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Michael Sonenscher, *Sans-Culottes: An Eighteenth-Century Emblem in the French Revolution*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2008. x + 493 pp. \$45.00 U.S. (cl). ISBN 978-0691124988.

Review essay by Johnson Kent Wright, Arizona State University.

Like its companion volume, *Before the Deluge* (2007), Michael Sonenscher's *Sans-Culottes* makes heavy demands on its readers. But in neither case can they complain that they were not well warned of the floods about to descend upon them. Preliminary sketches of the argument of *Before the Deluge* appeared in a two-part essay published in *History of Political Thought* in 1997 and in a long introduction to a selection of Sieyès's writings. In similar fashion, *Sans-Culottes* had its precursor in "Property, Community, and Citizenship," a contribution to *The Cambridge History of Eighteenth-Century Political Thought* (2006). In that essay, Sonenscher began at the end of a story, with Babeuf's appeal at his trial to the authority of the four "levellers" – Rousseau, Mably, Helvétius, and Diderot – whom, he claimed, had inspired his own notion of the *communauté des biens*. Often dismissed as an ill-informed bid for cover, Sonenscher argued that Babeuf's assertion ought to be taken seriously – that there was indeed a set of preoccupations and commitments shared by this quartet. These included a common utopian vision, joining republican government to a communal property system of one kind or another; the expectation or hope that progress in the arts and sciences might, over time, pave the way for the realization of this vision; a profound interest in Roman history and the role that the struggle between patricians and plebeians played in the downfall of the Republic; and the notion that modern systems of public credit might help steer France away from a Roman fate, via a "modern agrarian law," leveling wealth upwards rather than down. None of the four "levellers" subscribed equally to these ideas, and mysteries remained about their descent to Babeuf. In particular, "[t]here has never been a very convincing explanation of the extraordinary change that took place between the 1750s and the 1790s in the descriptions of the contents of Rousseau's political thought."¹ But such was the complicated intellectual background to Babeuf – and not just him, Sonenscher concluded. Babeuf's ideas were far closer to the eighteenth-century "mainstream" than is remembered today. Similar beliefs about the ideal relations between political community and property were shared by Robespierre himself, both in 1789, when he still hoped that Louis XVI would prove a "patriot king," and in 1793, when the Jacobins found themselves at the helm of the First Republic.

All of these themes and figures reappear in *Sans-Culottes*, whose central focus remains ideas about property and political community from the Old Regime to the Revolution. But this raw material has been drastically reshaped by two related changes. First and foremost, there is the replacement of Babeuf by the *sans-culottes* as centerpiece and pivot of the account. If the formal structure of the essay and book are the same – both presenting an eighteenth-century genealogy for a Revolutionary "moment" – the switch from the first communist to the popular urban classes who dominated the Paris Commune and supplied the shock troops for the great revolutionary *journées* of the Years I and II entails a very different look at ideas about property and politics. The most striking of these differences – the second novelty of *Sans-Culottes* – is the

crucial role that Sonenscher assigns to Cynicism. The most obscure of Hellenistic philosophical schools, the Cynics scarcely rate a mention elsewhere in scholarship on this period, nor did they figure in “Property, Community, and Citizenship.” In *Sans-Culottes*, however, Sonenscher presents Cynicism as the key to understanding the process that turned a joke about Enlightenment salons into an emblem of revolutionary populism and, not accidentally, to elucidating the role of Rousseau’s thought in this transformation. The combined result of these alterations, in any case, is to render the book at once far more ambitious and much more tightly focused than the original essay. In general, Sonenscher has been chary about making use of the grander Cambridge conceptual categories. References to the “languages” or “discourses” of the ancient constitution, political economy, or classical republicanism have been few and far between in his writing. In *Sans-Culottes*, however, he is unafraid of putting genealogy of the phrase to more ambitious uses: “The substantive aim of the book is . . . to describe what the term really did once stand for, before the image of the *sans-culottes* came to be set in its more familiar historical guise. In this sense, finding out about someone who was *sans culottes* before the *sans-culottes* became a political force (the hyphen is important) may help to open up a way to find out more about what republicanism in late eighteenth-century France once looked like, before it was given a real existence by the first French republic itself” (p. 21). *Sans-Culottes* is indeed the fullest account of the development of republicanism in Old Regime France that we possess – even if, as Sonenscher characteristically insists toward the end, “one of the points of this book has been to suggest that there is actually nothing at all straightforward about republicanism” (p. 406).

