Michael A. Keller, Dan Edelstein, and John Haeger, *French Revolution Digital Archive: A Collaboration of the Stanford University Libraries and the Bibliothèque nationale de France.*
<http://frda.stanford.edu/en/about

Review by David Andress, University of Portsmouth.

The first thing to be said about this initiative is that it can only be welcomed with joy by scholars of the French Revolution. It brings together two massive resources: a newly-scanned pin-sharp digitisation of the original 1787-93 series of the *Archives parlementaires* and the 14,000 images of the 1989 bicentenary videodisc project *Images de la Révolution française* in a form accessible to anyone with a web browser. Noteworthy also is the clear statement that "The use of these contents for non-commercial purposes is free of charge, subject to compliance with applicable French legislation and notably the inclusion of the source's statement." In particular for historians seeking images for their work, this is surely a massive boon.

All that said, it must also immediately be noted that this is not a fully-featured searchable corpus. I understand that the *AP* text is also available to subscribers to ARTFL, and is able to be subjected to more sophisticated analyses there. While there are limitations to what this free search engine can deliver, perhaps more immediately puzzling is an absence of positive guidance about what it will do. There is no evident "Help" function or explanation of terms used for defining searches. In what follows, therefore, I can only offer my experimental experiences in trying to discover the strengths and weaknesses of the collection.

Regarding the images, searching is relatively simple. The page http://frda.stanford.edu/en/images offers an expandable hierarchy of some dozens of categories covering both contents—"Religion," "Heroes," "Constitutional Acts"—and forms—Medals, Maps, Furniture, Fans (though in this case they deal essentially with prints and drawings OF items). This itself allows one to drill down to some thematic depth: from "Everyday Politics" to "National Guard" to "Lafayette…a controversial figure" for example, or "The Abolition of Privileges" to "The ruin of the nobility" to "The night of 4 August." Some tidying-up could be done here. There are high-level categories for "The great 'journées'," "The great journées," and "The great jounées" [sic.], though under the latter two, only links to images of 14 July 1789 appear.

When one has clicked on a category to bring up a range of actual results, a further menu box of options to the left of the page allows for results to be filtered by type, medium, artist, and even by the collector of the original, as well as, perhaps more usefully for most searchers, by named individuals in the image. "Tagging" of proper names to allow such definition, throughout both the image and *AP* collections, is comprehensive. Oddly, this search filter box is already present if one works from the homepage of the whole collection, but not on the specific images front page. If one does not wish to work through the pre-set categories, a generic search box on the left of every page, including the homepage, allows for more exploration. For the images collection, it will respond effectively to queries in English, using the thematic labelling as its source.

Search results for images present a list of small thumbnails with titles and dates (which are often approximate). Clicking on one of these brings up a larger image with all the associated metadata, including a link back to the original entry in the BnF Estampes catalogue. A menu box under the picture allows for selecting a variety of sizes of image for display. Where the scanned image is at

relatively low resolution, this can be rather absurd. Nobody would have a real use for a "medium" image of 90 x 72 pixels when the "full" size is only 720 x 576, as, for example, with this image, the first result under "Religion":
https://stacks.stanford.edu/image/pt257cr7719/IMG_04308_full.

Many images are at that rather basic resolution, adequate for a Powerpoint slide, perhaps, but not for publication. Others, however, come in glorious high definition, as in this almost 20-megapixel image of the returning "Heroines" of the October Days:
https://stacks.stanford.edu/image/fv658cc3940/T0000001_full. Any image can be right clicked to open in a separate window or tab, and this is often the easiest way to see any detail, as the display window within the FRDA site remains limited to a few hundred pixels wide. Images can then be both saved and bookmarked individually.

Moving on to the *Archives parlementaires*, this again has its own separate homepage, http://frda.stanford.edu/en/ap, which presents a list of individual volumes of the collection, each of which will expand to display its contents as a list of individual *séances* and the heading-letters of its index. For browsing a particular day's session, this is the most immediate route to open up the actual content. I note in passing that the *AP* has an interesting epistemological status, as a retrospective nineteenth-century attempt to come up with a definitive verbatim account of debate in the revolutionary assemblies—largely but not exclusively reliant on the actual contemporary reports of the *Moniteur* (which itself is now most often consulted in the July-Monarchy-era *Réimpression de l''ancien Moniteur*)—but it is, as they say, what we've got.

Clicking on a page brings up the default display, which is of the scanned text to the left and an OCR transcription to the right. Two other display modes offer either just the OCR text or the scanned text in a "flipbook" which is in practice a scrolling continuous series of pages. The scanned text is impressively zoomable, and one can easily fill the display panel with a small portion of one column before it starts to become pixelated. Ironically, at almost every resolution, the scanned text is, for this reviewer, actually easier to read than the OCR version, which in the default display mode has sometimes awkward formatting, and scrolls off the bottom of the screen. The real value of this text lies not in its questionable readability, however, but in the search capabilities that it permits.

Either from the *AP* homepage or directly from the FRDA homepage, one can immediately use the basic search box on the left, with a rather discreet "options" menu emerging to offer limitation by chronological span, "tagged" individual speaker's name, main text or headings. Other options allow for finding pairs of words with up to five words' distance between them, and the slightly mysterious "exact match (no stemming)," which, it turns out, is the choice between finding *tyran* and *tyrannie* when searching for *tyrannique*, or only what one actually types. What the site does not reveal is that phrases need to be within quotation marks in the search box. Otherwise, the words are searched separately: my initial attempt to search for *lettres de cachet* seemed to have broken the system, until it eventually disgorged the first page of results for every occurrence of *de*.

