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Marchamont Needham, *De la souveraineté du peuple, et de l'excellence d'un état libre*. Théophile Mandar, trans.; Raymonde Monnier, ed. Paris: Éditions du Comité des travaux historiques et scientifiques, 2010. 248 pp. 45€ (cl). ISBN-10: 2735507270.

Review by Micah Alpaugh, University of Pennsylvania.

With scholarly interest in transnational studies growing, attention is increasingly being paid to the French Revolution's international origins. As seen in the recent works of Rachel Hammersley, Sophia Rosenfeld, Philipp Zeiche and others, many French and Atlantic World historians are becoming more cognizant of the permeable borders between revolutionary movements and traditions. In an age of growing cosmopolitanism and universalism, growing evidence points to how Revolutionaries became increasingly comfortable adapting ideas from abroad. [1]

In a fascinating series of layered texts, Raymonde Monnier presents French Revolutionary Théophile Mandar's annotated translation (1791) of English Republican Marchamont Needham's *The Excellencie of a Free State* (1656). As Monnier describes, the text presented is a creative adaptation of the original, as seen even in its expanded title, *De la souveraineté du peuple, et de l'excellence d'un état libre*, adopted by Mandar even though Needham never used a comparable phrase to "popular sovereignty" in his original English version. Few early French Revolutionaries would have been familiar with Needham's original, as it had never been published in French, nor appeared in a new English edition since 1767. Perhaps fittingly for recapturing the 1790s reading experience, the English text is not included in the present edition and most of Monnier's analysis focuses on Mandar, instead of Needham. Yet the text still shows how at least certain French Revolutionaries undertook an in-depth reading of British radical writers, even those far more obscure than John Locke.

Mandar, writing in the immediate aftermath of July 1790's Fête de la Fédération, described Needham's work as a defense against *anarchie* while cultivating "L'amour de la patrie, inséparable de l'amour de la liberté," which Mandar believed could lead to *bonheur universel* (p. 40). Yet, in spite of the generally positive and emotionally charged language of his introduction, in many ways an outgrowth of the Federation movement and wider spirit of the seemingly consolidating Revolution, the translation which follows takes a much harder edge, detailing the measures necessary to defend the *patrie* from both displaced aristocrats and new tyrants.

Mandar presents Needham's work as both a forerunner of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Social Contract* and an implicit dialogue with Machiavelli's *The Prince*, both of which are included as appendixes following the text. Needham's analysis, drawing examples from the Bible, antiquity and Renaissance Italy, as well as (though more implicitly) his experiences as a journalist during the English Revolution's Commonwealth period, views liberty as humankind's natural state. Yet though Needham asserts "the people" to be the basis for all legitimate power, he declares popular liberty to have usually been subverted through individuals' selfish interests. Despotism, in his view, can only be avoided through representative government, but one in which all individuals must fully cede before the representatives' decisions. "Dans un état libre," the text declares, "il est sur-tout nécessaire d'éviter les dissensions civiles" (p. 150). Without limiting the public sphere, contestations would become dominated by aspiring

tyrants. Thus, even though Needham declares humankind to be naturally free, great measures must be taken to prevent society's manipulation and eventual perversion by the self-interested. Needham's work comes to function as an anti-Prince, detailing measures necessary to preserve republican government from being captured by non-democratic forces.

A text which would have been quite contentious as a new work at its publishing in the immediate aftermath of the Champ de Mars Massacre and wider republican suppression of July 1791, *De la souveraineté du peuple* gained favorable reviews as a historical and theoretical work that August in both the government-published *Moniteur* (p. 14) and radical *Journal des Cordeliers*.<sup>[2]</sup> Indeed, the volume offered French Revolutionaries insights into long traditions of political liberty—both ancient and modern—from which to draw ideas and examples. Conversely, the volume also advances a Revolutionary intolerance for dissent which would drive much of the Terror. Yet as both the republican and terrorist futures remained hypothetical and (at least in the latter case) largely unforeseen, Mandar appears to believe in a future of political moderation and peace, calling attention at the work's end to how liberty had become the “essence” of the English government (p. 225).

