
H-France Review Vol. 22 (February 2022), No. 24

Loris Chavanette, ed., *Le Directoire: Forger la République*. Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2020. 335pp. Notes and index. €25.00 (pb). ISBN 9782271124258.

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Many scholars likely retain a lingering sense of the Directory era as the dull, interim period between the Terror and the Consulate. The familiar image of see-saw politics hamstringing political progress, of a somber bourgeois character after the impassioned popular tone of earlier years, and the ultimate failure to prevent the return to authoritarian government, have contributed to the notion that the period from 1795 to 1799 is inherently less worthy of study than the periods that preceded and followed. That mode of thinking, however, is decidedly outdated, as the volume under review indicates. After the Bicentenary, interest in the Directory increased dramatically. In addition to key works by Bronislaw Baczko,^[1] Howard Brown,^[2] and Pierre Serna,^[3] to name just a few, at least four important essay collections have enriched our understanding of the period.^[4]

This new volume is certainly a worthy successor to those earlier collections, and scholars of both the Revolution and of nineteenth-century republicanism will want to take note. The product of a conference that took place in Tours in May 2016, co-organized by the Université François-Rabelais and the EHESS, with additional contributors subsequently invited to round out the offerings, the volume brings together an international group of scholars who challenge assumptions and expand our understanding of this period. Loris Chavanette's guiding hand is felt throughout, via contributors referencing his work, particularly the fêted 2017 monograph *Quatre-vingt-quinze*, as well as his own two contributions, one on the freedom of the press and the other on Carnot.^[5] For Chavanette, the purpose of the volume is to seek the meaning, the originality, and the legacy of the Directory period, of a Republic "en révolution malgré elle" (p. 11), while Alan Forrest, in his excellent historiographical introduction, points to the focus on republican authority, the search for order, and the many challenges that prevented it. Both Chavanette and Forrest have empathy for the revolutionaries of the era, Chavanette comparing them to athletes "out of breath and worn out" by repeated crises (p. 11), and Forrest describing them not as heroic but as prudent, lukewarm, and compromising. As the contributors to the volume show, their position was not an enviable one.

The book is divided into four thematic sections. Part one, "Autorité de l'État," regroups papers dealing with justice, the law, and the institutions of the Directory. Topics include popular sovereignty, freedom of the press and trial by jury, and the issue of brigandage and state violence. Part two, "La société directoriale," addresses issues of culture, religion, and sociability: history

and memory, dissent in symbolism, political and religious spaces, and morality. In part three, “Destins révolutionnaires,” three contributors enrich our knowledge of the lives of Sieyès, Babeuf, and Carnot, while a fourth paper offers an interesting contrast with a collective biography of the deputies from the Vienne department. Finally, a shorter part four groups two papers dealing with the Directory’s influence “Au-delà des frontières,” in the Cisalpine Republic and the colonies. The strength of this collection is the way the volume holds together on a number of common themes, while at the same time showcasing new research and a range of approaches.

The first two papers of part one each question the constitution of the polity and the handling of political opposition. Laurent Constantini’s study of the Commission des Onze and the limiting of sovereignty in the Constitution of Year III shows how deputies sought to prevent a recurrence of 1793 by restricting popular political life to primary voting assemblies. “Le peuple souverain” referred to voters, not the entire citizenry, and with popular clubs closed, the right to gather limited, and the opposition press curtailed, the direct voice of the people was effectively extinguished. Valérie Sottocasa’s study of brigandage also reveals how the redefinition of groups within the polity could be used strategically. The majority of those referred to as “brigands” were in fact political enemies, insurgents, and patriots. By likening them to common criminals, the government sought to deny the political dimension of popular counterrevolution. The struggle to allow political opposition in a stable Republic led, under the Consulate, to the separation of such opponents from highway robbers and their reintegration into the body social.

The final two chapters of part one each illustrate how judicial institutions thwarted legislation that was aimed at ousting the political opposition. Emmanuel Berger’s study of trial jury decisions in the Somme, Oise, and Vaucluse shows that although the proportion of political crimes decreased under the Directory, juries continued to protest what they saw as illegitimate legislation or penalties, just as they had under the Convention. Juries protected the freedoms established in 1791 and in year III by pronouncing high numbers of acquittals in political cases and forcing the government to adopt less repressive legislation. Loris Chavanette similarly reveals how the freedom of the press, officially recognized in the Constitution of year III, was, in fact, contested throughout the Directory era. In an engagingly written retelling of police actions and politicians’ directives, we learn how after the coup of Fructidor, the royalist press was muzzled, its personnel arrested and deported, and its printers’ shops vandalized. Ultimately, as in Berger’s chapter, the courts protected constitutional rights. A free and independent judiciary refused to condemn free and independent journalists, and government representatives were forced to step back their attempt to control the process.

