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Christophe Charle and Jacqueline Lalouette, eds., *Maurice Agulhon: aux carrefours de l'histoire vagabonde*. Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2017. 234 pp. €21.00 (pb). Notes and index. ISBN 979-10-351-0018-6.

Review by Peter McPhee, University of Melbourne.

Maurice Agulhon was born in 1926 in Uzès (Gard), the son of schoolteachers. His was a model Third Republic upbringing: secular (despite his father's Protestant background), diligent, and imbued with the republican values of education, meritocracy, and progress. Agulhon later recalled a childhood which was nonetheless unusual because of his parents' pacifist views and their advocacy of the equality of the sexes. His love of history was first awakened while a *lycéen* in Lyon (1943-46) by Joseph Hours, who had known Marc Bloch in the Resistance and taught his students about the *Annales* school. A brilliant student, Agulhon enrolled at the École normale supérieure in the rue d'Ulm in Paris in 1946, then at the Sorbonne, where he encountered Ernest Labrousse. As the top student in his cohort, he was free to choose his *lycée*—he opted for Toulon, as much for his PCF political activities as for his interest in its history. It was not until 1954 that he commenced a doctoral thesis, but he was to become one of the most significant and brilliant French historians since World War II.[1] After the completion of his magisterial study of the Var in 1970, published as several separate books,[2] his work would be characterized by two broad and connected concerns. The first was a major project to survey and interpret the role of the symbolic in popular as well as official representations of political regimes and values, in particular through the *Marianne* trilogy.[3] As a corollary, his second concern was to assume a civic duty as a public intellectual and quasi-official historian of the French Republic.[4]

A year after Agulhon's death in May 2014, former colleagues and students gathered at the Sorbonne, where he taught from 1972 to 1986, to honour their peer and friend through discussions of his great passions: history, the historical profession, and the Republic. The symposium's goal is achieved in this sparkling collection, divided between essays on Agulhon's pluralist approach to history and his civic life as a prominent historian. They are unified by a score of affectionate personal reflections about Agulhon and his work, making the volume far more satisfying than most *festschriften*.

The contributions range from brief personal reflections to lengthier considerations of Agulhon's scholarship but are united by their intellectual esteem and flashes of personal reminiscence. For example, we have—from Michel Vovelle—an insider's view of the factional politics before the Bicentenary in 1989 (Agulhon tried to be friends with Furet as well as with Soboul and Vovelle), and Rosemonde Sanson's delightful recollection of the usually reserved Agulhon's spontaneous

embrace after her *soutenance de thèse*. The book is studded with anecdotes providing fascinating personal glimpses into the friendships and rivalries of the often-agitated milieu of the French historical profession. So, my own caveat is perhaps necessary in writing this review. Maurice Agulhon was the most important influence on my own approach to history and I regard his *oeuvre* as both exemplary and an historiographical treasure. We were on friendly terms, although distanced quite sharply at times: once, temporarily, after the *Rainbow Warrior* bombing in Auckland harbour in 1985 and again when I argued that his emphasis on *bourg* and village petit-bourgeois political intermediaries between Parisian republican leaders and peasant voters (the *classe-relais*) in the nineteenth century rather downplayed the agency of peasants themselves. He took issue with me at some length in his *Histoire Vagabonde*.<sup>[5]</sup> Typical of Agulhon, he sent me a copy of the book “pour poursuivre un dialogue à la fois savant et amical.” He was a gracious and courteous person.

While *La République au village* first made Agulhon’s name in 1970, Michel Pigenet recalls that his study of Toulon, published the same year, also marked him out as an innovative historian of towns and workers’ movements, as befitted a PCF militant in Toulon and Aix-en-Provence in 1948-60. But it was Agulhon’s illuminating work on the rural populations of the department of Var across the first half of the nineteenth century that most distinguished him, as Pierre Lévêque recalls. The cluster of books stemming from his doctoral thesis expressed the richness of his adept use of political, economic, social and cultural history, for example, in his captivating insights into the *sociabilité* of the male *chambrées* which proliferated in the bustling *bourgs* of lower Provence. Within a few years he also became known for his seminal overviews of French rural and political history.<sup>[6]</sup>

From the time of his *La République au village*, too, Agulhon’s particular skill as a writer became apparent. His distinctively deft, gently probing prose, described by José-Luis Diaz as elegant, pedagogic but restrained, created an unusual satisfaction and relish for his readers.<sup>[7]</sup> He had that gift in common with the other great modern French historians since World War II, Fernand Braudel and Alain Corbin.

