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Jeff Horn, *Qui parle pour la nation? Les élections en Champagne, 1765-1830*. Paris: Société des études robespierristes, 2004. 273pp. Map, tables, notes and bibliography. €32.00 (pb). ISBN 2-908327-49-X.

Review by Alan Forrest, University of York.

The increasing vogue in French revolutionary studies for analysing the polity and the new political culture that enveloped France after the collapse of the Bourbon monarchy has seen a burgeoning interest in voting and the electoral process, considered by many to constitute an apprenticeship in democracy that helped prepare France for the multiple challenges of the nineteenth century. In France, Serge Aberdam and Patrice Gueniffey, in the United States, Melvin Edelstein, and in England, Malcolm Crook have all in their different ways made elections the central focus of their research, while for Isser Woloch the introduction of the electoral process—at every level of society from the Estates-General and the Convention down to the choice of *juges de paix* and members of local tribunals—formed one of the basic tenets of the “new regime”. This interest in electoral participation has been all the greater in that France was the first European nation to introduce universal manhood suffrage and to talk of its people as citizens, as members of a national community endowed with all the rights and obligations that stemmed from that. Electoral participation and political modernisation can be seen to go hand in hand. Just how closely the identification of elections and political participation should be made is, of course, a question of some debate. Participation in the political life of one’s section, membership of a club or popular society, incorporation in the national guard, all can be seen as forms of political engagement—as, for some historians, can involvement in riots and acts of collective violence. But in recent years, and especially since the celebration of the Bicentenary in 1989, historians have focussed especially strongly on voting, arguing that the French Revolution created the tradition and infrastructure on which modern French political practice is based.

Jeff Horn fully endorses this approach. Indeed, he goes rather further, arguing that voting was not only the principal means by which citizens became involved in the political process, but also determined access to power and allowed the legitimisation of that power. He insists that elections allowed France to experience what he terms “the emergence of democratic politics”, and he focuses on what he terms “the democratic functioning of elections” during the French Revolution. In this sense he is staking a claim for the Revolution being essentially democratic, and is placing himself on the “anti-revisionist” side of the historiographic divide, against those who, like Keith Baker and François Furet, have argued that the Revolution was intrinsically intolerant and undemocratic from its very inception. But, by the same token, there are questions which the revisionists have emphasised which barely figure here, most especially questions relating to the place of liberal democratic values in the revolutionary political order. Elections produce majorities and minorities; but did the revolutionaries ever truly take account of minority opinion? How far, indeed, was the polity divisible? Or was the Revolution already heading unstoppably towards the suppression of disagreement, the “one and indivisible republic” of 1793?

Elections, Horn believes, lay at the heart of the new political order, with clubs seen less as a competing form of political action than as a device to prepare for the hustings and help shape the electoral process. This is his justification for writing a departmental history of voting patterns, a monographic study of the department of the Aube which helps to nuance the conclusions reached over a broader canvas by Edelstein, Crook, and the others. Indeed, one has only to linger over his footnotes to see how often his conclusions for this department in southern Champagne are measured against the more universal claims of others, especially those who—like Malcolm Crook—have based their conclusions on the electoral

behaviour of ten or a dozen departments, though it goes without saying that none has done so in anything like the detail which is lavished here on the Aube. Horn, it should be noted, makes no great claims for the uniqueness of the Aube, but presents it as something of an average department, one that comes towards the middle of Crook's sample in terms of both participation levels and political preferences. If it is unusual, it is in the richness of its social diversity, its high levels of literacy, and the abundance of its electoral archives.

So is this a return to the departmental and local histories that once featured so strongly among the subjects of monographs and doctoral dissertations? In one sense it is, and the author makes no apology for it; there are processes, he argues, that are best demonstrated at local level, and he goes on, in some 250 pages, to show the potential of a good local case-study. In another, he is keen to impress on his readers just how much can be made of the electoral evidence from this part of southern Champagne if it is handled with assiduity and some imagination. For this is not just another book about elections, fully documented as these are. It spreads itself more widely, examining the men who emerged victorious and took up local office, discussing them as individuals with families and career structures, and analysing their social and professional composition. From this analysis, which is presented here through a series of highly illuminating tables, he concludes that the elections of the early part of the Revolution produced a new elite, a new political class in Troyes and its hinterland. That in itself will produce little surprise; the same pattern has been noted in many other towns and regions, though Horn differs from Crook about the exact moment when this revolutionary elite emerged, claiming that in the Aube it can be dated from the 1790 elections, not those of 1789. More significant is his claim that the elite which emerged in 1790 would remain in power during the decades that followed, providing the three principal pillars of Napoleonic administration--the *hauts fonctionnaires*, mayors, and departmental electors--and remaining in power even under the restored monarchy after 1815. It might depend less on the principle of electoral answerability, since the scale of voting did not subsequently equal that of the 1790s, and might become more withdrawn from the population at large. But the capacity of the new elites that emerged during the Revolution to maintain their local power base--which they succeeded in doing except during the short and exceptional period of the Hundred Days--is clearly demonstrated, and it suggests how deeply and permanently the Revolution left its mark on local society. If the author is right, these elections marked a seminal turning-point in French politics.

Horn's conclusions are based on a careful study of the prosopography of the men elected in Champagne between 1765 and 1830, which, if not the *longue durée* exactly, studies a far longer time span than that normally chosen by historians of revolutionary France. Parts of the book, perhaps inevitably, proceed chronologically from election to election, showing the changes in public mood and concern under the Consulate, or tracing local reaction to the experience of military occupation after 1815. But the emphasis is resolutely maintained on the personnel of this political drama--the men who stood for office, whether as mayors or deputies, and those who voted, as electors, in successive consultations. It shows how a new local elite was formed, how the local worthies of the small towns and rural hinterland of the Aube put their differences to one side at certain key junctures and how, from the Consulate onwards, they no longer allowed themselves to be fragmented as they had during the French Revolution itself. It mattered less, the author believes, that the electoral process of the early nineteenth century was narrowly based and patently undemocratic. Rather what counted was the habit of electoral consultation as well as the fact that the new elite, the product of revolution and turmoil, was given legitimation by the process of election. In this way, he tentatively concludes that the electoral innovation of the 1790s had a permanent impact on French public life: that "by developing the legitimacy of electoral results as a means of determining who governed the nation, the limited elections of the early nineteenth century sowed the seeds of democracy that would germinate in 1848 and blossom during the Third Republic" (p. 224).

This is a challenging conclusion, and one that justifies the author's decision to concentrate his focus on a single, well-documented department (though when he suggests that it would be valuable to undertake parallel electoral studies across France, the reader is perhaps allowed to confess—as did many French voters during the revolutionary decade—to just a measure of electoral fatigue). Detailed monographs of this kind are seldom commercial propositions, and the Société des Etudes Robespierriéristes has remained true to a long tradition of scholarship in bringing Jeff Horn's research to a wider, and especially to a Francophone, readership. The Robespierriéristes have not been deterred by the need to reproduce a large number of tables or to cite electoral statistics, and they have done so with commendable clarity. The appendices are excellent. So it may seem rather ungenerous to carp. But if this book is to be used by others, and if its conclusions are to be integrated into more general studies, as they deserve to be, then surely an index is indispensable. It seems incomprehensible that it should have appeared without one.

Alan Forrest
University of York
aif1@york.ac.uk

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