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D. M. G. Sutherland, *Murder in Aubagne: Lynching, Law, and Justice during the French Revolution*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009. xvii + 316 pp. Figures, notes, appendix, and index. \$95.00 U.S. (cl). ISBN 978-0-521-88304-7.

Review Essay by Edward J. Woell, Western Illinois University

According to D. M. G. Sutherland, three criteria must be met for a successful microhistory: a singular, specific event befitting of a powerful narrative; extensive documentation of that event; and a subject having broader significance beyond the event itself. Sutherland claims to have found all three in his research of Aubagne, a middling town of about seven thousand inhabitants during the Revolution located in the Provençal department of the Bouches-du-Rhône. Although the book's microhistorical focus purports to be the *grande affaire d'Aubagne*, a series of vengeful murders of town Jacobins coinciding with the White Terror in 1795, it is in fact a comprehensive narrative of the violence initiated by revolutionary factions both within and regionally beyond this town—some of which had socio-political roots predating the Revolution as well as legal and punitive repercussions extending into the Napoleonic era.

Aubagne was typical of the region. A community largely dependent on commercial agriculture and the trade it facilitated, the town was an economic center but far from dynamic as the Revolution approached. Wealth was the prime divider with the town having a substantial professional and *rentier* elite, but few nobles. Peasants and artisans made up the bulk of the town's population—a substantial number of the former owning small parcels of land mostly utilized for viticulture. Although these dimensions may seem innocuous, they nonetheless produced deep divisions during the late Old Regime that were then exacerbated by revolutionary factionalism. Most artisans and peasants became Jacobins while the urban elite led—for lack of a better term—the anti-Jacobins. Still, Sutherland is quick to point out that this factionalism did not conveniently follow strict socio-economic lines. A good share of the anti-Jacobins had virtually the same backgrounds as their political opponents, albeit with a little more wealth and a tendency to live within the town's walls. As to why the town's middling and poor inhabitants became divided during the Revolution, Sutherland points to the possible influence of factors like god-parentage and penitential societies.

Several issues sparked political division in the town early in the Revolution, but probably the most contentious was taxation. Complaints over the tax burden created a town-country alliance that became the lynchpin of the town's Jacobinism. As early as the drawing up of the town's *cahier de doléances*, future Jacobins were willing to use the threat of force to intimidate potential opponents over tax issues. From there they quickly took advantage of the electoral process in 1791 to dominate local offices, including that of the mayor, and formed their own club that quickly became a force in town politics. For their part, the anti-Jacobins began to organize as well, particularly with the help of an olive festival traditionally held in the late winter. Commemorated at a nearby château in February of 1792, the festival was seen by the town's Jacobins as a provocation, and as such they made a concerted effort to suppress it.

Such factionalism, however, was far from an isolated case in southeastern France. As Sutherland makes clear, Aubagne's factions often fell under the influence of their larger and more powerful counterparts in the cities of Marseille, Aix-en-Provence, and Arles. In such cities, those who later became Jacobins exerted extraordinary political force and were poised to challenge not only more moderate district and departmental officials, but also military contingents controlling numerous forts. Direct action was the most popular weapon in this group's arsenal, with marches and countermarches becoming commonplace in Provence between 1789 and 1792. Although Sutherland includes in the narrative almost every incident of political violence in Provence in 1790 and 1791 (including the Glacière Massacre at Avignon), he shows that factional murder did not become pervasive until the middle of 1792. In Aubagne it first appeared with the lynching of two political opponents of the Jacobins in September. Despite the murders coinciding with a war gone bad, the author argues that these acts had nothing to do with external threats, but rather were "the Jacobins' response to dealing with their local enemies"(122).

