

H-France Review Vol. 3 (December 2003), No. 144

Peter Jones, *Liberty and Locality in Revolutionary France: Six Villages Compared, 1760-1820*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003. xiv + 306 pp. Plates, figures, maps, notes, bibliography, and index. \$65.00 U.S. (cl); £45.00 (cl). ISBN 0-521-821777-0.

Review by Gail Bossenga, University of Kansas.

For the historian, the study of semi-literate populations on the margins of society is always a difficult task, even more so when these populations live in localities with their own idiosyncratic traditions and institutions. How then, it may be asked, is it possible to draw conclusions about the effect of an upheaval as sweeping as the French Revolution on a group as fundamental as the peasantry, whose membership was socio-economically and geographically so diverse? For Peter Jones, the best answer to this vexing problem is to practice comparative history, whose methodology allows commonalities to emerge while simultaneously drawing attention to differences. Rather than doing one intensive micro-study or a broad synthetic work, Jones examines the experience of six villages from the fall of the old regime, through the Revolution, and up to the Restoration. The result is a well researched book that offers specialists in French history a good look at how varying groups of peasants responded to the events and structural changes of the Revolution. In some cases, the Revolution did alter local practices irretrievably, but in other cases, aspects of peasant life proved to be extremely durable.

Jones chose his villages to encompass a wide range of ecological and regional settings. The Lorraine village of Neuville, and its associated hamlet of Roville, practiced an open field system dependent on collective farming practices. Near to Versailles, Villepreux was dominated by big tenant farmers who produced grain for urban markets and was dissected by a large, walled game park designed for the king's hunting pleasure. The Breton village of Châtelaudren was non-agricultural, populated by shopkeepers, artisans, and a bourgeoisie that lived off business brought into the active seigneurial court. Allan, a village geographically inside Dauphiné but legally entitled to the tax privileges of Provence, combined subsistence cereal production with cash crops from silk worms and viticulture. Saint-Alban, a Languedocian village in the mountainous hinterlands, had a pastoral economy and declining protoindustrial wool industry. Rocquelaure, located west of Toulouse, was characterized by sharecropping.

Given this geographical diversity, as well as the changing institutional landscape instigated by the successive shock waves of the Revolution, Jones should be congratulated, first of all, simply for successfully navigating so many archives and libraries--twenty of them--including national, departmental, communal, and private collections. Inevitably, and unfortunately, not all comparable documents existed in all villages, which sometimes precluded the rigorous comparisons that Jones sought. Enough did survive, however, to allow Jones to trace significant battles and trends in each village. The most important problems under discussion included the evolving relationship of the central government to localities, patterns of land use and ownership including seigneurialism, the composition of local elites, and the nature of collective identity.

As Jones's analysis shows, the vast majority of peasants in these studies either did not own land or owned minuscule amounts and eked out a precarious existence. In Villepreux, 72 percent owned no land; in Roquelaure approximately half of the population were sharecroppers and servants; in Allan 96 percent of the peasants had income from land under 100 *livres*; in Saint-Alban most households owned at most "a pocket handkerchief of arable"; and in Châtelaudren in 1797 only seven of 212 households lived from farming. In Neuville, 79 percent of the peasants held land, but only two were wealthy enough to maintain a plough team. Nonetheless, the effects of landlessness and poverty varied in relation to the ecology of the region and other kinds of institutional networks. Access to communal pastures, such as existed in the mountainous region of Saint-Alban or the highly organized collective farming in Neuville, could allow the poor to survive. Protoindustrial activities could also take up some slack. In artisanal and mercantile Châtelaudren, income from the land was less crucial to survival. The one village that stands out is Villepreux, where a more modern social structure had evolved. There, capitalist agricultural practices, the lack of communal rights, and large tenant farms created a highly polarized situation between a few wealthy *gros fermiers* and a huge number of day laborers. Situated near Paris, and hence open to the radicalizing influence of Parisian politics, Villepreux was also the village that displayed the most radical patterns of voting and agricultural policies during the Revolution. In 1790 the tax burden of municipal officers averaged 196 *livres*, but by 1793 it had declined to a mere 31 *livres*.