Indeed, no brief notice could begin to convey the contrapuntal complexity of the argument of *Sans-Culottes*. The term “baroque” itself falls short, though we are definitely closer to Bach’s circle than to Mozart’s arrow, in formal terms. Nevertheless, it is worth trying to glimpse the shape of the account as a whole, as it develops, straightforwardly or waywardly, across the six chapters of *Sans-Culottes*. The book opens with an extended introduction, setting forth the rationale for the long journey backward from June 1792, when the term *sans-culotte* made its Revolutionary debut – a voyage that, Sonenscher warns the reader, “entails going back quite a long way into the eighteenth century.” The second chapter (“An Ingenious Emblem”) returns us to the original context in which the unhyphenated phrase circulated, the salon culture of early eighteenth-century Paris. There is a salute along the way at the denizens of Darnton’s Grub Street. But the joke about aristocratic breeches, or lack thereof, sprang first from the most elevated precincts of the Enlightenment, Sonenscher insists. It is only in that setting that it “becomes clear that the archetype of a *sans-culotte* was not a vengeful literary hack but the ancient Greek philosopher Diogenes of Sinope” (p. 21). This could be seen above all in the most pointed joking about the breeches (not the funniest, which would be that of Voltaire), which was associated with Madame de Tencin’s practice of bestowing fabric for velvet *culottes* on the *habitués* of her salon as New Year’s presents. For connections between the various neo-classical moral outlooks and assumptions about social hierarchy were already clearly on display in the circle around Tencin – especially visible in the confrontation between advocates of “Ciceronian decorum” and their Cynic satirists. The latter included the poet N.-J.-L. Gilbert, whose “short, unhappy life” was emblematic for later writers such as Mercier, who would eventually play a contributing role in fixing the image of the *sans-culotte*. But the greatest Cynic of all, of course, proved to be Jean-Jacques Rousseau – accurately dubbed “that subtle Diogenes” by Kant – to whose coruscating assault on civilized “decorum” in the first two *Discourses* Sonenscher turns in his third chapter (“Diogenes and Rousseau: Music, Morality, and Society”). Its upshot is to argue that the neo-Cynicism of the eighteenth century came in two distinct forms, Rousseau’s “skeptical” version and the “dogmatic” alternative offered in response by less subtle critics such as Louis-Bertrand Castel and the influential English moralist John Brown.

If assumptions about human nature and the direction of historical change were at the heart of this divergence – Rousseau denying natural “sociability” and regarding human history as tracing a relentlessly downward spiral, his critics more hopeful about the prospects for what Rousseau himself termed human “perfectibility” – political outlooks were no less central. Rousseau never fundamentally strayed from the basic classification of forms of government established by Montesquieu in *De l'esprit des lois*, which sharply distinguished modern European monarchies, founded on an inegalitarian social order and inspired by aristocratic “honor,” from egalitarian republics, which alone were animated by “virtue.” The result was a deeply pessimistic reckoning of the prospects for realizing the just polity of *Du contrat social*. Rousseau’s own hopes were confined almost entirely to small agrarian societies, able to practice economic “decoupling” from the advanced world – Poland, Corsica. But his Cynic critics could draw on different traditions of thought, with deep roots in French culture, which rejected any sharp antithesis between monarchies and republics, and thus had far fairer hopes for reforming monarchy in “virtuous” directions. The commanding figure here was Fénelon, the shadow of whose *Télémaque* impended across the entire eighteenth century. Sonenscher devotes the opening sections of his fourth chapter (“Property, Equality, and the Passions in Eighteenth-Century French Thought”) to a handsome analysis of Fénelon’s political thought, which departed, he argues, from a classification of political forms antithetical to that of Montesquieu – distinguishing, indeed, the “Gothic” monarchy championed by the latter from the sort of reform monarchy, founded on “ancient prudence,” that he recommended for France. Fénelon himself was not directly associated with Cynicism. But not only did it prove easy for disciples such as Ramsay to make the connections, his later progeny could call on intellectual resources unavailable to Fénelon, including the lessons learned from the “Law” experiment in public funding and the theoretical foundations for agrarian prosperity provided by Physiocracy. The harvest of such thinking was to be seen as the programs of royal reform to be found in Ogilvie’s *Essay on the Right of Property in Land* and Garat’s pre-Revolutionary writings: both at the opposite pole from Rousseau’s pessimism, imagining that modern monarchy could lead the way to what Paine would later call “agrarian justice.”

