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Matthew Shaw, *Time and the French Revolution: the republican calendar, 1789-Year XIV*. Royal Historical Society Studies in History, new series. Woodbridge and Rochester, NY: Boydell & Brewer, 2011. xiii + 189 pp. Appendices, bibliography, and index. £50.00 (cl). ISBN 978-0-86-193311-2.

Review by David Address, University of Portsmouth.

This is a sober and judicious examination of what has always appeared to be one of the great extravagances of history: the effort of the French revolutionaries to remake time, to declare their own deeds to be the foundation of a new era, and even to imagine that the hours of the day might be recast to suit their sense of the meliorability of all things. Matthew Shaw's well-argued and thoroughly-researched work does not, perhaps, lead to the kind of inspiring insights that one hopes for in the very best histories, but in documenting the more quotidian realities attendant upon the revolutionaries' chronometric dreams, he offers a clear vision of how such experiences interacted with flights of ideological fancy, bringing them firmly back to earth, and ultimately to anticlimactic, though not complete, restoration of the old structures.

Divided into six main chapters, the book takes us from an overview of how eighteenth-century thinkers understood time, through a careful chronological account of the vicissitudes of the new calendar's lifespan, and into a series of more thematic case-studies. Shaw explores the place of the new system in the culture of "Year II," examines the broader question of its interaction with religious frames of reference, and then studies more closely the linkage between calendars, the control of work and festive time, and the effort to go beyond the marking of years and days to dictate new structures of clock-time, down to the new "decimal second."

Shaw begins the first of these chapters by noting the passion of eighteenth-century thinkers for precision in time-keeping, juxtaposed with the continued, more elastic rhythms of the agricultural work-year, and the looming shadow of Thompsonian "industrial work time" (p. 17). Perhaps slightly belaboring the point, he shows that, amongst the educated classes, there was a consciousness that measurement of time was not a natural and unquestionable process--the century that had seen countries, including Britain and Prussia, debate and decide the move from Julian to Gregorian calendars also saw scholarly interest in Roman and other ancient forms of timekeeping and, perhaps more frivolously, a number of publishing projects to augment or replace the traditional Catholic calendar of festivals and saints' days. This extended to the 1788 *almanach des honnêtes-gens* of Sylvain Maréchal, for which this impudent atheist was sentenced to three months' imprisonment. Referencing a range of other Enlightenment reflections demonstrates that this period's perceptions of time as an artifact of social and ideological decisions made the idea of a new calendar surprisingly plausible, especially as the events of 1789 were so universally recognized as an unprecedented epoch.

The nature of the transformation affected by revolution is attested in Shaw's next chapter, his longest, flagged as a "narrative history" of the republican calendar, but also a reflection on its place in the revolutionary years. As he argues, "the history of the calendar offers a window into the history of the creation of a nation, as imperfect, bureaucratic, mundane and locally determined as that might be" (p. 31). In this sentence, Shaw might be said to be summing up his place in the noble lineage of modern British contributions to the history of the French Revolution--where the French, and to a certain extent the Americans, have made grand pronouncements, *les Anglais*, in the long line that starts somewhere between Cobban and Cobb and descends through Lucas, Doyle, Forrest et al, have picked up their golden nuggets of insight by keeping their eyes close to the evidentiary ground. And so it is here.

From some initial generalization, we rapidly move to the adoption of the calendar itself, and then to the crucial question of what that actually meant for ordinary officials and their constituencies across the country. Could courts meet on the supplementary days at the end of the year, or only in the regular months? How did the new calendar affect critical resources like tide-tables needed by the navy? How did one pay one's taxes on time? In a narrative form, attention to vicissitudes inevitably prevails, and so we soon skip on to the uneasy years of the later 1790s where, from some perspectives, the new calendar was allowed to slip back into coexistence with the old. From others, its persistence led to a further effort to entrench it in festivity and obligation, with the theophilanthropic cult perhaps the most thorough-going, but hence also isolated and impractical, effort to hold onto the new system in all its dimensions. In the end, citing the impediment it represented to commerce, Napoleon in his new imperial pomp waved the new calendar away in 1805, to disappear definitively on the following 1 January.

After this perhaps occasionally too-rapid survey, we return to some more detailed explorations. The third chapter is not strikingly original, surveying as it does the precise nature of the imagery, and hence the implicit social model, of the calendar. Since much that was implicit was also made quite explicit by those who modeled it, the focus on a "rural democracy" of productive *cultivateurs* comes as no surprise (p. 65), though there is a useful discussion of the problems of representing this visually: female allegories and pastoral landscapes having their own freight of not-always-acceptable implications of idyllic and potentially lascivious leisure. Shaw also discusses "the materiality of the new time" (p. 78ff.), in which the new, more active social role of the citizen was complemented by a flush of printed and other types of calendrical concordances, watches and representative trinkets. Much of this was, evidently, a bourgeois fantasy of men in offices, whose engagement with the realities of agriculture and climate was very different from that of those who actually had to till the land, and shiver through the snows of Nivôse. Some of this was marked in a further "materiality," as counter-revolution took up the device of the almanac to mock and condemn change. In his fourth chapter, Shaw considers more closely the direct clash with religion, commemorated in at least one satire as a caustic dialogue between the hearty traditions of "Monsieur Dimanche" and the bureaucratic sterility of "Citoyen Décadi" (p. 83). Given the centrality of this to most existing accounts of the calendar, there is perhaps inevitably little surprising in much of this chapter, though the discussion in depth of the thinking of Gilbert Romme is noteworthy, before the slide into the crude anticlericalism of the most active dechristianisers.

