

Heinrich Blömeke, La »Terreur« dans le département de Seine-et-Marne (1793–1794). Mobilisation politique et Gouvernement révolutionnaire, Dammarie-les-Lys (Lys Éditions Amatteis) 2022, 432 p., ISBN 978-2-86849-319-4, EUR 27,00.

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In 1790, in an effort to rationalize the administration of a country made up of 36 provinces of greatly varying sizes and in which local aristocracies enjoyed a high degree of power, the French National Assembly created 83 *départements*, administrative units of roughly equal size and mostly corresponding to »natural« geographical features such as rivers and mountain chains. One of them, the Seine-et-Marne, is the subject of Heinrich Blömeke's exhaustive study. First published in German in 1989 and updated to account for recent scholarship, it focuses on the period of the Terror. Drawing on dozens of French archives from the national to the parish level, as well as manuscripts and publications held at the Bibliothèque nationale, the British Museum, the Newberry Library (Chicago) and several municipal libraries, it addresses the question of »political mobilization«.

By definition, political mobilization, or indeed politics, did not exist under the Old Regime. Decisions about law, finances, foreign policy, and other matters of state were the monopoly of the king, and even though he relied on the cooperation of *élites*, particularly his often refractory sovereign law courts, ordinary subjects had no recourse apart from sporadic and ultimately fruitless revolts. The Revolution changed all that, at least in principle. The introduction of representation and suffrage, at first limited to substantial taxpayers then, as of October 1792, extended to all men 25 or older, made it possible for a significant proportion of the people to contribute to making the laws by which they were governed. In practice, however, it was a very small portion of »the people« who forced through repressive laws, decrees and policies, known to historians and contemporaries alike as the Terror, by dint of insurrection, intimidation and demagoguery.

Under these circumstances, politics would seem to have disappeared again, suppressed now by a dictatorship rather than an absolute monarch. Yet Heinrich Blömeke argues that political mobilization flourished in the Seine-et-Marne. He delves into the records of three institutions to support this claim: 1) the »popular societies«, often known as Jacobin clubs; 2) local governments, including municipal councils and officials of the various districts comprising the *département*; and 3) surveillance committees, otherwise known as »revolutionary committees«, whose principal job was drawing up lists of suspected counterrevolutionaries to



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be arrested. The popular societies and local governments advised and often fulminated against envoys that had been sent from the national legislature (the Convention) to collect extraordinary taxes, requisition grain for the provisioning of Paris, recruit troops and punish traitors, and surveillance committees often differed from the representatives of the central government on who should be considered a suspect. They often got their way, but even when they did not, they were engaging in political mobilization.

Blömeke's study is rather limited in its geographic and temporal scope. The Seine-et-Marne was only one of 83 *départements* in a country that was extremely diverse geographically, economically, socially, culturally, linguistically, educationally and religiously. Moreover, the Terror lasted only ten months, and the heyday of popular mobilization was less than three months. The Convention proclaimed Terror »the order of the day« on September 5, 1793. It was only a slogan until September 17, when the »Law of Suspects« gave surveillance committees the power to arrest vaguely defined »enemies of liberty«. A mere 78 days later, the Law of 14 Frimaire (December 4, 1793) required the representatives on mission to obtain the approval of the Convention's Committee of Public Safety before engaging in any action and effectively made France a dictatorship. Does it really matter that Jacobins, local officials and members of surveillance committees exerted influence in policy matters during that brief window of time in that small portion of France?

As for the study's geographic limitations, Blömeke's justification is that the Seine-et-Marne, like France itself, was exceedingly diverse. It consisted of: 1) the western part of the relatively rich region of Brie, characterized by large grain-producing estates and the cities of Meaux and Fontainebleau, with their educated bourgeoisie; 2) the northern sections of the Gâtinais, a region both poor and poorly educated; and 3) the valleys of the Seine-and-Marne, where small-scale wine production was the basis of the economy and villagers rather than nobles, bourgeois or the clergy owned most of the land. This diversity made the *département* a miniature model of France, »an ideal laboratory for analyzing political mobilization« (10). This is no doubt an overstatement. No single *département* rises to the level of diversity necessary to be considered representative. Only further research in other *départements* can confirm or refute Blömeke's assertion. But this does not detract from the book's value. After all, it is in the nature of specialized studies to stimulate scholarship.

As for the study's *courte durée*, Blömeke argues that political mobilization in the last months of 1793 is significant as an »anticipation of a new political culture and new social behaviors« (386). There is more than a hint of teleology in this approach, but this may be an occupational hazard in the study of the French Revolution, an event whose promises of liberty and equality were long deferred, and indeed are far from realized even today.



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