Of particular interest are the reflections of his close colleague Jean-Claude Caron on the parallels between Agulhon’s political trajectory—leaving the PCF quietly in 1960 and later enthusing about the victory of Mitterrand and the Parti Socialiste in 1981—and his developing interest in the history of non-violent republican culture. As a parallel, his brilliant forays into the history of attitudes towards the treatment of animals, now so current in historical research, go back to 1981. If his mother used to tell him that history was only about three things—“patrie, violence et guerre” (p. 53)—Agulhon was increasingly drawn towards the history of French political culture and to his own actions as a civic intellectual.

Michel Vovelle recalled Agulhon’s regret that Hachette invited Furet rather than him to write the volume on 1770-1880 in the publisher’s monumental history of France, but his acceptance of the authorship of the succeeding volume enabled him to deploy his vast erudition as an historian of twentieth-century France, as Antoine Prost captures. His history of France since 1880 and his studies of de Gaulle would stand alone as a lifetime’s achievement for most historians,<sup>[8]</sup> but these were written at the same time as the three volumes often seen as his masterpiece, his history of the cultural resonances of “Marianne.” First imagined in a small town in Tarn in 1792, so it seems, the feminine allegory became Agulhon’s cultural lodestone for the meanings of the Republic in public life since the Revolution.

As Christophe Charle captures expertly in the longest essay in the collection, what tied all of Agulhon's work together—from ethnography to iconography, from biography to rural history—was his passion for politics: not the politics of parliamentary manoeuvring, but “citizen politics, the politics which inhabits French history as the constant link from centre to periphery, from élites to grass-roots militants, from the Provençal *chambrée* to the Panthéon, from the village cemetery to the Invalides” (p. 105). As opposed to entrenched assumptions of democracy and republicanism being inculcated in the masses from above, Jean-Noël Tardy reminds us eloquently of Agulhon's subtle investigation of the role of new forms of popular sociability in the great nineteenth-century transition in political culture.

The collection is laced with astute insights inspired by Agulhon's work across disciplines. Of particular interest are the reflections on Agulhon's interactions with others in the historical profession and wider academia. Vincent Robert writes brilliantly of Agulhon as historical ethnographer, first celebrated by André Burguière in 1978 (p. 73). His influence soon transcended the world of nineteenth-century historians. Literature specialists Stéphane Michaud and José-Luis Diaz reflect on Agulhon's “vast literary culture” (p. 24), his encouragement of work on nineteenth-century feminists such as Flora Tristan and his insightful utilisations of literature as a historical resource. The distinguished ethnographer and sociologist Martine Segalen concludes that her two disciplines henceforth “must become infused with *la sensibilité agulhonienne* and analyse contemporary emotions and behaviours in the light of a deep knowledge of history” (p. 127). Anne-Marie Sohn writes very differently, but equally generously, of Agulhon's early insights into gender and women's political roles (who could forget the story of La Garde-Freinet in *The Republic in the Village* or the discussions of the ambiguities of “Marianne?”), as well as acknowledging her differences with him. A similar point is made by Dominique Kalifa about Agulhon's pioneering work in the history of representations, where once again, he was never really comfortable with many theoretical perspectives. Above all, for Kalifa, Agulhon's strength was to emphasize differences in collective mentalities, across time, space and class.

Two of Agulhon's closest colleagues, Gilles Pécout and Jean-François Chanet, to whom he left the joint responsibility of archiving his papers, offer precious insights into the culture of the institutions in which Agulhon worked. Pécout is fascinating on the École normale supérieure of the rue d'Ulm in Paris where the young Agulhon began his training as a teacher and as a PCF militant in October 1946. One of his party tasks was to target Fernand Braudel's *Méditerranée* in an anonymous review as having a pro-NATO and -US subtext (p. 111)! Agulhon came to believe that Braudel's later frostiness stemmed from discovering his authorship. As Chanet notes, despite Agulhon's departure from the PCF, he retained his close attachment to Ernest Labrousse and Madeleine Rebérioux through the Société des Études Jaurésiennes, of which he was a vice-president from 1976 to 2011.

Agulhon emerges from these essays as an indefatigable participant in professional life, almost universally liked because of his dedication, modesty and brilliance, captured generously by Raymond Huard's fine account of his resurrection of the Société de 1848 in 1975. At the same time, as Rosemonde Sanson recounts with deep esteem for the *maître*, he was directing the inter-university Centre du XIXe siècle, where he supervised 190 Master's theses between 1972 and 1986. One of those Master's students was Philippe Boutry, who recalls in delicious detail trying (and finally managing) to convince a reluctant Agulhon to supervise a thesis on the Ars religious pilgrimage, becoming “a sort of naughty duckling in the wake of a republican swan” (p. 175).