Where there are fascinating hints of a deeper cultural history, it is in the years of the later 1790s, as local officials wrestle with their communities', and perhaps their own, doubts about the point of continuing with innovation, while also adhering of necessity to a range of concrete changes, including the secularization of marriage. It is a shame that these pages are not developed more fully before Shaw pushes ahead into more institutional clashes with the Church, and its final victory. After this chapter, there is a change of direction from belief to activity, and intriguing questions about the continuity of attitudes to policing work. Festivity and immorality had been seen under the Old Regime as going dangerously hand-in-hand, as had a feckless tendency for workers to excuse themselves from their masters' business on the flimsiest celebratory pretext. Notoriously the republican calendar continued and extended this censorious attitude, drawing the ire of working people for condemning them to nine days' labor out of ten. Considering that, by some accounts, Parisian workers before 1789 had enjoyed over 100 rest-days a year, this was a major and unwelcome shift, but Shaw demonstrates that for the authorities it was probably one of the good points about the system. Following a well-established historiography of *la police*, he illustrates the tendency since the days of Colbert for the state to intervene firstly to limit the number of official holidays and, secondly, to impose penalties on those who used them for anything except religious observance or sober rest. Needless to say, this long fight remained largely unsuccessful, but it was taken up again with undiminished vigor by the revolutionaries.

The old-regime compulsion to harass the idle, while also ensuring that official festivities were honored with due solemnity, found an inevitable sequel in complaints both of workers continuing to take

Sundays off, and being found working on the *décadi*. As late as 1798-1799, this was causing persistent aggravation to local authorities. In some places there was a noticeable shift in the balance between morality and utility. Shaw's case-study of Nantes shows official authorization of a range of both essential and respectable economic activities on the day of rest, while "activities deemed to pose moral dangers" were repressed (pp. 114-115). In other areas, even sweeping one's own farmyard on the *décadi* could incur official disapproval, and patterns of behavior that suggested disrespect for the day played a widespread part in continuing denunciations of counter-revolutionary suspects. Particularly resented were efforts to make the time-honored cycle of local and regional markets conform to the new calendar, something which in practice sometimes meant banning old markets before orders to establish new ones had been clarified—a fundamental disruption to economic and social life. Overall, Shaw argues, these aspects of calendrical reform mark both a significant continuity with the preoccupations of old-regime civil authorities, and a step forward into a more economically-oriented definition of productive time.

This point is amplified in the final substantive chapter of the book, which delves into the thoroughly abortive effort to decimalize the hours, minutes and seconds of the day. Foreshadowed by a slow but steady increase in attention to fine distinctions and exact measurements of time in the eighteenth century, not least as watchmaking expanded its clientele beyond the elite, decimal time was supposed to bring the advantages of precision to all. Of course it failed, not least because replacing or modifying mechanical clocks was a much more costly and complex business than renaming the days. Even the clock that adorned the National Convention took several years to successfully adapt after first being earmarked for the change in December 1793. Much of this chapter is taken up with a case-study which is in some respects tangential to the book, concerning the cultivation of a watch-making industry in Besançon based around over 2000 immigrant Swiss artisans. Though rather a failed enterprise in the short term (it did flourish eventually, though on a smaller scale, producing some 17,000 watches per year around 1810), this is also, for Shaw, a case-study of the shifts in time-discipline identified by E. P. Thompson in English factories. Unfortunately, the direct evidence for this in Besançon is thin on the ground, and rounded out with a variety of general observations that are undoubtedly valid, but add little original to our understanding of a notable Jacobin concern for regularity, discipline and control.

Shaw's overall conclusions are thoroughly wide-ranging: from republican concordances with the Islamic calendar produced during the Egyptian expedition, to English satires, to late-nineteenth-century revivals of interest in decimal time, and to the very concept of "national holidays." In sweeping over this range, they do lack a certain focus, and it would have been desirable to look back a little more closely at some of the aspects of the revolutionary years' experience covered in this volume. Though the text makes a consistent effort to offer both empirical case-studies and theoretical or methodological touchstones—Benedict Anderson, Foucault, Elias, even Thompson—there is a persistent slight disjuncture between these dimensions. A more substantive reflection here might have pulled the volume together. As it is, there is a sense in which it ends almost as anticlimactically as the calendar itself, which is a shame, as there is much of value here.

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