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**Jean-Clément Martin, dir.** *La Révolution à l'oeuvre. Perspectives actuelles dans l'histoire de la Révolution française*. Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2005. 375 pp. Notes and bibliography. €22.00 (pb). ISBN 2-7535-0055-X.

Review by Jeremy D. Popkin, University of Kentucky.

In January 2004, I was fortunate enough to attend the lively conference at which the papers in this volume were originally delivered. Since then, so much time has gone by that Jean-Clément Martin, then relatively recently appointed as director of the Institut de l'Histoire de la Révolution française at the Sorbonne, has now announced his impending retirement from that position. Martin's intentions in organizing the 2004 conference were to provide a comprehensive assessment of trends in scholarship about the Revolution in the fifteen years following the bicentennial of 1789 and to re-establish the position of the IHRF as a center for wide-ranging historical debate, following a period in which that venerable institution had been somewhat in eclipse. The January 2004 meeting was a lively one, attracting so many attendees that lunch tables had to be set up in the narrow hallway on the third floor of the Sorbonne, *escalier D*, the IHRF's home. For those of us of a certain age, the packed sessions evoked memories of the grand academic conferences devoted to the Revolution in the late 1980s, when it seemed that one could go around the world in eighty days, stopping in one country after another to participate in a serious discussion of 1789, its origins, turning points, and consequences.

Reduced to print, the proceedings of the 2004 conference prove somewhat less stimulating. In his brief concluding remarks, the Italian French Revolution specialist Haim Burstin applauds the fact that, in contrast to the conferences of the 1989 era, "La Révolution à l'oeuvre" saw no pre-programmed confrontations between rival historiographical schools such as the face-offs between the late François Furet and his critics that took place on a number of occasions. Even he has to admit, however, that in the absence of controversy, the result was sometimes "un oecumenisme un peu fade" (p. 341) and that many of the speakers showed so much "prudence à l'égard des synthèses hâtives et des définitions simplistes" (p. 337) that they hesitated to suggest any firm conclusions at all. The conference participants interpreted their assignment — to survey trends in the various subfields of revolutionary scholarship since the Bicentennial — in varying ways. Some provided laundry lists of scholarship since 1789, others tried to identify significant shifts in interpretation, and still others presented their own work. Although one of the avowed goals of the conference was to revive the international interchanges characteristic of the Bicentennial-era meetings, the participants were overwhelmingly French. There was a distinguished contingent from the United States — Lynn Hunt, Tim Tackett, and David Bell — and several Italians, but, surprisingly, no British, Australians, or Canadians.

Taken as a whole, the papers provide only a partial picture of recent trends in revolutionary scholarship. Jean-Pierre Jessenne provides an intelligent assessment of the new shape of revolutionary social history in an era in which categories of class have been called into question, but his is the only contribution devoted to this area. (At the conference, there were some lively discussions about the peasantry and the Revolution that are not reflected in the published volume.) Tim Tackett's summary of his work on the deputies to the Constituent Assembly is the only reflection of the recent revival of interest in revolutionary high politics, and Martine Lapiéd's sketchy survey of work on women is the only mention of that subject. Cultural history gets a whole section to itself but is treated in somewhat old-fashioned terms, with separate contributions on painting (Philippe Bordes), theater (Philippe Bourdin), caricature (Annie Duprat and Pascal Dupuy), and the sciences (Patrice Bret), to which one might add Jacques

Guilhaumou's rather opaque survey of scholarship on what he calls "notions-concepts en usage." Scholarship on the colonies and slavery is represented only by Anne Pérotin-Dumon's short essay on violence in Saint-Domingue.

Given that so much of recent revolutionary scholarship is left out, one might ask what *La Révolution à l'oeuvre* actually covers. In addition to the contributions of Jessenne and Lapied, the opening section on "Société et institutions" includes Hervé Leuwers's suggestive essay on "Pratiques, réseaux et espaces de sociabilité," Michel Biard's polemical challenge to the notion of the revolution as a process of centralization, and a dense and not entirely clear piece by Xavier Rousseaux devoted to "Politique judiciaire, criminalisation et répression." A second section, "Champ du politique," has Lynn Hunt's reconsideration of the notion of revolutionary political culture, Bernard Gainot's rapid discussion of theories and practices of political representation, Guilhaumou's piece on language and Antonino de Francesco's look at Jacobinism in Europe after Thermidor. As one might expect, given Jean-Clément Martin's contribution to the study of opposition to the Revolution, this subject gets good coverage in two contributions by Jean-Luc Chappey and Karine Rance. Rita Hermon-Belot concludes this section with a piece on "Religion et Révolution," which includes an intriguing plea for a study of the emergence of the period's contribution to the notion of "laïcité," "l'idée positive d'un espace public, espace de communauté où les citoyens se rencontrent en individus, libres de toute spécification religieuse" (p. 202).