The five papers in part two address a range of topics broadly grouped under the subheading, “culture, religion, sociabilité,” and yet each is strongly connected to the theme of the regime’s attempt to set itself on firm footing. Mette Harder’s paper on the memoirs written by ex-Conventionnels about themselves and their colleagues suggests that the strong criticism present in such works in fact undermined the Republic itself, by attacking not only the individuals but what they had represented. If the Republic had been built by criminals and scoundrels, how strong was the foundation of the current regime? This theme of vilification and labeling of one’s enemies, which was first raised in Sottocasa’s work on brigandage, is also visited in Clément Weiss’s chapter on the perception of those who frequented the Palais Royal. Weiss looks beyond the derogatory labels applied to the *jeunesse dorée* and the *muscadins* by the authorities, obsessed with what they saw as a den of thieves, prostitutes, gamblers, and all manner of counterrevolutionaries. By “spatializing” the problem, authorities implied that if the Palais Royal

could be controlled, the city would be cleansed and the Republic saved, a reassuring if naive narrative.

The final three papers in this section all consider how symbolism and ideals were used to maintain power. Christina Schröer studies the symbolism employed by the Directory government to paint a picture of stability and morality, including festivals, costumes, and imagery, and compares it to the symbolism used by oppositional groups to criticize, destabilize, and portray an imagined alternative. In Maxime Hermant's study of the town of Provins (Seine-et-Marne), the conflict between Catholic practice and civic religion is handled deftly by local police, with civic and religious authorities "cohabitating"—literally sharing the local church—when the *décadi* landed on a Sunday. Freedom of religion, in the end, led to more stability than the impulse to root out fanaticism. Finally, Jean-Charles Buttier explores the emphasis placed on a "proper civic education" in building the foundation for a political regime, with "morale républicaine" one of four main subjects after reading, writing, and arithmetic. The official manuals and catechisms were "depoliticized," he argues, in that they attempted to put forward a universal republican morality for all citizens.

The third section of the book, "Destins révolutionnaires," moves to a close examination of a handful of revolutionary actors and their legacies. The contributions of Sièyes, Babeuf, and Carnot are all well-known to revolutionary scholars, but the three scholars who focus on them here all succeed in bringing something new to the picture. Writing of Sièyes's wish to set the Republic on a stable, perennial footing, Erwan Sommerer sketches a portrait of a pragmatic, determined man who sought a "régime sans extériorité," based on immutable natural law. He is also portrayed as remarkably unchanging in his views. The origins of Sièyes's 1797 scheme to exclude ex-nobles from the nation, for example, can be found in his writings from 1788 and 1789. Loris Chavanette presents Carnot as a man with a reputation for discretion, moderation, and survival, striving for "a Republic without a revolution." In the end, he made a "rookie mistake," and Chavanette tracks his missteps and the increasing isolation that led to his ousting in the coup of Fructidor. In Laura Mason's retelling of the Conspiracy of Equals, Gracchus Babeuf is seen shrewdly projecting the image of a dedicated republican, a patriot raising the alarm about the Directory's failings to defend liberty, justice, and popular sovereignty. Yet Mason's focus is less on the man and his trial than it is on the government's exaggerated reaction. By denying legitimate criticism, she argues, they ultimately weakened the Republic. The final chapter in part three, Marjorie Alaphilippe's study of Félix Faulcon, is a pleasant counterweight to the three chapters focusing on "great men." Examining "le témoignage exceptionnel d'un député moyen," Alaphilippe shows that while Faulcon and his eight fellow deputies from the department of Vienne were far more ordinary in both their origins and their impact, they, too, were focused in small ways on the stability of the Republic.

The book's fourth and final section invites us to look beyond France proper and toward its extended sphere of influence. Francesco Dendena takes us into the world of the political elite of the Cisalpine Republic, and particularly the signing of the 1798 alliance with France that is traditionally seen as a foundational moment for collective identity, in which local republicans reacted to French oppression. Citing Annie Jourdan's work on the Batavian Republic as model to follow, Dendena shows how the resulting coup d'état in fact demonstrated the unity of the political elite, as they appropriated revolutionary values for themselves.[6] The legacy of the Republic was also debated in the realm of colonial policy. In the closing chapter, Jeremy Popkin examines a surprising pro-colonial offensive that took place in 1797, as right-wing

counterrevolutionaries who had come to the fore in the elections of year V denounced the emancipation of slaves and introduced racist language into the conversation. The debate would influence the future, with conservative views providing a foundation for Napoleon's policies in 1802, while the decision to return colonial policymaking to Paris motivated Toussaint Louverture to continue a fight that would lead to Haiti's independence a mere two years later.

As the reader moves through the chapters of this book, several themes begin to coalesce. The first is the notion of periodization, the identification of two distinct eras. The book largely confirms the traditional framework of the First Directory (from the ratification of the Constitution of Year III to the coup of 18 Fructidor) and the Second Directory (from the coup of Fructidor to the coup of Brumaire). As Chavanette writes, the coup of Fructidor is generally understood to have been both necessary—to act against the reactionaries and royalists who had infiltrated the government—and disastrous, a Pyrrhic victory that killed the constitution the government had been trying to protect and that laid the groundwork for the military dictatorship that would follow (p. 250). Chavanette's work on Carnot pivots on 18 Fructidor, and in many papers, that all-important shift in the political composition of the government represents a turning point in policy or direction. Indeed, the sense of passage from one era to another permeates the volume. Writing on civic education, for example, Buttier thinks in terms of the phases of planning, writing, and diffusing republican catechisms. Other contributions add nuance to the shift to the Second Directory, pointing to Babeuf's trial or the elections of year V rather than the coup d'état itself. In identifying phases, turning points, and sea changes, the scholars in this volume help to make sense of the period, each from the perspective of their area of research.