The translation and editing of Needham's text appears to have been a major step in both Mandar's own Revolutionary education and career. Already a *Vainqueur de la Bastille* (Monnier includes as an additional appendix a letter detailing his place in the insurrection), Mandar apparently found his literary and broader political voice through translating Needham and several other British authors. By the era of his Needham translation, Mandar had become a prominent member of the radical Cordeliers Club. During the Varennes crisis of 1791, he would play a major role in the republican petition campaign that would be repressed only with the Champ de Mars Massacre, thereafter turning his attention to a massive treatise entitled *Des insurrections*: a work looking to establish the just conditions for such uprisings, which he would publish only two years later in the more radical political climate of 1793. He served as Vice-President of Section du Temple in 1792, and would be appointed a Commissaire national du conseil executive by the Convention in 1793. In spite of *De la souveraineté du peuple*'s radicalism, however, Mandar would soon become a moderate, particularly decrying the September Massacres in his *Des insurrections*.<sup>[3]</sup>

*De la souveraineté du peuple* formed a portion of important debates over the applicability of British forms and traditions of liberty for Revolutionary France, during an era of rapid expansion for clubs, free press, parliamentary democracy, and other institutions drawn in large part from British traditions. Publishing such a work as Needham's served as a powerful counterpoint to Edmund Burke's conservative rendering of liberty as a tradition too alien for the French to successfully adopt. Mandar's interests in Britain were not only historical: he also references contemporary London Revolution Society radicals Richard Price and Lord Stanhope in his preface, as *citoyens augustes* worthy of “notre amour et notre admiration” (p. 46). Though still faulting the British for retaining vestiges of servitude, he described a commonality of cause with the British not described for other European nations.

Monnier deftly adds a third layer of critique to Mandar's and Needham's commentaries, in many ways capitalizing upon her book, *Républicanisme, patriotisme et Révolution française*, which examines re-appropriations and developments of Republican theory by French Revolutionaries. Monnier situates Mandar's work as an exercise to both better understand republican traditions, gathering their *champ d'expérience* for potential applications to Revolutionary France (p. 28). She explores how Mandar seems less interested in imitating Needham's theories than in creatively adapting them for French Revolutionary use. As seen in both Mandar's 1788 antislavery writings and *Des insurrections*, the Revolutionary author saw traditions of liberty as precedents to be superseded more than strictly followed (p. 30).

Conspicuously absent from Monnier's discussion, however, is Hammersley's *French Revolutionaries and English Republicans: The Cordeliers Club, 1790-1794*, which devotes an entire chapter to Mandar's translation of Needham's text.<sup>[4]</sup> Indeed, Hammersley's close comparative reading of both texts shows substantial differences Monnier does not mention. Mandar repeatedly altered the text to make it seem "more democratic," including minimizing or deleting class distinctions in Needham's work in order to create the impression of a homogenous *peuple*.<sup>[5]</sup> Hammersley also more strongly situates the book as an alternative vision to Rousseau's skepticism as to the possibility of implementing a democratic society in a large state, with Mandar approving of Needham's vision of the people's capacity to re-claim their natural liberty themselves. Especially for a book about Anglo-French cross-cultural dialogue, Monnier's general lack of interaction with Anglophone transnational scholars is striking.

Such conversations' absence also point to a larger lacunae in the current historiographical literature. While it can no longer be denied that French Revolutionaries imported many ideas from abroad, the extent of these influences--and the rapports between them--remains difficult to determine. The field may soon need to move from focusing on such relationships' existence to better demonstrating the extent of their importance in Revolutionary thought and politics.

Nevertheless, Monnier's work also serves the important function of distributing an important text--otherwise not even available on GALLICA or Google Books--to a wider scholarly audience at an important historiographical moment. *De la souveraineté du peuple* could make a valuable addition to library collections, or be employed with profit either in graduate seminars or exam reading-lists.

Though somewhat limited in applications due to the text's obscurity even during the French Revolution, Mandar's translation of Needham serves as a welcome addition to growing discussions about the role of international inspirations for early French Revolutionaries. As part of a corpus of foreign texts influencing French Revolutionary conceptions of liberty, statecraft and revolution, Needham's work helped give French Revolutionaries a corpus of ideas and traditions from which to draw inspirations, examples and practices.

## NOTES

[1] Rachel Hammersley, *The English Republican Tradition and Eighteenth-Century France: Between the Ancients and Moderns* (Manchester, U.K.: Manchester University Press, 2010); Sophia Rosenfeld, *Common Sense: A Political History* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2011); and Philipp Zeiche, *Cosmopolitan Patriots: Americans in Paris in the Age of the French Revolution* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2010).

[2] On the Cordeliers review, see Raymonde Monnier, *Républicanisme, Patriotisme et Révolution française* (Paris: Harmattan, 2005), p. 76.

[3] Mandar, *Des insurrections: ouvrage philosophique et politique, sur les rapports des insurrections avec la liberté et la prospérité des empires* (Paris, 1793), esp. pp. 29-30.

[4] Rachel Hammersley, *French Revolutionaries and English Republicans: The Cordeliers Club, 1790-1794* (Suffolk, U.K.: Boydell Press, 2005).

[5] Hammersley, *French Revolutionaries and English Republicans*, pp. 73-74.

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