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Huguette Krief. *Le Métis révolutionnaire. Barbault-Royer, homme de lettres et voyageur engagé*. Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2021. 341 pp. €38.00. (pb). ISBN 978-2-406-11337-9.

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Huguette Krief's "intellectual biography" of Pierre-François Barbault-Royer reflects current interest in the role of France's colonies and their non-white populations during the French Revolution. Barbault-Royer, born in 1767 to a white French father and a South Asian mother and raised for the first eleven years of his life in the Île de France (today's Mauritius), one of the French outposts in the Indian Ocean, was an author and minor political figure during the revolutionary era. He is best known for *Voyage dans les départements du Nord, de la Lys, de l'Escaut, etc., pendant les années VII et VIII*, an account of his travels in northern France and Belgium at the end of that tumultuous decade. Krief's study adds to our knowledge about the ways in which individuals classified as "colored" in the terminology of the time participated in the events of the revolutionary era; it also shows that no simple formula explains how these individuals reacted to their situation.

Barbault-Royer's parents brought him to France at the age of 11, and he received a thorough education in Paris, learning Latin and Greek and becoming familiar with classical literature and history. He enthusiastically embraced the ideals of the French Revolution, and the National Assembly's decree of 28 September 1791 that people of all races living in European France were to enjoy equal rights seemed to assure his status as a citizen, although documents as late as 1794 identified him as an "Indien" because of his mother's origin. In 1791 he published a novel, *Craon et les trois opprimés*, in which fictional characters from Russia, Persia and Africa denounced tyranny and expressed the hope that revolutionary France would help bring freedom to their countries. In his story, which was reprinted several times during the revolutionary years, Barbault-Royer depicted a powerful African kingdom unifying the Black population to expel European slave traders.

By early 1793, Barbault-Royer's political commitments had earned him appointment to a minor post in the navy ministry, dealing with correspondence from France's Caribbean colonies. Thanks to Julien Raimond, an influential representative of Saint-Domingue's mixed-race elite, Barbault-Royer was selected to accompany François-Thomas Galbaud, the general appointed as governor of Saint-Domingue in 1793; the fact that Barbault-Royer was a "man of color" but not of African ancestry may have made him a safe choice for a mission to a territory wracked at that moment by violent racial conflicts. When Galbaud's clumsy conduct provoked the crisis of June 1793 that drove the French civil commissioners Léger-Félicité Sonthonax and Etienne Polverel

to decree the emancipation of the enslaved population in Saint-Domingue, Barbault-Royer returned to France. He avoided the disgrace that descended on Galbaud and established himself as an active member of the radical revolutionary committee in the port city of Rochefort, where he wrote pamphlets denouncing France's foreign enemies and supported the de-Christianization campaign. If he expressed any opinion about the National Convention's epochal decree of 16 pluviôse Year II (4 February 1794) abolishing slavery, Krief does not mention it.

Despite his involvement in radical politics during the Year II, Barbault-Royer successfully navigated the turbulent Thermidorian period. He was sent back to Saint-Domingue as secretary to Julien Raimond, a member of the Third Civil Commission dispatched to the colony in early 1796. During his time there, Barbault-Royer attached himself to the cause of the mixed-race generals Jean-Louis Villatte and André Rigaud, who were contesting the authority of both the white governor Etienne Laveaux and the Black general Toussaint Louverture, with whom Laveaux had allied himself. Krief does not speculate about whether this *prise de position* reflected Barbault-Royer's identification with men who shared his status as individuals with French educations and mixed racial ancestry. By mid-1797, Toussaint Louverture's growing influence and a public clash with Sonthonax, the dominant figure on the commission, led Barbault-Royer to return to France. After the republican coup d'état of 18 fructidor Year V (4 September 1797), he became a regular contributor to the press, denouncing the British and supporting the Second Directory's measures against the Catholic Church. Krief singles out an article from October 1797 in which he anticipated present-day debates by asserting that Africans had created the culture of ancient Egypt, which had inspired the Greeks and Romans.

By this time, Barbault-Royer had lost his enthusiasm for the radical Jacobin ideas he had espoused during the Terror. Napoleon's coup of 18 Brumaire took place while he was conducting his survey of conditions in northern France and Belgium, and he endorsed the new regime as a necessary corrective to the excesses of the revolutionary years. By 1802, when Napoleon reintroduced slavery in the colonies and reestablished the Catholic Church as France's public religion, Barbault-Royer seems to have soured on the new ruler. He published a revised edition of some of his earlier works in that year and then in 1803 one last denunciation of the English. After that, he disappears so completely from the historical record that Krief says nothing about the remaining 28 years of his life; in 1831 he died in Paris.

As a specialist of French literature, Krief describes Barbault-Royer's literary publications in detail, although she makes no claims for their quality or originality. Barbault-Royer had clearly absorbed the identification with classical antiquity and the Enlightenment critique of religion that characterized pre-revolutionary French culture; if he changed his ideas after 1803, when romanticism became dominant, he left no traces of this evolution. The extent to which Barbault-Royer's racial ancestry shaped his thinking is hard to tell. Krief's list of sources does not include documents from the Archives nationales concerning his two missions to Saint-Domingue, which might shed more light on his involvement in the island's conflicts. Neither does she engage with the extensive English-language scholarship on the questions her story raises: her bibliography does not include Julia V. Douthwaite's study of French fiction during the revolutionary era, Sue Peabody's fundamental book on race policies during the Old Regime, or this reviewer's detailed account of Galbaud's mission.^[1] Nevertheless, Krief deserves credit for bringing this forgotten figure to light. An appendix to her book includes a number of excerpts from his writing, including his article of October 1797 defending Black peoples' contributions to civilization.

NOTE

[1] Julia V. Douthwaite, *The Frankenstein of 1790 and Other Lost Chapters from Revolutionary France* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012); Sue Peabody, *“There Are No Slaves in France”: The Political Culture of Race and Slavery in the Ancien Régime* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); Jeremy D. Popkin, *You Are All Free: The Haitian Revolution and the Abolition of Slavery* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

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