Thus the stage was set for the drama recounted in Chapter Five (“The Entitlements of Merit”) – the one sustained chronological narrative in *Sans-Culottes*, which takes us from the Ségur ordinance to the start of the Revolution and finally to the emergence of the vocabulary of the *sans-culottes* in its classic form. The debacle of the 1781 military reforms served mainly to show how very few Frenchmen were prepared, by the end of the century, to defend anything like Montesquieu’s “Gothic” monarchy. This was demonstrated even more vividly by the speed with which the National Constituent Assembly rejected the constitutional designs of both Mounier and Sieyès in the fall of 1789: opposite visions of the shape of a modernized monarchy, but both firmly dismissed for violating modern norms of equality. These out of the way, the Feuillant leadership could then enact the long-incubated dream of combining a Fénelonian “ancient prudence” with the intellectual resources of modern political economy – or, as Sonenscher puts it, try “to realise Rousseau’s moral and political vision, using modern financial means” (p. 317). The fragile centerpiece of this program, of course, was the *assignat* scheme, enabled by the nationalization of Church property, whose intellectual foundations Sonenscher traces to great effect in the thought of Clavière. If the consensus behind this project for national regeneration had begun to crumble almost from the start, it was, of course, finally shattered by the attempted flight of the “patriot king” serving as its figurehead in June 1791. It was in the wake of Varennes, in the context of mounting noble emigration and colonial revolt in the Caribbean, that the emergent Girondin or “Brissotin” faction decided that the best hope for rescuing and re-launching the Revolution lay in an appeal to popular foundations. As Sonenscher remarks, the idea of *sans culottes* without the hyphen, a memento of a defunct culture of aristocratic patronesses and male bourgeois intellectuals, might seem the least likely of the emblems now deployed to symbolize this new alliance of elite and popular forces. As he shows in a meticulous

reconstruction, however, the yeoman's labor that permitted the now hyphenated neologism to surpass both Phrygian cap and pike as a popular symbol was chiefly that of the Brissotin journalist Antoine-Joseph Gorsas. It was in the course of his sustained campaign of invective against the Feuillants in the winter and spring of 1791-92 that Gorsas, calling on what was now a long tradition of neo-Cynic satire, forged what would become the lasting image of the *sans-culottes*. As short-term political tactic, Gorsas's appeal to petty-bourgeois radicalism paid off handsomely. The Brissotin defenders of the *sans-culottes* were able to take control of the municipal government in Paris, dominate the legislative elections in the spring, and indeed form, in March 1792, what was termed the "*ministère sans-culotte*." As long-term strategy, this kind of alliance with popular forces proved fatal, of course, once what we might call the "*République sans-culotte*" had arrived – the Brissotins being among the first victims of the creature they had helped to call into being.

