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**Michel Pertué, Ed.** *Suffrage, citoyenneté et révolutions 1789-1848. Collections études révolutionnaires*, no. 3. Paris: Société des études robespierristes, 2002. 180 pp. Notes, figures, and index of proper names. 25.00 € (pb). ISBN 2-908327-46-5.

Review by Denise Z. Davidson, Georgia State University.

This book about voting contains no statistics. Its focus lies not in the results of elections or levels of participation, but rather in electoral procedures. A collection of essays presented in chronological order, the book traces the evolution of these procedures from the upheavals of 1789 until the Revolution of 1848, when universal male suffrage came to France to stay. Aimed at an audience of specialists, each essay presents illuminating details about how voting took place during a relatively narrow time span. Together, the essays make a strong case for the importance of this period in laying the procedural groundwork for the modern electoral system. As one type of regime quickly succeeded another, each experimenting with new suffrage rules along the way, a strong electoral culture emerged, even though electoral results had little real impact during the Napoleonic period and despite the fact that most of the population was denied the vote from 1815 to 1848.

The material was first presented at a conference held at the Lycée Henri IV on 10 March 2001. Published remarkably quickly, the book (in both form and content) seems rather hastily put together. It is more a record of a day's discussions among scholars in frequent contact with each other than a polished collection of essays. With the exception of the concluding chapter, which does a good job of drawing connections between the various *contributions*, the essays do not speak directly to each other, and each takes a different approach that makes it difficult to see how they add up to something larger. The essays vary in length from ten pages to twenty-six pages, and their formats differ extensively: some use subheadings, while others do not; some include appendices of primary documents, while others do not. Even the footnote formats vary from one essay to the next. In one case, the notes are filled with unexplained abbreviations that would puzzle any but the most knowledgeable specialists in the field. Despite the unpolished nature of the publication, the book serves as a valuable record of a group of top scholars meeting to share their findings. The essays, which come out of much larger projects (cited in the notes to this review), are based on deep archival research. Together they present a statement of current trends in this important area of political history.

Many of the changes in procedure mapped here would have long-term significance for the emergence of "modern" democratic systems. One central transition was the shift from communal voting, in which assemblies deliberated on particular issues, to individual voting and elections held purely to select representatives who would in turn participate in such debates. Serge Aberdam's essay analyzes the situation in 1793 when, despite the fact that deliberative assemblies were "parfaitement illégales en 1790-1792" (p. 10), assemblies of citizens continued to meet, discuss issues, and draft *vœux*, practices reminiscent of the creation of *cahiers de doléances* in 1789 and of older traditions as well (p. 26).<sup>[1]</sup> While such procedures differed markedly from what we think of today as voting, in many ways this was a more direct form of participation in government than the modern representative system. Aberdam insists on

the importance of these assemblies (which he argues are not just archaisms as some scholars' work would suggest) in orchestrating equality.[2] Unlike the assemblies that met to draft the *cahiers* in 1789, they were no longer organized along the lines of *états* or *rangs* (pp. 12-13). However, with the successful implementation of individual voting in 1799, people could no longer debate the text to which they would be granting approval, and fraud became widespread. From this, Aberdam concludes: "Le moment de la suppression du vote en assemblée de citoyens et de la généralisation du vote individuel correspondent donc à une forte diminution de la liberté de vote, et non l'inverse" (p. 29). Voting by assembly allowed people to have greater influence over the decision-making process and also made fraud less likely than in the more "modern" system of individuals voting for particular candidates or responding yes or no to a referendum whose text was determined by the central authorities.

These essays make clear that voting procedures mattered, even if election outcomes had little real political effect as succeeding regimes limited their impact. In an essay on the Directory, Bernard Gainot found "une véritable mobilisation annuelle des citoyens ayant droit de vote" (p. 33), as the regime regularized the electoral calendar.[3] During the early years of the Revolution, the timing of elections varied, but the Directory held them annually in the spring, thus laying, he argues, the seeds of modern election campaigns. Gainot also reflects on the fact that the choice of season may help to explain the high abstention rates of the Directory: not only were agricultural laborers returning to the fields, but bad weather sometimes kept them from voting (p. 34). Much of Gainot's essay treats the festival atmosphere of elections, with extensive quotations from primary documents instructing local administrators on how to organize them.

