

Zitierhinweis

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The historiography of the French Revolution is a diverse and ever expanding field. It is an eminently useful idea to produce a guide to it, though not one Oxford University Press is alone in having. In his introduction, David Andress, editor of the *Handbook* under review and himself a prolific contributor to this historiographical corpus, is disarmingly frank about the challenges of producing such a tome, admitting that at least two not dissimilar works were in train as this one got underway. Andress sets the goal of producing 'an original, complementary, and engaging contribution' to the study of the French Revolution. Individual authors were asked to describe why their particular field was 'still an active field of debate, to review the 'state of the art' in current understanding, and to suggest new ways forward for future research: all of which is summed up as 'putting a twist on existing debates' with the ultimate aim of generating further debate and discovery. A light editorial touch is evident throughout, allowing for disagreement between contributors and a sense of conversation between the articles which do not explicitly cross-refer. There are 37 essays between these covers, by male and female historians from Britain, the United States, France, Australia, New Zealand, and the Netherlands, including stalwarts and newer arrivals to the field. The essays cover a good swathe of time, stretching back into the *ancien régime* and down almost to the present day, with most attention naturally devoted to the years of the Revolution itself. Truly this is a vast territory populated by experts, and this reviewer approaches the volume with all due admiration for the work and knowledge it represents.

In his searching contribution, Joël Félix characterises the revolution as 'a process and a failure, a rupture and an achievement', a paradoxical yet accurate list which encompasses all the difficulty of attempting to produce a handbook to such an epoch. The mammoth task is reduced to more manageable proportions with sets of essays arranged in chronological sections, starting from 'Origins' and working through to 'After Thermidor', though these temporal titles serve more as guides than strictures. The editor has chosen to focus mainly on European France, while explicitly opening out the perspective to the international in essays by Annie Jourdan, Thomas E. Kaiser, Mike Rapport, and David A. Bell. Authors were asked to consider gender within each chapter.

It would be presumptuous, given the scale of this enterprise, to attempt to engage in depth with each of the 37 pieces of scholarship presented here. My own research interests directed my attention particularly to the two opening sections on 'Origins' and 'The Coming of the Revolution'. These provide some real insight into the *ancien régime*, which complements well the work which appeared under the editorship of William Doyle in *The Oxford Handbook of the Ancien Régime*.⁽¹⁾ We are presented here with a set of insightful contributions which skilfully describe events in the run-up to 1789 without falling into the tempting traps of teleology. Joël Félix's subtle and incisive essay on 'Monarchy' is unafraid to present the contradictory operations of old regime government, exposing the 'inherent tension between the discourse and practice of power' without feeling the need to ahistorically rationalise them. Here is as complete and compelling a description of these structures as could be afforded in an essay of this length, and one which will doubtless endure as a valuable reference. Against this complexity, the diversity of the French nobility – or nobilities? – is well captured by Jay M. Smith. Smith draws a striking parallel between the works of Henri de Boulainvilliers and parlementaire Adrien Le Paige, both of whom looked to antique precedent to establish the authority of the nobility in general and the parlements in particular. The swirling mists of ancient Gaul appear quite crowded from this perspective. Two essays in this section offer impressive new interpretations of old questions. Lauren R Clay looks for the 'absent bourgeoisie' and finds a commercial class sufficiently self-conscious to request separate representation as a Fourth Estate, recalling debates earlier in the century on the possibilities of a *noblesse commerçante* which, by attempting to graft nobility onto commerce and vice versa, attest to anxiety about where this group could fit in the *ancien régime*. The campaign for representation fell foul not only of the organisational inertia which bedevilled the Estates General but, perhaps more importantly, of a political rhetoric which

abhorred any hint of faction and in which the virtuous man acted alone in the interests of the nation as a whole. The mood, it seems, was already against anything that smacked of special interest, even as represented in the time honoured structure of estates. As Clay remarks, this miscalculation may well have sealed their political fate in the coming years. Simon Burrows effectively redraws the landscape of the pre-Revolutionary reader, along the way exploding several 'popular and historical myths' (as he pleasantly terms them) about the impact of pornographic pamphlets on political thinking. Burrows shows that 'even in the highly illegal sector it seems that *philosophie* was always more popular than salacious tales' (p. 83) and, importantly, that the 1780s did not witness a massive underground market for pornographic *libelles* against the queen. These appeared only after 1789. Readers before that date got their political kicks from philosophical works as well as lighter libertine literature. One hopes his inclusion in this volume will bring his findings to an ever wider audience.