Strictly speaking, the argument of *Sans-Culottes* has reached its destination at this point. As Sonenscher summarizes it, at the start of his concluding sixth chapter, "the emergence of the *sans-culottes* in their now familiar guise was a relatively sudden political response to the disintegration of a broad consensus in favour of using the resources of modern public finance to make property generally available, and, once property had lost its socially charged status, to give merit and distinction their proper place in social and political life" (p. 362). But there remains one further twist in this story: "the final switch from the initial Brissotin drive to win the support of the newly named *sans-culottes* in 1791-2 to the better known association between Robespierre, Saint-Just, and the *sans-culottes* that emerged in 1793" (p. 363). How is this still more fateful alliance – the chapter, after all, is entitled "Democracy and Terror" – to be explained? Certainly not by "the old master concepts of class and sovereignty," which are dispatched down the oubliette even more decisively than in *Before the Deluge*. But "[p]ushing nineteenth-century philosophies of history out of the historiography of the French Revolution does not mean that there were simply *no* philosophies of history available before or after 1789" (p. 363). With this, Sonenscher returns to the terrain of the 2006 essay, though not to Babeuf, but rather to the famous Jacobin prohibition, in March 1793, on even *proposing* an "agrarian law" – a measure that was "straightforwardly Ciceronian, because the French republic now faced a state of affairs comparable to those that had once faced the Roman Republic (p. 365)." The philosophy of history that most threatened "decorum," in other words, remained that of Rousseau – though the latter's reappearance in the *Sans-Culottes* is extremely brief, a mere two pages, before he gives way to Volney, who himself cedes the stage almost immediately to a figure who has been mostly absent from the book thus far. This is the abbé de Mably, to whose life and thought Sonenscher now devotes an extended and illuminating analysis. Its gist is to suggest that Mably, a warm admirer of both Fénelon and Brown, had as much or more to offer to the Jacobins than Rousseau – though the latter could still claim at least some responsibility for the uses of the concept of "democracy" itself, during the emergencies of the Year II. However, the last word in *Sans-Culottes* belongs to neither Mably, Rousseau, nor Robespierre. In what now seems to be a characteristic Sonenscherian move – cf. the cameos of Schmidt-Phiseldeck and Alexander Hill Everett at the end of *Before the Deluge* – we are seen off in the improbable company of Emmanuel Salchli, the various redactions and updatings of whose didactic poem *Le mal* in 1784, 1789, and 1813 serve to remind us what had changed and what had not once the *sans-culottes* had come and gone.

No staccato summary of contents could possibly suggest the riches that await readers of *Sans-Culottes*. All other considerations aside, Sonenscher has almost certainly rescued more eighteenth-century political thinkers from oblivion, and made more fundamental discoveries about the interrelations of political ideas from the late seventeenth to the early nineteenth centuries than any current practitioner of intellectual history. It will plainly take some time for scholars to take the measure of *Before the Deluge* and *Sans-Culottes* and begin to assimilate their

findings. Meanwhile, there can be little doubt about the central achievement of the latter. As strange as it seems, no historian has ever undertaken to recover the pre-history of so central a term of modern political experience as *sans-culottes*, nor has anyone attempted to capture the moment of its hyphenated crystallization, in the course of the tumultuous political contention of 1791-92. Sonenscher has accomplished both tasks, with an extraordinary combination of scholarly industry, intellectual energy, and even formal panache. What, then, can be said about the larger aim of *Sans-Culottes* – the hope that this reconstruction “may help to open a way to find out more about what republicanism in late eighteenth-century France once looked like, before it was given a real existence by the first French Republic itself”? It is worth reminding ourselves of the relative novelty of such an aspiration. One of the paradoxes of the history of political thought over the past half-century has been the peculiar reluctance of scholars to pursue the history of republican ideas in France – after all, still the only major West European state in which a monarchy actually gave way to a republic – while the study of their fortunes in Italy, Britain, the Netherlands, and North America flourished to the point of saturation. Sonenscher is not, of course, working with an entirely clean slate in this regard. Keith Baker’s identification of a French tradition of “classical republicanism” was a central achievement of the essays collected in *Inventing the French Revolution* (1990); sequels – “Transformations of Republicanism in Eighteenth-Century France” (2001) and “Political Languages of the French Revolution” (2006) – together offer a framework for understanding the evolution of republican ideas in France, of even wider scope than that of *Sans-Culottes*. Recent years have also seen the publication of two fundamental books, both directly pertinent to Sonenscher’s enterprise: Marisa Linton’s *The Politics of Virtue in Eighteenth-Century France* (2001), a detailed history of the concept that most regard as the central token of early-modern republican thought; and Eric Nelson’s *The Greek Tradition in Republican Thought* (2004), whose focus is property regimes, private and communal, with two extended chapters on French thinkers.[2] Surprisingly, *Sans-Culottes* appears to owe little or nothing to this recent scholarship on republicanism. There is a nod in Nelson’s direction; but Baker’s later essays and Linton’s book are missing from an otherwise bulging secondary bibliography. If Sonenscher’s picture of republicanism in France is bound to look different from these, how should we describe its contours?

