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H-France Review Vol. 18 (March 2018), No. 50

Maxime Kaci, *Dans le tourbillon de la Révolution: Mots d'ordre et engagements collectifs aux frontières septentrionales (1791-1793)*. Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2016. 324 pp. Maps, charts, bibliography, and index. €22.00 (pb). ISBN 978-2-7535-5043-8.

Review by Paul R. Hanson, Butler University.

This volume is a welcome addition to the growing body of work devoted to the history of the French Revolution in the provinces. Maxime Kaci's book grew out of a *thèse du doctorat* under the direction of Jean-Pierre Jessenne at Université de Lille III, and its focus is principally on three frontier departments of that region: the Nord, the Pas-de-Calais and the Ardennes. This is more than a local history, however. Kaci is concerned with situating these departments both in the context of their relations with bordering countries (including England across the Channel) and with Paris. It is also a comparative study—the region faced a common set of challenges in the early years of the Revolution, but the three departments did not always respond in the same way, and Kaci explores and explains their differences quite deftly. The chronological focus of the book is somewhat narrower than other provincial studies, but there is a clear analytical rationale for this. These departments were particularly affected in these years by three events: the flight of the king in 1791; the declaration of war in 1792; and the defection of two generals in 1793, Lafayette and Dumouriez, both of whom had cultivated a base of supporters in this region. The last chapters of the book examine the early months of the Terror in the aftermath of Dumouriez's defection and the proscription of the Girondin deputies from the National Convention.

Kaci sets up his approach at the outset by addressing the influence of François Furet on the historiography of the French Revolution. For Furet, he writes, “la Révolution substituerait aux conflits d'intérêts pour le pouvoir une compétition de discours pour s'approprier la légitimité” (p. 19). This had two consequences in his view. First, it turned historians away from archival sources toward printed documents. Second, the “question classique du lien entre révolution parisienne et révolution provinciale fut largement évacuée” (p. 19). I am inclined to think that this second point is overstated, though to be fair, much of the work done in the 1980s and 1990s on the Revolution in the provinces (my own included) was done by Anglo-American historians. That point aside, Kaci is determined to depart from a Paris-centric view of the Revolution, to place discourse in its social context and to move beyond official sources to draw on songs, oaths, and festivals for insight into political attitudes.

The book is organized chronologically, but also thematically, with chapter headings such as “The voices of the Nation,” “The test of the flight,” “Bursts of patriotism,” and “On the rhythm of struggles for power.” The first section of the book focuses on collective actions in 1791. Here he acknowledges his debt to old masters such as Charles Tilly and E.P. Thompson. Two sorts of collective action draw his attention: civic ceremonies and what he calls “mouvements séditieux,” the latter being mostly riots over grain or religious issues. He observes that there were many more riots in the Nord between November 1791 and February 1792 than in the Pas-de-Calais or the Ardennes but cautions that this may in part reflect a disparity in archival sources (due, for example, to records lost during war) rather than the actual incidence of such protests. Kaci offers several interesting insights about these riots. One is that people got riled up more over concern about the export of grain in this border region than the hoarding of grain by producers reluctant to sell at a lower price than they might later gain. A second point is that

soldiers (sometimes national guardsmen, sometimes garrisoned troops) often played an active role in instigating food riots, thereby according greater legitimacy to them. The keyword “nation” was often employed by the rioters, evidence to Kaci that Revolutionary ideals resonated among local people. He points to the emergence of a regional press as being important at this early stage of the Revolution, both because it informed local residents about news from abroad—England, Belgium, and the Dutch Lowlands—but also news from Paris, which served to cast local concerns in the emerging idiom of national politics.

The other issue that prompted collective action was concern over the Civil Constitution of the Clergy and the oath of loyalty that it required. Kaci notes that the percentage of priests swearing the civil oath was much higher in the Ardennes than in either the Nord or the Pas-de-Calais. Why would this have been so? Part of the reason, he suggests, is that political and religious lines of jurisdiction crossed each other in this border region, not only within French territory, but across international borders. In the Ardennes, foreign bishops governed a greater number of parishes prior to 1789 than in the other two departments. For those priests, then, swearing the oath may have elicited stronger patriotic feelings than elsewhere. To refuse to swear the oath meant heeding not just one foreign authority (the pope), but two. As in other parts of France, the religious controversies of late 1791 and early 1792 embroiled not just priests and their parishes, but local administrative bodies and popular societies as well.

Given the active level of protest over subsistence concerns and the civil oath in this region, as well as the reports of widespread panic in other areas following the flight of the king, why, Kaci asks, were there no violent incidents in these three departments near the frontier in the days and weeks following June 21, 1791? As conflicting reports reached the area following the king’s apprehension at Varennes, there was apprehension and concern but no collective disruptions. Here Kaci offers a correction to Timothy Tackett’s account, which suggested that when the king was stopped, reports were sent quickly back to Paris and then emanated from the capital back out to the provinces.<sup>[1]</sup> Kaci argues that there were several currents by which news circulated in the northeast, which he traces on a map (p. 76). Locals therefore learned of events before Parisians did and, given their proximity to the frontier people, acted with dispatch to bolster local defenses and increase surveillance in their communities. Additionally, as soon as news of the king’s flight arrived, some forty officers in the area of Dunkirk abandoned their posts and headed to the frontier, evidence that plans for the king’s flight were circulating in advance among networks of aristocratic officers. This, Kaci suggests, confirmed the king’s guilt in the eyes of these frontier citizens and heightened their fears about the danger of war. In this regard, he challenges Patrice Gueniffey, who has interpreted the law of July 9, 1791 in ideological terms as marking the beginning of the Terror because it targeted a group or category of people (aristocrats) rather than a crime. The debate in the Constituent Assembly that led to that law, Kaci observes, was launched by reports from the Nord of the desertion of those officers.<sup>[2]</sup>