A somewhat misleadingly titled third section, "Nation, conflits, violence," contains no discussion of nationalism, but rather Timothy Tackett's summary of his recent books on revolutionary legislators' attitudes toward violence, Marc Bélissa's contribution on the Revolution's impact on the European state system, an early version of the work on warfare that David Bell has now published as *The First Total War*, and Perotin-Dumon's essay on violence in the colonies.[1] The previously mentioned contributions on cultural subjects make up the fourth and concluding section of the book.

In my notes on the discussions at the conference, I recorded Lynn Hunt as concluding that everyone present was searching for a new synthesis of research on the French Revolution, but no one knew how this could be achieved. In a general sense, the contributions to *La Révolution à l'oeuvre* all reflect what could be called a "post-revisionist" approach to the subject. The Bicentennial celebrations of 1989 coincided with the collapse of Soviet communism, and the burning concern with 1789's connections to twentieth-century totalitarianism that characterized the revisionist school has largely evaporated, although the revisionist critique of categories such as social class remains influential. In a review essay published in 2002, I suggested that the years after 1989 had seen the rise of what could be called a "neo-liberal" or "neo-democratic" interpretation of the Revolution, stressing the positive contributions of the movement to the modern ideal of liberal democracy that seemed to have achieved hegemonic status after the fall of communism.[2] The scholarly works I cited in support of my contention were primarily by American historians such as Isser Woloch and Patrice Higonnet.

Most of the predominantly French contributors to *La Révolution à l'oeuvre* differ from the Furet school--whose leading French representative, Patrice Guéniffey, did not participate in the conference -- but even those who see the revolutionary era in a positive light rarely stress its connections to liberal democracy, which may strike them as too narrow a conception of the ideals of the 1790s. To take two examples, Michel Biard argues that the Convention's *députés en mission* were not simply imposing Jacobin centralism in the provinces, but that this distinctly un-liberal institution was in fact a way of creating a real connection between the country and its central government, and Philippe Bourdon suggests that revolutionary-era theater, with its mixture of stage genres, of amateur and professional actors, and its broadening of audiences, extended democracy to the cultural realm.[3] On the other hand, however, many of the conference participants also insist on the central role of violence in the revolutionary era, reflecting what might be called a post-9/11 view of history rather than the more optimistic mood that prevailed in the 1990s.[4] *La Révolution à l'oeuvre* provides persuasive evidence for the importance of both of these opposing aspects of the events following 1789 but offers few suggestions

as to how these conflicting perceptions might be integrated into any new paradigm of historical understanding.

While the content of *La Révolution à l'oeuvre* underlines the continuing absence of a convincing overall interpretation of the Revolution in contemporary historiography, the book's form and the footnotes to many of the essays suggest some reflections about the continuing obstacles to communication among scholars in different parts of the world. It is clear from the bibliographies to many of the contributions that much of the most important current French scholarship in this field appears in volumes like this one — collections of essays by different scholars, originating either in colloques or in joint research projects — rather than in the single-author monographs that are characteristic of English-language scholarship. Among the volumes most frequently cited by the contributors to *La Révolution à l'oeuvre*, for example, one finds Martine Lapied and Christine Peyraud, eds., *La Révolution française au carrefour des recherches* (Publications de l'Université de Provence, 2003) and Jean-Clément Martin, ed., *La Contre-Révolution en Europe, XVIIIe-XXe siècles* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2001). Rarely reviewed outside of France, if they get reviewed at all (the tardiness of this review of *La Révolution à l'oeuvre* is a good example of what tends to happen to such productions), and purchased by only the largest American research libraries, these publications are among the most difficult for scholars outside of France to keep up with. Unlike journals, they are not available on line. While the multiplication of regional French university presses, which put out many of these volumes, has had many positive aspects for scholarship in our field, these small publishing houses are often not successful in getting word of their productions to researchers outside of France. H-France provides them an opportunity to announce the titles and tables of contents of their books when they come out. Let us hope that more of them will take advantage of this possibility.

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## NOTES

[1] David A. Bell, *The First Total War: Napoleon's Europe and the Birth of Warfare as We Know It* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2007).

[2] Jeremy D. Popkin, "Not Over After All: The French Revolution's Third Century," *Journal of Modern History* 74 (2002), 801-21.

[3] Biard has developed this argument at much greater length in his important book, *Missionnaires de la République. Les représentants du peuple en mission (1793-1795)* (Paris: Comité des Travaux Historiques et Scientifiques, 2002).

[4] Jean-Clément Martin, the conference organizer, has provided an extended examination of this issue in his essay, *Violence et Révolution. Essai sur la naissance d'un mythe national* (Paris: Seuil, 2006).

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