Here we might concentrate on the two central features of his account. The first, and most striking, of course, is Sonenscher’s claim that the eventual shape of Revolutionary republicanism owed much to a species of eighteenth-century neo-Cynicism, which had developed in critical reaction to the salon-culture of the High Enlightenment – more than one species, in fact, since Sonenscher traces the differences between Rousseau and otherwise like-minded thinkers, such as Mably, to a divergence *within* this neo-Cynicism between “skeptical” and “dogmatic” variants. Sonenscher is, of course, not alone in seeking the evolution of republican ideas in wider cultural currents – a theme of Baker’s and Linton’s writing – or in stressing the key role of references to classical antiquity in them. But there seems to be no precedent at all for his promotion of Cynicism to the very center of this process. To get a sense of the novelty of the proposal, it is enough to glance at the first volume of Peter Gay’s *The Enlightenment: The Rise of Modern Paganism* (1966) or Chantal Grell’s massive two-volume *Le Dix-huitième siècle et l’antiquité en France* (1995). The Cynics are almost entirely missing from both. How should we judge Sonenscher’s argument for restoring them to the center of eighteenth-century intellectual history? The evidence that he sets forth, showing that their contemporaries had no difficulty at all in identifying Rousseau with Diogenes, or Brown, Castel, and Mably with Cynicism, largely speaks for itself and is enough to embarrass anyone who has ever been tempted to underestimate its importance. After *Sans-Culottes*, no historian will be able to return to the role of classical antiquity in eighteenth-century thought without contending with the Cynics. At the same time, there are also reasons to wonder whether eighteenth-century Cynicism, as Sonenscher understands it, is really capable of playing the demiurgic role assigned to it in *Sans-Culottes*, at least on its own. Indications of stress on the category would include, on the one

hand, its bifurcation from the start into “skeptical” and “dogmatic” variants (though there are precedents for this in the distinction between “hard” and “soft” versions of ancient Cynicism), and, on the other, the tendency of both to morph effortlessly into more familiar forms of neo-classical outlook, Aristotelian, Stoic or even Epicurean (e.g., pp. 238-242).

What these signs of difficulties in defining and delimiting Cynicism suggest is not that Sonenscher is wrong about the association of Rousseau and the rest with Diogenes, but rather that an accurate sense of the specific role played by Cynicism in eighteenth-century thought will depend on our understanding of the cult of antiquity in France considered as a whole. For all the debt that we owe to Gay or Grell, this is a subject that is badly in need of a renewed effort of scholarly interpretation today. No student of republican ideas in France doubts that they developed in a context of a prolongation of the *Querelle des anciens et des modernes*, which did not reach its climax until the Revolution itself and whose after-effects extended well into the nineteenth century. But the surprising fact is that we still possess nothing that approximates a satisfying study of the *political* dimensions – for thought and action – of this vast cycle of history. Early in *Sans-Culottes*, Sonenscher himself acknowledges that “Many historians have pointed out the widespread presence of ancient philosophy in eighteenth-century thought, even though it is not particularly clear why it was so ubiquitous, or why so much of the political rhetoric of the period of the French Revolution took its cue so readily from ancient Greece or Rome.” His own “unavoidably crude attempt at an explanation” is to suggest that “ancient philosophy was the only available alternative to Christianity for thinking about the relationship between morality and politics” (p. 63). Fair enough – though the later eighteenth-century was perhaps not quite so bereft of self-consciously “modern” resources, in this respect. But what is needed, beyond an argument-via-elimination of this kind, is a more positive and comprehensive account of the functions, modalities, and temporalities of the appeal to antiquity in this period – of precisely the kind represented by Sonenscher’s own recovery of Cynicism. His impatience with “nineteenth-century philosophies of history” notwithstanding, we may still have something to learn from the likes of Constant or Marx, in this regard. For all the differences between them, both shared a common conviction that the cult of classical antiquity was absolutely central to the historical meaning of the French Revolution; and each offered suggestions about its explanation that compare well with the puzzlement or indifference of more recent historians.[3]ⁱ