Looking beyond France, Annie Jourdan's kaleidoscopic contribution captures the rich international influences of travel and ideas on the (mostly) men of the Revolution. She writes to good effect on the rising tide of public expectation of reform fuelled in great part by the example of royal support to the American rebels. The Dutch rebellion of 1787 is dealt with in the following essay on French foreign policy by Thomas E Kaiser. French conduct in that affair induced 'a sense of national shame' (p. 116) which further undermined already shaky confidence. Overall, Kaiser's essay asks whether France's diplomatic and military policy in the 1770s and 1780s contributed anything other than severe fiscal distress to the fall of the old regime. His answer is emphatically yes: mishandling of Britain and the bungling of the Dutch emergency in particular sapped the French self-image and, significantly, fed a growing sense of vulnerability which led even the foreign minister, Montmorin, to conclude agonisingly that France had 'no ally, no friend on whom it can count ...'. Lamoignon de Malesherbes viewed *the absence* of a British attack in 1788 as impossible, given wide international knowledge of France's financial and political distress (p. 118). Internally and externally, the French state in 1788 appeared weak and embattled, teetering on the brink of vague yet terrifying disaster. These two essays, read in conjunction with later pieces by Marc Belissa and Kirsty Carpenter, build a well rounded picture of the international dimension of the period.

In this context of insecurity and upheaval, the second section concerns itself with 'the coming of the Revolution' and opens with a 'view from above'. The nervousness conveyed by Kaiser is reflected in John Hardman's account of turmoil, dissent and downright confusion in attempts by the government to get to grips with the rapidly unfolding situation in the spring and summer of 1789, Hardman suggests that the Third Estate 'always knew' that they would gain the crucial doubling of their number in time for the Estates General in May 1789, 'and so, deep down, did everyone else' (p. 134). In a later essay in the same section, Micah Alpaugh offers a contrary view of these events with, for instance, the Crown seen as knowingly manipulating the voting issue to ensure that the Estates General would be divided, splitting 'the privileged from their former commoner allies' (p. 182). There are many other points where Hardman and Alpaugh differ substantially in their interpretations. Here the volume's role as a handbook rather than textbook is clear: there is no heavy-handed attempt to resolve these professional differences. The reader is required to bring a leaven of knowledge and judgement to the material presented.

In part three, under the rubric of 'Revolution and constitution', historians address subjects as diverse as the constitutional legacy of the National Assembly, elections and popular press, the politics of identity, religion, and urban violence in 1789. Nonetheless, for the reader who had been wondering why religion has not appeared earlier, Edward J. Woell's vigorous piece on that topic is very welcome. Woell is unabashed in positioning his work as a corrective to that of Tackett, Doyle and Aston, particularly as regards the reactions of the Catholic laity to religious reform after 4 August 1789. He suggests that much religious reform was already causing angst and was a 'fait accompli' *before* the introduction of the Civil Constitution of

the Clergy. He goes on to argue that the 1791 Oath was a major factor in undermining both the new regime directly and democratic processes in the provinces, and that one practical effect was an increase in centralisation as local divisions, occasioned by the oath crisis, drove an increase in top-down intervention.

D. G. M. Sutherland's essay provides a fascinating description of the Parisian crowd, a weighted term in this context, punishing the effigy of wallpaper maker Réveillon before the eponymous riots took place. Sutherland's assertion that such punishment was a clear threat to kill is provocative. In 1774, similar crowds took identical measures against effigies of abbé Terray and chancellor Maupeou without this being taken as a threat to life. When was this long-standing practice so transformed from admittedly intimidating political statement to imminent physical peril? Were the political circumstances of April 1789 enough to warrant such an interpretation? The question arises of how peaceable and fun mock executions, celebrated with fireworks and dancing, transformed into the gruesome spectacles Sutherland goes on to describe of real decapitation, dismemberment, hand-washing in blood, and so on, indeed *ad nauseam*.

'Counter-revolution and collapse' is the title of part four, in which Ambrogio A. Caiani makes a strong case that 1790 was the year which sealed the fate of the monarchy while Kirsty Carpenter, shedding light on an under-regarded topic, provides the view from the émigré side and highlights what might have been in 1796. Noelle Plack and Alan Forrest offer insightful and comprehensive overviews of events in the countryside and the army, respectively. An extended conversation about the Terror straddles parts five and six, 'The new Republic' and 'After Thermidor' respectively. A trio of essays is directly concerned with the Terror. Pieces on Thermidor then unavoidably engage with the topic and subsequent contributions by Jeff Horn and Jennifer Ngairé Heuer offer further reflections, with Heuer eloquent on legacies of violence. David Andress's own contribution is a convincing plea to historians to think critically about the leadership of 'popular' movements, to question the figure of the *sans-culotte* and to be wary of where seeing 'the people' as an undifferentiated mass might lead them, historiographically speaking. Asking 'What was the Terror?' Dan Edelstein undertakes a many-faceted interrogation while the contributions of Marisa Linton and Ronen Steinberg capture the ramifying nature of this event without losing sight of its human cost. Linton is perhaps the most forthright in stating the importance of emotion to our understanding of the period, yet it is clearly a significant factor running through many of the analyses presented here. Steinberg's conclusion is thought-provoking in its evocation of the potential for exploration of notions of trauma and reconciliation in this period.