Official denunciations were rife within the town by early 1793 and the Jacobin Club set up a secret *comité de surveillance* whose express purpose was to punish enemies. While many of the club's opponents remained resigned to their repression, they were presented with an uncommon opportunity for payback when the so-called Federalists gained the upper hand in Marseille shortly before Girondins were expelled from the National Convention. Taking control of local governance, the anti-Jacobins were anxious to mete out punishment for what their enemies had done in the town, yet such vengeance was cut short by the demise of Marseille's revolt only two months after it began. What followed, of course, was Jacobin terror in the Bouches-du-Rhône. Here again, Sutherland halts his chronology of events to make clear that the Terror in Aubagne "was a continuation of faction, where the Jacobin side had the legal right to inflict a huge amount of damage on the other" (173). As much as Sutherland describes justice during the Terror as a sham, however, he finds that the Revolutionary Tribunal in Marseille sentenced a modest nine Aubanians to death. We learn, moreover, that of the 109 who held some type of office in Aubagne during the Federalist revolt, only four were executed. Still, the Terror in the town appears more vengeful than it arguably was because Sutherland's description includes obvious instances of political payback not just within the town, but more broadly in the entire region.

The Terror continued in Provence several months after 9 Thermidor Year II in spite of the widespread Jacobin disavowal of Robespierre. When the anti-Jacobins of Marseille consolidated their power by early 1795, a vengeful new vigilantism erupted in the region as anti-Jacobins sought to even the score. This was first evident in a massacre of Jacobin prisoners at Aix-en-Provence, a Jacobin uprising in Toulon, a prison massacre of Jacobins at Fort Jean in Marseille, and yet another at Tarascon. Such was the immediate context for the *grande affaire d'Aubagne*, marked as it was by a string of at least fifteen murders in and around the town in the summer of 1795. Sutherland explains that although anti-Jacobin vigilantism was similar to that of the Jacobins, it also was unique. Anti-Jacobin reprisals tended to be done in private—not amid a mass gathering—and local officials tended to be more complicit in the violence, usually through looking the other way when a murder was being plotted or failing to prosecute the crime.

As for the broader lessons of Aubagne, Sutherland admits that although its violence is comprehensible, it also "was not paradigmatic of France as a whole"(285). So what does this microhistory suggest about the Revolution at large? For one, Sutherland argues that since the violence was quite distinct from what unfolded in western France during the Vendée and *chouannerie*, it shows that revolutionary violence as a whole tended to be a highly heterogeneous phenomenon. Sutherland also contends that the events at Aubagne illustrate the ways in which direct democracy fomented violence in the Revolution, particularly through the mass action of crowds. As injurious as crowds could be, however, Sutherland is even more struck by the tendency of revolutionary officials—Jacobin and anti-Jacobin alike—to make excuses for such violence or in some cases to exonerate the perpetrators. This, too, is an important lesson about the Revolution that Sutherland draws from the events at Aubagne.

Overall, Sutherland's work on Aubagne is highly meticulous. Those who have done laborious work in the archives cannot help but admire the extent of the analysis as well as the author's agility in constructing such a coherent narrative out of a remarkable array of sources. His points about how and why new democratic practices—elections, the formation of political clubs, popular protests, among others—only aggravated social tensions and created the space for spectacular murders to occur in the town are well argued and compelling. Precisely because this study is rich with implication and characterized by exquisite detail, however, it raises numerous concerns regarding its scope, conclusions, and scholarly engagement.