There is another crux of Sonenscher’s account of pre-Revolutionary republicanism in France, less visible than Cynicism, but no less important for Revolutionary sequels. This is the idea, as he puts it in a striking passage in the Acknowledgements at the start of *Sans-Culottes*, that “the initial framework in which a surprisingly large number of eighteenth-century justifications of an egalitarian property regime arose” was a “theologically inspired antithesis between Gothic government and absolute government.” “One, very short, version of this book,” Sonenscher continues, “would be to say that the *sans-culottes* emerged when, for specifiable historical reasons, this long-standing antithesis between Gothic government and absolute government no longer made sense, and, when, as a result, an old, rather austere way of thinking about moral integrity and royal reform – one sometimes associated with the ancient philosophical sect called the Cynics – became a vision of a more republican, and ultimately democratic, set of social and institutional arrangements” (p. x). This is a wonderfully concise distillation of the argument of *Sans-Culottes*. But its final clauses might be taken to imply that it was the disappearance of the “antithesis” in question that paved the way for republicanism in France. In fact, what Sonenscher’s extended account – from chapter four onwards – demonstrates is that republicanism was already very much at stake in the distinction between Gothic and absolute government itself. In fact, on either side of it. On the one hand, one of the great achievements of *Sans-Culottes* is to propose a way to bring the enigmatic figure of Fénelon into an account of the *origines lointaines* of republicanism in France. There is a general appreciation of the

importance of the author of *Télémaque* for, as it were, putting the “classical” in classical republicanism. Sonenscher’s analysis suggests that the crucial first step in this process was to bring the assets of “ancient prudence” to bear on the reform of *monarchy*. In a sense, this was to hoist Bourbon Absolutism by its own petard, by taking advantage of what Judith Shklar aptly called “the Augustan charade” – an ideological over-dependence on parallels with ancient Rome. The alluring vision of a “virtuous” or “patriotic” monarchy bequeathed by Fénelon in *Télémaque* – a kind of French equivalent to Harrington’s *Oceana* – could then be updated by a long line of “dogmatic” Cynics, schooled in modern political economy, from Ramsay to Clavière, before it was at last realized, briefly, in the “*monarchie républicaine*” of 1789-92.

On the other hand, there is Montesquieu, theorist supreme of “Gothic” monarchy – but whose contribution to the development of republicanism in France almost certainly exceeded that of Fénelon. This was owing to the fact that the analysis of monarchy in *De l’esprit des lois* was part and parcel of a wider typology of governments, whose most dramatic feature was the antithesis it established *between* monarchies and republics, assigning “virtue” to the latter alone. If it were necessary to single out the one *ideologeme* that was most crucial to the history of modern republicanism, and not just in France, it would certainly be this. Sonenscher is, of course, perfectly aware of the importance of Montesquieu’s typology for his story, on which hinges the drama of Rousseau’s journey from the margins to the mainstream of republican thought. At the same time, it must be said that this side of his account – what he calls “the Rousseau-Montesquieu pairing,” and its eventual victory over the “Rousseau-Fénelon pairing” – is the least developed in *Sans-Culottes*. After its initial presentation, highlighting Fénelon’s own debt to his friend Claude Fleury, the antithesis between Gothic and absolute government receives relatively scant attention – at least compared to those aristocratic breeches. Montesquieu himself is something of an insubstantial presence in *Sans-Culottes*, the gravitational pull of his typology always felt, yet never directly analyzed or explained. The controversies that flowed in the wake of *De l’esprit des lois*, over republican “virtue” and the constitutional implications of the theory of Gothic government, are not ignored, but neither are they fully integrated into Sonenscher’s account of republicanism-before-the-Revolution.