Elections continued to evolve under the Consulate and Empire which, according to Philippe Tanchoux, brought "la séparation définitive entre les fonctions d'élection et de délibération: le peuple n'a en aucun cas compétence pour participer activement et de manière continue à la conduite des affaires..." (p. 49).[4] Scholars have long held that Napoleonic elections were of little significance because it was the central government that selected representatives from lists of potential candidates created locally. However, the transformation in how voting took place created a basis on which to build new electoral systems. The tradition of assembling to discuss issues and to draft locally produced legislative proposals faded away and was replaced by new traditions involving individualized voting. Limiting the ability of voters to gather in large groups, which was part of the Napoleonic fixation with order, such transformations in electoral procedures can tell us a great deal about the transition to modern democratic systems.[5]

But procedures cannot tell us everything about how voting actually happened. The first three essays rely in large part on government documents about how elections were supposed to function. We see very little about how elections actually took place. Details on who held the urn, how people got their voting cards, and more on the culture of elections would have been helpful. An example of the kind of analysis I have in mind appears in Margaret Lavinia Anderson's recent book on voting in late nineteenth-century Germany. Anderson uses the actual practices of voting, and forms of disobeying the prescribed procedures, to develop an argument about an emerging democratic political culture.[6] We see the beginnings of that type of analysis here when, for example, Philippe Tanchoux describes the electoral procedures defined by the constitution of the Year VIII (1799). Voting was to take place at the home of the person overseeing the election over a period of fifteen days. Once a voter's identity was verified and inscribed on the register, he was to write a list of names on his voting card that was to be deposited in the urn. Five days after the election period ended, a list was to be created showing the names mentioned and the numbers of votes for each (p. 50). Tanchoux's discussion of these procedures is based on directions given for holding elections; while these are instructive in themselves, they do not allow us to know whether they were followed in practice.

Practices enter the story more fully in Malcolm Crook's essay on voting during the Bourbon Restoration where he makes use of police records to discuss actual events.[7] Despite the small number

of eligible voters during this period, Crook argues that elections concerned more people than just those who had the right to vote: “les élections mobilisent beaucoup de Français ... et construisent ainsi une culture électorale assez riche” (pp. 75-76). Beginning in 1817, various kinds of assemblies and processions took place on election days. At these gatherings “les classes populaires et aussi les femmes ... participent au moment électoral, acte public et collectif” (p. 86). In addition to allowing more than just voters to participate in collective political experiences, voting during the Restoration contributed to an emerging electoral culture. Crook concludes that “malgré sa mauvaise réputation politique, la Restauration représente une étape importante dans l'apprentissage électoral... [L]es élections directes, fréquentes et assez libres de la période 1814 à 1830, aident les Français à apprendre à voter” (p. 87). By looking beyond who voted for whom, the essays in this collection demonstrate that these regimes' electoral systems had long-term significance in preparing the ground for later, more inclusive, systems.

The last two essays in the collection are less connected than the first four, though both are valuable in themselves. Anne Verjus examines the rather surprising choice on the part of liberals during the Restoration and July Monarchy to support a familial conception of voting rights despite their theoretical allegiance to the individual.[8] To be eligible to vote during the Restoration, a man had to pay 300 francs in taxes, a sum that dropped to 200 francs in 1831. Under both regimes, a man could ask his family members (his wife and her parents, his parents, and his sons) to assign the taxes they paid to count as part of his overall tax payment and thus permit him to attain the minimum required to vote. This “political family” existed purely for voting purposes, and had no effect on transmission of property or other civil concerns. It made one man the political designee of the entire group, a system heretofore rarely acknowledged. An interesting twist in the electoral law also allowed a widow to designate a son, and later even a son-in-law, to use her tax payments to allow him to vote, thus giving women an indirect role in the electoral process. Throughout, liberals supported this familial conception of suffrage because they saw it as a way to enlarge the electorate, even if it contradicted the liberal emphasis on the individual.

Finally, Michel Offerlé's essay on the iconography of voting includes over fifty images that date from the late 1840s to the present, extending well beyond the chronological boundaries of the collection.[9] One important point made is that before 1848, one finds virtually no images of voting or voters, but suddenly, beginning in 1848, such images became commonplace. Though he does not attempt to explain the lack of iconographic attention to voting prior to 1848, Offerlé argues that the post-1848 images helped to ensure that “l'acte de voter ... sera naturalisé et neutralisé...” (p. 102). The images are a wonderful addition to this collection, even if many date from the later nineteenth and twentieth centuries. They are of interest in themselves, and touch on themes related to voter manipulation, the peasantry's entry into politics, and feminism. Unfortunately, not all the images reproduced well, again giving an unpolished feel to the book.