Moving on to Thermidor and its aftermath, Laura Mason offers further material on the framing of the Terror, arguing for significant continuities between before and after the famous date of 9 Thermidor. Her essay shows the other side of a coin first seen in Charles Walton's earlier piece: how does his focus on calumny and slighted honour fit with her radicals who promoted denunciation as a civic virtue? Is (virtuous) denunciation what one does to others, and (vicious) calumny what others do to you? These wordy exchanges are thrown into sharp relief by Howard G. Brown's description of increasingly authoritarian efforts to impose law and order from 1795 to 1802. The bare fact of 800 death sentences handed down by non-military courts in every year from 1801 to 1804 captures the sheer violence of this unsettled polity. In an effective conjunction, Brown's essay sits alongside Jean-Luc Chappey's on the fading 'civilising mission' of the 'rational, sensible' elites of the Directory whose growing sense of distance from 'the people' sanctioned an increasing resort to coercion in order to protect the power of the executive. 'And so are they all, all honourable men', as Mark Anthony lamented, bringing us back to Charles Walton's earlier reflections on honour in a weak state which chime with Kaiser's point about 'national shame' and with views Hamish Scott has conveyed elsewhere.⁽²⁾ As so often throughout the volume, the echo and counterpoint between the essays further enriches the reading experience.

Jeff Horn's magisterial piece on 'lasting economic structures' may well be the essay that launches a thousand dissertations in a field for which he pleads for attention – and helpfully indicates many possible avenues of inquiry – that of the economic policies of 1789–99. He describes the shifting moral economy which links the rejection of the politics of the Terror with the outright dismissal of what had been successful economic policies, with immediate and 'harrowing' consequences for the French. In a nicely-positioned essay towards the end of the volume, Jennifer Ngairé Heuer neatly unpicks the categories and questions underlying much thinking on the Revolution with a compassion that renders this endeavour constructive and informative rather than destructive. One is tempted to go back and re-read all that came before in this new light. The coda is provided by David A. Bell in an essay on the conceptual legacies of the Revolution. Passages on political ideology made for diverting reading against the background of the British Labour Party leadership election won by the avowedly left-wing Jeremy Corbyn MP over the pragmatists of what was once known as New Labour. This rich and stimulating volume has one flaw: the hoped-for integration of gender does not quite come off. In this reviewer's opinion, a chapter, or chapters, on the topic would certainly add value to the wide-ranging essays presented here. The loose chronological basis of the part structure seems to come unstuck in places and the editorial intent behind it feels muddled. Sutherland's essay on urban violence appears out of place in part three, as does Plack in part four. It comes as something of a surprise to find ourselves firmly in 1790 at the beginning of part four, having been in the mid-1790s for most of part three. These are minor quibbles, however, perhaps explained away by thematic concerns. The collection maintains a very high standard throughout. Where authors have scrupulously attempted to fulfil the editor's brief, they have produced particularly fine essays, as Lauren R. Clay, Marc Belissa and Ronen Steinberg's pieces among others show. Important essays by Simon Burrows and by Andress himself call for a reappraisal and reorientation of existing historiography, for a critical rethink and a new direction, while Kirsty Carpenter and Jeff Horn brings necessary attention to neglected aspects of this intensely studied period. These essays in particular will be valuable points of reference for students mulling over thesis topics.

The great success of this *Handbook* is to present a picture of the Revolution, and its historiography, as the hectic criss-crossing of many individual paths: this bustling, confusing, noisy, and fearful time of upheaval is well conveyed in these pages. The reader is given good directions to follow one, or many, of these paths in the ample footnotes and readings, and left with indelible human images of the time, from Lafayette hanging an empty frame for the future French Constitution, to the peasants of Gastine secretively devouring their bacon in fear of tax agents. Inevitably, this volume does not and cannot stand alone: it is in constant dialogue with our understandings of the Ancien Régime and the Revolution, those already set down and those in the process of becoming. The *Handbook* offers a convenient and scholarly starting-point or refresher on many different aspects of that turbulent epoch and on its repercussions, one which will be valuable in teaching and research. The editor and his collaborators are to be congratulated.

Notes

1. William Doyle, *The Oxford Handbook of the Ancien Régime* (Oxford, 2011).
2. Hamish Scott, 'Honour, international decline and the monarchy' in *The Crisis of the Absolute Monarchy: France from Old Regime to Revolution*, ed. Julian Swann and Joël Félix (2013).

The editor is pleased to acknowledge this wide-ranging and generous review, and to accept its observations in the spirit with which they were intended.