The anticipation of war grew in the final months of 1791, and this had a dual impact in these three departments. On the one hand, it led to a hardening of political antagonisms between ardent patriots and supporters of the constitutional monarchy in the ranks of local officials. As in Paris, those in the northeast who favored a declaration of war did so for a variety of reasons. But as the prospect of war increased, conflicting attitudes emerged regarding refugee Branbançons, particularly in the Nord and the Pas-de-Calais, and concerns about subsistence also heightened. In the hinterland of Dunkirk, for example, sixteen food riots broke out between February 6 and March 15, 1792. Kaci interprets these disturbances as expressions of “social patriotism,” embracing the 1789 ideal of equality, rather than as anti-government riots. There was a spate of civic ceremonies during these months as well, including at least a dozen ceremonies for the planting of liberty trees in the three departments between March 30 and the end of June 1792.

The outbreak of war in April 1792 triggered violent confrontations in the garrison towns of Lille and Valenciennes. The decision by General Théobald Dillon to move 5,000 troops out of the Lille garrison led to the violence in that city and ultimately to the massacre of Dillon himself. National guards and his

own soldiers, who accused their leader of treason, played a central role in the killing of Dillon. Less than two months after this bloody event, the first uprising against the monarchy occurred in Paris. Kaci counts at least twenty-seven addresses from various local administrations and army units protesting the June 20 uprising. All three of the departmental administrations went on record denouncing this outrage against the king and his family. The department administration of the Ardennes went so far as to state explicitly their support for General Lafayette, who had moved his headquarters to Sedan in recent months. Lafayette and his local supporters did all they could in the days after August 10 to control the flow of information from Paris to Sedan. The deputies sent out by the Legislative Assembly to recall Lafayette to the capital were initially threatened with arrest by local authorities. But when Lafayette gathered his officers and soldiers together on August 15 to swear an oath of loyalty to the constitution and the king, many of them refused, which jarred Lafayette's confidence and led to his emigration.

These moments of political and military uncertainty and crisis created opportunities, Kaci observes, for "new men" to step onto the political stage. This manifested itself in varying ways across the three departments. In the Pas-de-Calais, for example, the electoral assembly of September 1792 was quite tense, pitting former supporters of Lafayette against Jacobin supporters from Arras. Over the following months, rivalry between the club of Arras and the more moderate club of Calais became an important factor. One result of that contentious electoral assembly was the election of Thomas Paine to the National Convention, his candidacy carried to victory by local followers of the moderate Brissotins. Paine was also elected from the nearby department of the Aisne, where his advocates were local radicals, evidence for Kaci of the vagaries and complexities of local politics. In the Nord, the upheaval of these months brought a surge of soldiers into the local popular societies, and they would play a predominant role in departmental politics into 1793. In the Ardennes, surprisingly, most of the departmental administrators retained their positions, despite their support for Lafayette. Sedan, however, elected the firebrand Jean-Baptiste Vassant, a refugee from the Austrian Lowlands, mayor in the fall of 1792, only to remove him from office in December 1793.

The fate of Vassant points to the role played by representatives on mission in the provinces. At the time of his ascendancy, Vassant and his supporters succeeded in securing the recall of the representatives on mission Calès and Perrin. But one year later, those same deputies played a key role in Vassant's dismissal from office and arrest. Shifting local alliances and the interplay between Sedan and Paris were both at work here. In the Pas-de-Calais, the representative on mission, Guislain Lebon, allied himself with the Jacobins of Arras (who had their own important connections in Paris, of course) and played a key role in the repressive policies put in place in the final months of 1793. In the Nord, the deputy Nicolas Hentz oversaw the creation of a revolutionary army. Ironically, Kaci observes, the Terror ended up being less severe in the Nord than in the Pas-de-Calais, where no revolutionary army was created.

In his discussion of the protests and riots in these departments Kaci makes an important point. During the food riots and violence of spring 1792, it was local authorities and popular societies who took the initiative to respond to those events, not a campaign emanating from Paris. In September 1792, violence occurred in Charleville and Sedan well before news of the September massacres could have arrived from Paris. And in the spring of 1793, at the time of Dumouriez's effort to lead his troops against the radicals in Paris, local officials again took the initiative to establish surveillance committees and local committees of public safety well in advance of the legislation passed in the National Convention in the fall of that year. It is also worth noting that in August 1793, as National Convention deputies called for the arrest of foreign nationals in war zones, roughly 20 percent of the 3,600 national guardsmen mobilized for the defense of Dunkirk were native to England. Foreigners had lived among the inhabitants of northeastern France for years, if not decades, and the local populace was loathe to turn against them, even at a time of crisis.

In his conclusion, Kaci emphasizes that there was nothing inevitable about the manner in which revolutionary politics evolved in this region, and I hope that I have made clear in this review that they also evolved quite differently in each of the three departments that are the principal focus of

examination in this study. In his final pages, the author borrows a phrase from Daniel Nordman, who characterized “les territoires frontaliers septentrionaux” as “un paradoxe dans l’espace.”<sup>[3]</sup> Perhaps it would be fair to say that they were less of a paradox to the local inhabitants than they were to Parisians—or to us today.

## NOTES

[1] Timothy Tackett, *When the King took Flight* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2003).

[2] Patrice Gueniffey, *La Politique de la Terreur* (Paris: Fayard, 2000).

[3] Daniel Nordman, *Frontières de France: De l’espace au territoire (XVIe-XIXe siècle)* (Paris: Gallimard, 1998), p. 551.

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ISSN 1553-9172