

Timothy Tackett, *The Glory and the Sorrow: A Parisian and His World in the Age of the French Revolution*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021. 360 pp. Appendix, notes, bibliography, and index. \$24.95 U.S. (cl.). 9780197557389. \$9.99 U.S. (eb). 9780197557402.

Review by Jeff Horn, Manhattan College

Tim Tackett has written a “little book” in the very best sense of the term.[1] His newest work is a deep dive into the life of Adrien-Joseph Colson, primarily through his extended correspondence with his best friend Roch Lemaigre, a rich source that he has drawn on extensively in previous “big” books, most notably 2015’s *The Coming of the Terror in the French Revolution*.<sup>[2]</sup> But Tackett does more than flesh out Colson’s correspondence, he extends the analysis to his neighbors and the social, economic, and political milieu of central Paris in which he lived for decades. In *The Glory and the Sorrow*, Tackett has painted a detailed portrait of how a small-time, single lawyer from a small, frontier town lived quietly in Paris until the shocks of 1789 transformed his world. It is my happy task in this forum to consider the ways that Tackett depicts how and why participants in the Revolution changed political course between 1789 and the summer of 1793 when the narrative halts because of notable shifts in the tone, content, and volume of Colson’s correspondence.

*The Glory and the Sorrow* is a natural outgrowth of some of Tackett’s earlier work on politics, particularly *Becoming a Revolutionary* (1996), a kind of collective biography where he depicted the political transformation of the deputies of the National Assembly based on 129 “principal witnesses” (p. 9).<sup>[3]</sup> His new book shifts the focus to an individual’s relationship with his neighbors, his best friend, and his employers to produce an intimate depiction of many of the same processes and turning points that Tackett has emphasized along the way. Although *The Glory and the Sorrow* deliberately does not engage directly with historiography, by implication and example, it makes a number of important arguments about the causes and consequences of Revolutionary political transformation.

Tackett minimizes the role and impact of political ideology in favor of communal feeling and solidarity experienced in the press of events. Among other things, *The Glory and the Sorrow* is a case-study for rejecting the revisionist argument made most notably by François Furet and Keith Baker that Revolutionary violence was not primarily a response to circumstances, especially the war. Rather they argue that it was “patterned” on the language found in certain discourses that emerged out of the Enlightenment. Tackett makes it clear that Colson was not directly influenced by the writers of the Enlightenment until the loosening of the censorship enabled the publication of “a great flood of brochures” in 1788-89 (pp. 164-5). The Pre-Revolutionary period depicted so effectively by Jean Égret in 1962 witnessed a “remarkable growth of political consciousness and commitment, a veritable ‘politicization’ of Colson and his neighbors” (p. 65) that Tackett sees as a turning point (p. 77).<sup>[4]</sup> He emphasizes, however, that for this group, politicization did not turn into action until 1789. The pressure of events like the massacre at the Champ de Mars, the King’s

flight, and the war, among other key moments played a determinative role in changing the outlook and actions of this village-like community situated at the heart of the city.

Already in 1789, fear of counterrevolutionary plots and the views of his neighbors, especially as articulated in the sections and his national guard unit, pushed Colson to accept violence against those who had transgressed against appropriate social behavior (pp. 90, 92). By the summer of 1793, Colson had become a full-fledged radical (pp. 124-126; 139-40). Through the lens of this elderly lawyer, Tackett provides yet another powerful counterexample to those who put ideology at the center of the emergence of Revolutionary politics.[5]

*The Glory and the Sorrow* also shows that being a “radical” did not mean agreeing with all Revolutionary actions. In some ways, Colson, in Tackett’s account, was a rather moderate “radical” breaking with most of his section over the September Massacres and the death of Citizen Capet (pp. 139, 141). There were almost always limits on what Colson was prepared to do, even when swept up in patriotic fervor.

Tackett has always been deeply involved in considering the role of religion in the French Revolution. He chronicles the importance of religious observance in Colson’s life and how he reacted to the Civil Constitution, the appropriation and sale of Church lands, and the counterrevolutionary activities of many refractory clergy. Colson’s acceptance of religious reform was clearly tied to patriotism and his faith in the ideals and accomplishments of 1789 as embodied by the constitution (pp. 127-30). Tackett also illustrates the bounds of Colson’s willingness to forgo Roman Catholic ritual (pp. 159-60) concluding, in one of this book’s rare forays into the period after the summer of 1793, that “the severe repression of all popular Christian devotion...may have been an additional factor alienating Parisians toward a regime that supported such dechristianization” (p. 168). Tackett’s masterful demonstration that even an ardent revolutionary and patriot who was willing to embrace most facets of the Revolution’s encounter with Roman Catholicism had limits, might well have shaped political attitudes *after* the Year II as well.

Colson’s correspondence enables us to see, and, in some ways, feel the uncertainties of the Revolutionary era. The secrecy surrounding events (p. 69), the difficulty of getting reliable information necessitating heavy reliance on the neighborhood rumor mill (p. 79) amidst the development of a new, somewhat undefined, and changeable political vocabulary (pp. 74-82) are highlighted effectively by biography in ways that more synthetic accounts cannot. Tackett also details the twists and turns of this community’s views of the King and royal power to underscore the uncertainties and opportunities of the Revolutionary moment.