Boutry came to relish the richness of Agulhon's ethnographic appreciation of Catholic culture and that of its opponents and his profound erudition about Christianity. Nevertheless, as Jacqueline Lalouette stresses, Agulhon always insisted that he was uncomfortable with discussing ideas except in their interrelationship with lived experience.

Agulhon was closely engaged with international scholarship, especially that of Anglophone contemporaries ranging from Charles Tilly, Theodore Zeldin, Eugen Weber and above all Eric Hobsbawm to their successors John Merriman, Ted Margadant and many others. Laurent Le Gall's most engaging discussion of the "reverberations" of Agulhon's work refers only to Hobsbawm and Tilly, and then in passing. Given the international esteem of Agulhon, not only in the Anglophone world but in Spain, Italy and elsewhere, it is to be regretted that his influence and relationships outside France are so rarely referred to in this volume—despite the lovely photo on the cover of Agulhon in Canada.

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## NOTES

[1] See my appreciation: "Maurice Agulhon," in Philip Daileader and Philip Whalen eds., *French Historians 1900-2000: New Historical Writing in Twentieth-Century France* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 1-10. The volume under review has a lengthy list of French "homages" after his death. Agulhon's own reflections on his life and work are in "Vu des coulisses," in Pierre Nora ed., *Essais d'ego-histoire*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1987), 9-59.

[2] Maurice Agulhon, *Une ville ouvrière au temps du socialisme utopique: Toulon, de 1815 à 1851* (Paris and La Haye: Mouton, 1970); *La vie sociale en Provence intérieure au lendemain de la Révolution* (Paris: Société des Études Robespierristes, 1970); *La République au village: les populations du Var de la Révolution à la Seconde République* (Paris: Plon, 1970) (translated by Janet Lloyd as *The Republic in the Village: the People of the Var from the French Revolution to the Second Republic*, [Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press; Paris: Éditions de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, 1982]). An earlier book, *La sociabilité méridionale: confréries et associations dans la vie collective en Provence orientale à la fin du XVIIIe siècle* (Aix-en-Provence: La Pensée Universitaire, 1966) (republished as *Pénitents et francs-maçons de l'ancienne Provence: essai sur la sociabilité méridionale*, Paris: Fayard, 1968), was his *thèse de troisième cycle*.

[3] Maurice Agulhon, *Marianne au combat: l'imagerie et la symbolique républicaines de 1789 à 1880* (Paris: Flammarion, 1979) (translated by Janet Lloyd as *Marianne Into Battle: Republican Imagery and Symbolism in France, 1789-1880* [Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981]; Agulhon, *Marianne au pouvoir: l'imagerie et la symbolique républicaines de 1880 à 1914* (Paris: Flammarion, 1989); Agulhon, *Les métamorphoses de Marianne: l'imagerie et la symbolique républicaines de 1914 à nos jours* (Paris: Flammarion, 2001).

[4] See, among other books, the three volumes of Agulhon's *Histoire vagabonde*: vol. 1, *Ethnologie et politique dans la France contemporaine* (Paris: Gallimard, 1988); vol. 2, *Idéologies et politique dans la France du XIXe siècle* (Paris: Gallimard, 1988); vol. 3, *La politique en France, d'hier à aujourd'hui* (Paris: Gallimard, 1996).

[5] Agulhon, *Histoire vagabonde*, vol. 3, pp. 60-82. This is referred to in Pierre Lévêque's chapter in this book, pp. 51-52.

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[6] Maurice Agulhon, *1848 ou l'apprentissage de la République, 1848-1852* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1973) (translated by Janet Lloyd as *The Republican Experiment, 1848-1852* [Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press; Paris: Éditions de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, 1983]); Maurice Agulhon, Gabriel Désert, and Robert Specklin, *Apogée et crise de la civilisation paysanne, 1789-1914*, vol. 3 of *Histoire de la France rurale*, Georges Duby and Armand Wallon, eds., 4 vols., (Paris: Seuil, 1976).

[7] In English, Agulhon's work benefitted from superb translations, mostly by Janet Lloyd for Cambridge University Press.

[8] Maurice Agulhon, *La République: de Jules Ferry à François Mitterrand, 1880 à nos jours* (Paris: Hachette, 1990) (translated by Antonia Nevill as *The French Republic 1879-1992* [Oxford and Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1993]); Agulhon, *De Gaulle: histoire, symbole, mythe* (Paris: Plon, 2000).

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