The importance of seigneurialism loomed larger than Jones had expected, and its effects were also varied. In Villepreux it took the form of the king's huge hunting park and restrictions on poaching. Unsurprisingly, the village's *cahier des doléances* complained vehemently about the problems produced by game, and the first act of revolution was a massive hunt staged by peasants in the region. The seigneurs of Neuville and Allan owned half of the land in those villages, and in both villages anti-seigneurialism was a dynamic that propelled village politics in the Revolution. In Neuville, the seigneur had seized his third of the commons through *triage* and reorganized village landholdings into consolidated strips. During the Revolution, a major goal was to repudiate the earlier policy of *triage*, an attempt that was successful in Neuville's associated hamlet of Rville, but whose outcome was not clear in Neuville itself. Nonetheless, Jones also observes that seigneurialism only worked in the old regime because a small group of peasants and resident bourgeois provided the clerks, collectors, and so forth, necessary to keep the system going. In Châtelaudren, many in the village lived off the "pickings" produced through the seigneurial court located there, while in Roquelaure, it was common for *sindics* and *consuls* in the village government to be dues collectors or farmers of the tithe. Exceedingly heavy (12.5%), the tithe in Roquelaure was among the major grievance of its villagers.

Jones argues, in contrast to Alexis de Tocqueville's thesis of centralization, that the corporate underpinnings of village life were rather strong. Even in northern France, where village assemblies were infrequent, the discipline of communal agriculture and the institutions of church and parish could provide a degree of communal identity. Besides, village assemblies helped the work of the central government, as tax collection and labor services (*corvée*) were often the primary matters of business.

Because most peasants were so poor, it was common in all six cases that only a small elite of villagers had the skills and wealth necessary to serve as village leaders. According to Jones, except in the case of Villepreux, this same basic group of leaders persisted throughout the political vicissitudes of the Revolution. At the national level, governments of different political persuasions over time had little choice but to work with these leaders, as there were few, if any, alternatives. Thus, there were certain socio-economic parameters of village life that limited political innovation and proved virtually impossible to budge. Village leaders who had been involved in seigneurialism proved adept at shedding their association with this institution and embracing a new kind of politics. Sometimes, experience in seigneurial jurisdictions had given local men training in skills that were later turned to other purposes.

After examining village politics, various successful and unsuccessful attempts to redistribute land, the course of local festivals, and the situation of the church, Jones argues that the Revolution did make a difference. The drafting of *cahiers des doléances*, voting for communal governments, creation of local militias, and participation in festivals did give at least some villagers a stronger sense of their worth within the state. In fact, a central goal of Napoleon was to tame the politicization that the Revolution had unleashed. Surplus extraction through seigneurial dues and the tithe was reduced, although it was often the large landowners, not the poor, that benefited most. Only in Villepreux and the Lorraine estate of Neuville and Roville did seigneurial property come onto the market, and then it was outside bourgeois who had the means to acquire this property. Villages such as Roville and Saint-Alban that retained common lands, however, were able to hold on to collective institutions such as the common flock. Of all the players, the national government was the biggest winner. The tax burden was made fairer, but the amount placed on localities increased. Villagers enjoyed more freedom of religious choice, but the state increased its control over the Catholic church. "Bureaucratization" began in the old regime and was enhanced by the Revolution. Although bureaucracy usually has negative connotations, Jones points out that the impersonality and uniformity of bureaucratic rule of law was a great advance over the arbitrary, closed, personalized nature of decision-making in the old regime. At the same time, it removed some of the villagers' ability to invoke custom as a norm.