As Marisa Linton discusses in depth in this forum, emotions were an important part of Tackett’s depiction of Colson and his neighbors. I want to emphasize the political importance of the various fears and anxieties that shaped the Lombards section of Paris. From the first, genuine threat of an aristocratic plot in late June-early July 1789 (p. 86), Tackett uses Colson’s gossip with Lemaigre to take his readers through the waves of fear and panic that engulfed central Paris (p. 114). Colson was motivated neither by class consciousness nor by ideology. Nor was he reacting to real political problems or the ups and downs of the military struggle. In Tackett’s account, what drove this lawyer was fear: fear of “aristocrats” seeking revenge (pp. 117-118), foreign plots (p. 124) or some

other form of conspiracy that were based on the ability of elites to manipulate events by taking advantage of the gullibility of the poor, both women and men (p. 143). The actions of the Parisian popular classes during the French Revolution make much more sense if we take Colson's view that "conspiracy was everywhere" seriously (p. 145). By bringing these concerns to life, Tackett has ensured that these facets of political culture remain at the heart of how historians understand the impact of the Revolutionary moment (pp. 85, 92, 121-122, 131-137, 141).

I would like to conclude with a few comments about the way that *The Glory and the Sorrow* reflects Tim Tackett's broader intellectual trajectory. Although there is a vital and convincing evidentiary reason why the narrative basically concludes in the summer of 1793 (pp. 150-1), that stopping point is also a perfect reflection of Tackett's deep and abiding interest in the "becoming" aspect of Revolutionary politics, as the title of the original session at the French Historical Studies meeting and this forum evokes. *Becoming a Revolutionary* and *The Coming of the Terror* along with Tackett's other wonderful monographs *When the King Took Flight* (2003), *Religion, Revolution, and Regional Culture in Eighteenth-Century France: The Ecclesiastical Oath of 1791* (1986), as well as *Priest & Parish in Eighteenth-Century France* (1977) all focus on the early phases of the Revolution, especially the heady, hopeful transformations that occurred between 1789 and 1792.[6] As Tackett notes, "the enthusiasm of Colson and his neighbors never diminished for the spectacular achievements of the early Revolution" (p. 96). We might say the same for Tim Tackett.

Neither the mechanics of the Revolutionary terror nor the see-saw politics of the Directory have received much attention in Tackett's voluminous and impressive oeuvre. As we consider the political transformations and their motivations illuminated so effectively in *The Glory and the Sorrow*, Tackett's readers should not forget that there was a great deal more of both emotions to come. Colson and his eyewitness account faltered in mid-1793 but the Revolution continued. Our understandings of the political processes at work in this superb book cannot and should not be confined to the early stages of the Revolution. For example, the growing lack of tolerance for rural violence Colson expressed in the aftermath of the Great Fear (p. 95) and his defense of Roman Catholic practice in 1793 (pp. 159-160) might be traced profitably across the era of the Terror through the Directory and into the Consulate.[7] In *The Glory and the Sorrow*, Tackett's lively depiction of the initial years of the Revolution challenges us all to match the vivacity and rigor of his analysis and apply them to the entire Revolutionary era.

## NOTES

[1] I would like to express my deep thanks to Bob Blackman for organizing the original panel at the 2022 Society for French Historical Studies meeting in Charlotte and for editing this forum, to my eminent fellow panelists, and to the audience for their stimulating comments and questions. But most importantly, I would like to express my appreciation to Tim Tackett for all he has done for the profession and for me personally. Across the thirty years I've known him, he has always been there to answer a question or provide encouragement. Thanks Tim.

[2] Timothy Tackett, *The Coming of the Terror in the French Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015).

[3] Timothy Tackett, *Becoming a Revolutionary: The Deputies of the French National Assembly and the Emergence of a Revolutionary Culture (1789-1790)* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996).

[4] Jean Egret, *The French Pre-Revolution, 1787-88*, trans. Wesley D. Camp (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978 [1962]).

[5] François Furet, *Interpreting the French Revolution*, trans. Elborg Forster (London: Cambridge University Press and Paris: Éditions de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, 1981 [1978]) and Keith Baker, *Inventing the French Revolution: Essays on French Political Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990). At the Charlotte conference, I queried Tackett about why he was not more explicit about his historiographical interventions to make them more accessible to readers who were not fully engaged in these debates. He responded that the people whom he wanted to get his point, did so, and that, at this stage of his career (and of this debate!), he preferred to participate in historiographical discussions by implication.

[6] Timothy Tackett, *When the King Took Flight* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), *Religion, Revolution, and Regional Culture in Eighteenth-Century France: The Ecclesiastical Oath of 1791* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986), and *Priest & Parish in Eighteenth-Century France* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977).

[7] For my reasoning as to why the term “Terror” still has resonance, see my *The Making of a Terrorist: Alexandre Rousselin and the French Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), 189-190.

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