Searching properly for "*lettres de cachet*" produces a results page which displays individual hits in the first ten of, in this case, 69 volumes, with at the top of the page a useful calendar of the density of hits by month across the period covered up to early January 1794. Hovering over a square on this image gives a tool-tip indication of the hits in the month, while clicking on it, and hitting the nearby "search" button again, filters the results down to that period alone.

Search results cannot be batch-downloaded, but can be bookmarked. When opened this does cause the original search to be run again, with a noticeable delay. (Again, the whole site is rather slow, but then it is also truly free, as opposed to so many "free" things where the user and their usage data are, in fact, the product.) Once users have clicked on an individual hit, they are also given the choice of downloading the page either as PDF or text, or, slightly oddly, of taking the whole volume as either a 1.7Gb PDF or a 5Mb dump of unformatted, but searchable, text. The latter option will only be useful if there is already some kind of other program to handle it, but the former option offers

everyone with a spare 100Gb on their hard drive (and some hours of download time on an accommodating network) the possibility of their own personal browsing copy of the *AP*.

The individual results are displayed with a thumbnail of the page image, and the sentence in which the search term appears, with the term itself highlighted. Irritatingly, this highlight disappears on clicking through to the full page display, leaving one with the choice either of reading the text from the top, or using the browser's own "find" function. Results are also sometimes displayed confusingly, especially when dealing with names that have been "tagged": for example, simply searching for "Robespierre" in 1790 produced a first hit in vol. 11, p. 114, 7 January, displayed with a visible highlight on screen. Ticking the "exact match" box for the same search delivered the same number of results, but the first one was displayed instead as a link to pp.110-14. Meanwhile, the search engine copes with the fact that up to April 1790 the *AP* spells Barère as "Barrère," but of the 52 hits for 1790, the first is to a single page, the next to a five-page run, the next nine, the next twenty-two, then a single page, then a seventeen-page run.

Beyond such quibbles, it is important to remember what a powerful resource this is. For example, a basic search for "*lettres de cachet*" produces 57 references between 1 July 1789 and 31 December 1790. This compares to the printed index (which one can of course browse through this site, here at tome 14, pp. 470-1, which records only the formal debate on the decree abolishing the *lettres*, and two other incidents where they were discussed. A search for the "*comité des lettres de cachet*" set up to manage their abolition reveals that the body was still coming up in discussion as late as January 1793. Examining the vocabulary associated with these mentions can prompt further searches: "*victime pouvoir arbitraire*" using various word separations shows that it appeared as a stock phrase in a number of *cahiers*, was taken up in the general discussion of *lettres de cachet*, used by various individuals thereafter as part of their self-presentation when petitioning assemblies, including a Society of Victims of Arbitrary Power, and was still a point of reference in late 1792 and early 1793. Likewise, one can trace a wave of concern with "*ordres arbitraires*" from the *cahiers* through every phase of the Revolution.

Nothing in such search results is of course a substitute for contextually reading each actual usage, but even fairly basic searches reveal surprises that might be worth further exploration. A search for "*tyrannie monarchique*" with "exact match" off also produces results for "*monarchie tyrannique*," but demonstrates that the phrasing is extraordinarily rare: only four hits from 1792/3.

Using the "hit calendar" function can also reveal interesting patterns. A general search on "*sensibilité*," for example, shows six to twelve hits per month, broadly consistent throughout 1789, 1790, and 1791 (when there are actually fewer hits overall than in 1790), then a rise—ten to fifteen hits per month in 1792, twelve to twenty per month in 1793—support, perhaps, for William Reddy's association of the term with Jacobin radicalisation.[1]

"*Liberté*" turns up, perhaps curiously, only around twenty times per month in 1789, then grows to a remarkably consistent 35 to 45 hits per month through 1790-91, surging in March-September 1792 to a persistent 52 to 55 hits per month, then interestingly falling back to a slightly lower level of roughly thirty to 35 hits per month in 1793. Searching for the word in speeches by Robespierre, we see that his use of it in the National Assembly peaked in 1791, with over fifty hits, mostly in the spring. He appears to have uttered the word once in the Convention in September 1792, then not again until March 1793, and very rarely thereafter. Mirabeau appears, remarkably, never to have used the word at all, despite being called "l'orateur de la liberté" at least once in a debate six months after his death. Barère used it once or twice a month in the National Assembly, but ten to fifteen times a month in the Convention throughout 1793.

These are, I stress, merely scratches at the surface of a resource that, while not without potential for improvement, is already a marvellous testament to the enabling possibilities of technology for wider access to historical sources. All the many scholars involved and acknowledged here: <http://frda.stanford.edu/en/about>, are to be heartily congratulated. I once thought that the low resolution, unsearchable, sometimes literally illegible scanned pages of the *AP* provided through the

BnF's Gallica were a wonder. The FRDA puts them in the deepest shade. What still greater wonders are yet to come?

NOTE

[1] William Reddy, "Sentimentalism and Its Erasure: The Role of Emotions in the Era of the French Revolution," *Journal of Modern History*, 72/1 (2000): 109-152.

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