Jones's discussion of political policies and the role of local elites during the Revolution itself was, for me, the least satisfying part of this book. Since Jones discussed the evolution of elites over the course of the whole Revolution in an earlier chapter, I found it difficult to match up village leaders in different stages of the Revolution with actual policies that were being pursued. Jones's argument that the same set of elites maintained themselves throughout the Revolution (except in Villepreux) was hard to square with his later references to "village Jacobinism," which seemed particularly important in Neuville and Roville. What is meant by the term "peasant Jacobinism," and who were these Jacobins? No reference to "Jacobinism" could be found in the index, only "Jacobin Clubs," which was not the same thing. In a similar vein, Jones observes that the strong presence of federalism at the village level (appearing here in Breton Châtelaudren and Gascon Roquelaure) has been ignored by historians. Yet I got little sense of what federalism meant at the village level, or why it appealed to villagers. Federalism in Roquelaure, Jones argued, reflected the politics of Auch, but his brief discussion of events in Auch left me unenlightened.

Some of the problem, of course, may be attributed to the sources, or lack of sources, available to the historian. At one point, Jones notes briefly that the battle in Neuville and Roville to recover the commons forfeited to *triage* in 1771, as well as vestiges of the fight over the tithe in Rocquelaure, may have opened the door to village Jacobinism, but that this cannot be verified. Yet, inadequate sources do not completely explain the problems that readers may encounter in this book. The organization of the book could have been clearer. Given the complexity of following six villages plus associated hamlets over forty years, I would have preferred more narrative threads to tell the story of a single village over greater stretches of time, so that I could remember the idiosyncratic constellation of factors at work conditioning each case. I found myself having to go back and forth among different chapters too often in order to get a coherent sense of how each village functioned over the long run.

Another difficulty is that Jones refers to critical terms without clearly defining them. What, exactly, is the difference between *vaine pâture* and *droit de parcours*? Or "centralization" as opposed to "bureaucratization?" Individuals and situations appear without proper introduction. On page 198, for example, Jones observes that the largest landowner in Roville during the Revolution was Antoine Bertier. He was a "staunch revolutionary, indeed a republican by natural inclination," but since he wanted to maintain the policy of enclosure, the village community combated his schemes through a "neo-Jacobin" stance. That is all we learn. Where did this Bertier come from, and what is the difference between "republicanism" and "neo-Jacobinism" in terms of village politics? Only fifty pages later, almost at the end of the book, do we learn that the seigneurial estates of Neuville, including Roville,

had been seized and sold by the government during the Revolution, and that Berthier acquired the ex-seigneur's holdings in Roville. His farm became one of the great sites of agricultural innovation in the nineteenth century. Finally, I still wonder why the editors at Cambridge University Press allow authors to use French quotations without translation at critical interpretive points in an English book. What if anglophone historians of German or Latin American peasants want to use this book for their comparative work?

Jones's book, then, for me was both fascinating, brimming with interesting observations and data, and frustrating, talking about events and changing institutional networks without always providing a sense of the groups and interests underlying them. Did he succeed in his goal of doing comparative history? That depends on the definition of comparative history. If the goal of comparative history is to test explanatory hypotheses by gathering evidence in such a way as to identify causal relationships, as William H. Sewell, Jr. has suggested in his essay on Marc Bloch's comparative method, I would say Jones does not fulfill the goal.^[1] There were just too many variables in operation to isolate what critical causal factors were at work, and Jones rarely lays out explicit hypotheses to test. If the goal of comparative history is more general, to allow us to witness the diversity of possible arrangements and responses to various situations in a period, then I would say that he was successful. In the end, a great deal can be learned from this ambitious book by the leading English historian of the French peasantry in the old regime and the Revolution. But patience is required.

NOTES

[1] William H. Sewell, Jr., "Marc Bloch and the Logic of Comparative History," *History and Theory* 6 (1967), pp. 208-217. Marc Bloch's essay "Pour une histoire comparée des sociétés européennes" first appeared in *Revue de synthèse* 46 (1925): 15-50. An English translation can be found in Frederic C. Land and Jelle C. Riemersma, eds., *Enterprise and Secular Change* (Homewood, Ill., 1953): 494-521.

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