspects of the project—at the Casa de Velasquez in Madrid, the University of Cambridge, the Conservatoire National des Arts et Métiers, the École Normale Supérieure, the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, the European University Institute in Florence, the Freie Universität in Berlin, Harvard University, the Institute of Historical Research in London, Johns Hopkins University, Princeton University, Utrecht University and Warwick University. The enthusiasm and skepticism I encountered at these presentations inspired me, in equal measure, to complete the project.
I would also like to thank my students at King’s College London for having put up with me for the past nine years and for having often served as the first, semi-captive audience of several aspects of the book’s argument. I am especially grateful to two PhD students, Laura Forster and Leonard Hodges, whose research influenced my own understanding of nineteenth-century France. I cannot thank my colleagues in King’s History Department warmly enough for making it such an exciting and friendly environment in which to research and teach.

All historical research owes more to the help of librarians and archivists than meets the eye, and this work is no exception. I feel especially indebted to Sylvie Prudon from the Archives Diplomatiques in La Courneuve, who helped me navigate the archival series of French consulates in the Middle East. The finished product of historical research owes an enormous deal to publishers, and I was very impressed by the professionalism and kindness of all those I have worked with at Princeton University Press, especially Brigitta van Rheinberg, Amanda Peery and Eric Crahan. I also wish to thank the Leverhulme Trust for funding an extended sabbatical leave, from 2013 to 2015, during which time a great deal of the original research for the project was completed.

This book is, in addition, the product of many influences from outside the academic world. Among these I must single out the vision of nineteenth-century France of one of its great connaisseurs, Georges Liébert, including an especially stimulating discussion with him and Alice d’Andigné, in 2016, about nineteenth-century Paris. A more diffuse but very decisive influence was that of spending most of my adult life in Britain, having grown up in France. I hope the book reflects my understanding of how the French see themselves, but it has hugely benefited from the opportunity I have had of learning to see France from the world outside. Translations of quotations originally in French are my own, although I have consulted and often followed contemporary translations where available.

My own Anglo-French nuclear family has been a constant source of emotional support. I am more than ever in awe of my wife, Victoria Moul, an amazing scholar and wonderful mother, who still found the time to be my first reader and expunge remaining Gallicisms from the manuscript. My young sons, Joseph and Felix, have contributed in their own mischievous ways to the endeavour, not least by helping me to take seriously the advantages of the Malthusian model of French economic development in the nineteenth century. The book is dedicated to my mother, whose love never failed me, which made everything else possible.