A second theme that emerges—and these authors are consistent at presenting it effectively—is the need of readers to put themselves in the shoes of individual actors, the protagonists of the Directory era. The third section, “Destins révolutionnaires,” focuses specifically on this idea, but it applies broadly to all the chapters. By exploring personal situations and motivations, the sheer magnitude of notions such as “comment sortir de la Terreur” (to use Bacsko's phrase), how to end the Revolution and establish a solid Republic without Revolution, is brought home. “Le Directoire n'a pas de grand homme,” writes Chavanette in the preface, and indeed, in the accounts of these historians, the stage is shared by a large cast. It is easy to identify with the plight of the secondary actors: the municipal officers of the town of Provins deciding to stay out of a thorny situation in which the clergy refused to bless a marriage tainted with divorce, or the members of a jury dismissing accusations borne of political rhetoric and vengeance. And one may well see oneself in Faulcon, the well-educated deputy from the Vienne, deeply interested in a wide range of political topics and yet failing to leave a notable trace in the period's history.

The power of having the reader identify with revolutionary actors introduces a final theme, which is the incredible task ahead for those actors: end the Revolution and create a durable stability while avoiding another Revolution, or, as the subtitle suggests, “forger la République.” We see how the Directory attempted to solve problems, and how it was frequently the unwitting author of its own undoing. The question of preserving the gains of the Revolution, as Harder, Popkin, and others suggest, is key, and by attacking the policies of the Convention, the Directory undermined the entire revolutionary heritage. The way political conflict was handled was also key. Moving forward and allowing the development of a legitimate opposition, as Mason and Schröer write, would have led to the development of a healthy democracy. Ironically, by attempting to crush dissent, such as by eradicating brigands (Sottocasa) or controlling the press

(Chavanette), the Directory condemned itself to the perennial Revolution it was attempting to avoid.

Overall, this is a successful collection of well-presented and thought-provoking essays. I will mention two minor layout errors: The page numbers are near the binding, rather than at the outside of the page, and the page header giving the current chapter title starts a few pages too early every time. In addition, readers should note that this is not a book for the nonspecialist. Many chapters assume considerable familiarity with the era, and once or twice it was helpful to have the *Longman Companion to the French Revolution* close at hand. For Anglophones, the level of French is frequently sophisticated, and while the preface and the introduction are both excellent, they primarily enhance the impact of the book, rather than provide an easily accessible background for the uninitiated. Yet, these are minor caveats, and they do not detract from what is an exciting new offering from these scholars. Citing Pierre Serna among others, Chavanette muses whether our interest does not stem in part from the comparison between the Directory and the Fifth Republic of today (p. 17). If so, the French people may well take solace from the struggles and challenges faced by the actors described in these pages, if not from the ultimate end of that first experience of a liberal republic.

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Jeremy Popkin, “L’offensive coloniale sous le Premier Directoire”

NOTES

[1] Bronislaw Baczko, *Comment sortir de la Terreur: Thermidor et la Révolution* (Paris: Gallimard, 1989).

[2] Howard G. Brown, *Ending the French Revolution: Violence, Justice, and Repression from the Terror to Napoleon* (Charlottesville, University of Virginia Press, 2006).

[3] Pierre Serna, *La République aux Girouettes: 1795-1815 et au-delà: Une anomalie politique: La France de l’extrême centre* (Seyssel, Paris : Champ Vallon, 2005).

[4] Roger Dupuy et Marcel Morabito, eds., *1795: Pour une République sans Révolution* (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 1996); Michel Vovelle, ed., *Le Tournant de l’an III: Réaction et Terreur Blanche dans la France révolutionnaire* (Paris : CTHS, 1997); Philippe Bourdin et Bernard Gainot, eds., *La République directoriale: Actes du colloque de Clermont-Ferrand (22-23 avril et 4 mai 1997)* (Paris : Société des études Robespierriennes, 1998); Jacques Bernet, Jean-Pierre Jessenne, and Hervé Leuwers, eds., *Du Directoire au Consulat: 1. Le lien politique local dans la Grande Nation* (Lille : ANRT, 1999); Howard G. Brown and Judith A. Miller, eds., *Taking Liberties: Problems of a New Order from the French Revolution to Napoleon* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002).

[5] Loris Chavanette, *Quatre-vingt-quinze: La Terreur en procès* (Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2017). See Howard Brown’s review of the book in *H-France Review*, vol. 18 (February 2018), No. 28.

[6] Annie Jourdan, *La Révolution batave: entre la France et l’Amérique (1795-1806)* (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2008), p. 298, n.16.

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ISSN 1553-9172