In his concluding remarks, Raymond Huard helps to make clear the contributions made by each essay and also connects them to earlier scholarship.[10] The collection does not have an introduction, only a brief (barely more than a page) “avant propos” by Michel Pertué. Thus Huard's piece serves a useful function by finding links and drawing larger conclusions than those made in the specific essays. Among these larger themes is how examination of the vote as political practice allows us to see progression in this period of political chaos as “chaque régime ou presque apporte sa contribution” (p. 173). Huard's summation does a good job of explaining the significance of each essay, something not all the authors were equally successful at accomplishing themselves. Some of the essays seemed a bit too self-referential, explained perhaps by the authors' collaboration in a research group working on elections. The first three authors each cite themselves and each other extensively, and in some cases too many long quotations with little distillation or analysis made it difficult to grasp the main point. Another insight made by Huard is that the collection contributes not only to “l'histoire pratique du suffrage, mais elle fait aussi partie de son histoire intellectuelle” (p. 173). The essays help us to see how voting was conceived, and these early conceptions of the meaning of suffrage are vital to our understanding of the

history of democratic political culture. As recent political developments in the United States demonstrate, it is often not whom voters select that matters as much as the rules of the game. The rules varied widely during the period examined in this collection, and they in turn contributed in various ways to longstanding conceptions of the significance of elections.

## LIST OF ESSAYS

- Michel Pertué, “Avant-propos”
- Serge Aberdam, “Délibérations en assemblées de citoyens et portions de souveraineté en 1793”
- Bernard Gainot, “La centralité des enjeux électoraux sous le Directoire”
- Philippe Tanchoux, “Les procédures électorales sous le Consulat et l’Empire”
- Malcolm Crook, “Suffrage et citoyenneté sous la Restauration”
- Anne Verjus, “La veuve et son gendre dans la stratégie électoraliste libérale sous la Monarchie censitaire”
- Michel Offerlé, “Voter en images: Pour une iconographie du suffrage universel”
- Raymond Huard, “Un grand sujet, une journée féconde”

## NOTES

[1] Serge Aberdam’s recently completed doctoral thesis, “L’élargissement du droit de vote entre 1792 et 1795 au travers du dénombrement du comité de division et des votes populaires sur les Constitutions de 1793 et 1795” (Université de Paris I, 2001) was awarded the Albert Mathiez Prize by the Société des études robespierristes in 2002.

[2] Here Aberdam is critiquing arguments made by Pierre Rosanvallon and Patrice Gueniffey.

[3] Bernard Gainot and Serge Aberdam have already collaborated extensively: they lead a group of scholars working on the history of elections at INRA (Institut Nationale de la Recherche Agronomique) and were among the authors of a guide to research on that subject published in 1999. Gainot also authored *1799, un nouveau jacobinisme?* (Paris: Editions du CTHS, 2001).

[4] The first volume of Philippe Tanchoux’s thesis “Les procédures électorales en France de la fin de l’Ancien Régime à la veille de la Première Guerre mondiale” (Université de Orléans, 2000) has just been published as *Procédures et pratiques électorales en France* (Paris: CTHS, 2003). The second volume is forthcoming.

[5] Malcolm Crook makes a similar argument about how the practice of voting during the Napoleonic period contributed to a culture of elections in “The Uses of Democracy: Elections and Plebiscites in Napoleonic France,” in *The French Experience from Republic to Monarchy, 1792-1824: New Dawns in Politics, Knowledge and Culture*, eds. Maire F. Cross and David Williams (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2000).

[6] Margaret Lavinia Anderson, *Practicing Democracy: Elections and Political Culture in Imperial Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

[7] Malcolm Crook’s extensive publications include *Elections in the French Revolution: An Apprenticeship in Democracy, 1789-1799* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). He is currently completing a project on French elections from 1800 to 1848.

[8] Anne Verjus' doctoral thesis, which she wrote under the direction of Pierre Rosanvallon, (author of several important studies of voting, including the oft-cited *Le sacré du citoyen: histoire du suffrage universel en France* [Paris: Gallimard, 1992]) was published recently as *Le cens de la famille: les femmes et le vote, 1789-1848* (Paris: Belin, 2002).

[9] A political scientist, Michel Offerlé's *Un homme, une voix?* (1992) has recently been republished as a livre de poche by Gallimard (Paris, 2002).

[10] Raymond Huard is the author of *Le suffrage universel en France* (Paris: Aubier, 1991).

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