One is related to the genre itself. While Sutherland identified some important criteria for a successful microhistory, arguably he overlooked one as well. As Peter Campbell pointed out in his recent essay for H-France on current revolutionary historiography, microhistory usually involves “the technique of looking deeply at a particular problem *from all possible angles with all possible sources.*”^[1] Admittedly I have little knowledge of all the sources available for Aubagne. Even so, the dearth of information in the book regarding the town's religious institutions and developments during the Revolution is conspicuous. In the conclusion Sutherland assures readers that in no way were the murders related to religious conflict since the Civil Constitution of the Clergy was widely accepted in the region and all ten of the town's clerics took the 1791 Oath. As true as this is, though, there was much more to the Revolution's religious reforms and conflict stemming from it than just one oath crisis: the circumscription of parishes; the seizure, auctioning, and buying of *biens nationaux*; the suppression of religious congregations; the quashing of those penitential organizations that Sutherland suggested may have played a role in the drawing of political lines—just to name a few. Perhaps Aubagne was religiously indifferent. But if true, it would have mattered little that the anti-Jacobin “killers stretched the liminal period of mourning in a Christian culture to agonizing lengths” by not allowing Jacobin corpses to be buried properly⁽²⁷⁴⁾. The broader point is that in many other French towns, political factionalism was augmented by a wide array of developments related to religious belief, practice, and institutions.^[2] Whether this was the case at Aubagne is difficult to determine, in part because so little of the narrative addresses the town's religious complexion.

A second concern relates to a term appearing in the conclusion, namely “violent democracy” (p. 287). Although the author does not define the term, I take it to mean forceful and destructive acts—usually committed by large crowds—that were effected or justified by notions of popular sovereignty or majority rule. On page 75, for example, Sutherland surmises that “the [proto-Jacobin] seizure and attempted demolition of the forts [in Aix, Marseille, Toulon, and Arles] was also instructive of a style of democratic practice.” No doubt some in the crowd perceived their actions as a kind of instantaneous democracy. For many today, though, “democracy” refers not only to a political process based on popular sovereignty, but also to a context where the rule of law, equality under it, political pluralism, civil liberties, and due process are observed. For this reason, to describe the thuggish actions of various political factions in and around Aubagne as “democratic” seems to stretch the term's meaning beyond its current usefulness. “Violent democracy,” in other words, will come across to many as an oxymoron. Employing such a term, moreover, clouds what today we might recognize as genuine democratic accomplishment in the French Revolution. Although one could reduce this objection to merely one of semantics, there is more at issue here. We toil in a field where words matter, particularly when using them amid a broader audience that often condenses this revolution down to one big bloodbath.

Finally, there is the matter of engaging contemporary scholarship. Sutherland's incorporation of newer historiography as well as that standing the test of time is as it should be. Still, there were a few missed opportunities. In discussing the Terror not only in Provence but in the nation at large, Sutherland addresses the work of Donald Greer as a means of countering what he sees as apologetic arguments for it. Greer's work remains seminal, but missing is consideration of more recent work that makes better sense of the Terror, particularly the judicial side of it. Robert Allen's study of criminal tribunals during

the Revolution and the First Empire, for example, seems well suited to place the judicial structure of the Terror in Provence into a more fitting national context.[3] But even more significant, the book lacks any meaningful exchange with Jean-Clément Martin's argument about much violence in the French Revolution stemming not so much from top-down repression, but rather from the absence or weakness of the state.[4] Discussion of these works, then, could have yielded even more lessons about the Revolution based on Aubagne's example.

All of which is saying that as exemplary, fascinating, and important as this book is, it nonetheless could have been even better. Yet given the standard of excellence that Professor Sutherland has set with this book and to which we must now aspire, most of us can only hope to limit ourselves to such shortcomings.

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NOTES

[1] Peter R. Campbell, "Redefining the French Revolution. New Directions, 1989-2009," *H-France Salon* 1:1 (2009): p. 20. <http://www.h-france.net/Salon/h-francesalon.html>. Accessed on 13 January 2010. The italics are mine.

[2] See for example Bernard Bodinier and Eric Teyssier, "*L'événement le plus important de la Révolution*": *La vente des biens nationaux (1789-1867) en France et dans les territoires annexés* (Paris: CTHS - Comité des Travaux, 2000).

[3] Robert Allen, *Les Tribunaux criminels sous la Révolution et l'Empire, 1792-1811* (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2005).

[4] Jean-Clément Martin, *Violence et Révolution: Essai sur la naissance d'un mythe national*. (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2006).

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