No doubt the choice of the *sans-culottes* as the pivot of the book helps to explain this tilt in the direction of the “Rousseau-Fénelon pairing.” But it perhaps also owes something to the fact that Sonenscher, now the leading authority on the languages of political economy and republicanism in eighteenth-century France, has thus far largely avoided direct engagement with the *first* of the early-modern political languages discovered in Cambridge – the “ancient constitutionalism” whose English adventures were the subject of Pocock’s first book. For there is, of course, a French equivalent of *The Ancient Constitution and the Feudal Law*, published some thirty years earlier: Carcassonne’s *Montesquieu et le problème de la constitution française au XVIIIe siècle* (1927), a book that remains without a serious rival or successor today as a survey of French political thought in the eighteenth century. It is striking how little use Carcassonne has been for either *Before the Deluge* or *Sans-Culottes*. Nor does this apply only to Montesquieu himself. On one side of *De l’esprit des lois*, there is the figure of Boulainvilliers, central to Carcassonne’s interpretation and today not infrequently regarded as a kind of proto-republican himself – barely there in *Before the Deluge* and missing altogether from the survey of ideas about property and community in *Sans-Culottes*. On the other side, there is Mably, whose writings on French history Carcassonne regarded as the great turning point in the victory of republicanism *over* the idea of an “ancient constitution” – the aftermath of the Maupeou coup marking the moment when “Montesquieu had now been overtaken by Mably.” This side of Mably – and his filiation with Boulainvilliers, the subject of a famous essay on the ideological origins of the Revolution by Furet and Ozouf – gets the least attention in Sonenscher’s otherwise winning profile in his concluding chapter.^[4] If *Before the Deluge* and *Sans-Culottes* together make an overwhelming case for the role of thinking about political economy and property in the development of

republicanism in France, *Montesquieu et le problème de la constitution française* is a reminder of the other side of story – of the need to return to the terrain of the “ancient constitution,” as well, in explaining the way the Old Regime in France met its end, giving way to the First Republic.

But it is no criticism of a project of revision on the scale of that undertaken by Michael Sonenscher to point out that it is incomplete or unfinished. The most intrepid or greediest readers of *Sans-Culottes* may feel a twinge of regret at encountering evidence, at its end, of dangling threads or punches pulled – the fleeting return of Rousseau, the belated introduction to Mably, the sudden swerve from Robespierre to Salchli. Most of us, however, will be grateful for the pause, in order to catch our breaths and collect our thoughts. For there is certain to be more to come, as prequel or sequel to *Before the Deluge* and *Sans-Culottes*. Not so long ago, Istvan Hont could remark, in conversation, that those of us working on the history of French political thought were fortunate: “You have everything left to do.” Not any more. There is suddenly a lot less work out there, and the rest of us had better get busy before Sonenscher puts us out of a job altogether!

NOTES

[1] Michael Sonenscher, “Property, Community, and Citizenship,” in Mark Goldie and Robert Wokler, eds., *The Cambridge History of Eighteenth-Century Political Thought* (Cambridge, 2006), p. 497. Babeuf could be forgiven of course, for having assumed that Diderot, and not Morelly, was the author of the *Code de la nature*.

[2] Keith Michael Baker, “Transformations of Classical Republicanism in Eighteenth-Century France,” *Journal of Modern History* 73 (March 2001), pp. 32-53; and “Political Languages of the French Revolution,” in *The Cambridge History of Eighteenth-Century Political Thought*, pp. 626-659; Marisa Linton, *The Politics of Virtue in Eighteenth-Century France* (Palgrave, 2001); and Eric Nelson, *The Greek Tradition in Republican Thought* (Cambridge, 2004).

[3] For an exception, unjustly neglected, see Claude Mossé, *L’Antiquité dans la Révolution française* (Albin Michel, 1989).

[4] François Furet and Mona Ozouf, “Deux légitimations historiques de la société française aux XVIIIe siècle: Mably et Boulainvilliers,” *Annales E. S. C.* 34 (1979), pp. 438-450.

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