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978-1-107-02595-0 - The Calendar in Revolutionary France: Perceptions of Time in Literature, Culture, Politics

Sanja Perovic

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## THE CALENDAR IN REVOLUTIONARY FRANCE

One of the most unusual decisions of the leaders of the French Revolution – and one that had immense practical as well as symbolic impact – was to abandon customarily accepted ways of calculating date and time to create a revolutionary calendar. The experiment lasted from 1793 to 1805 and prompted all sorts of questions about the nature of time, ways of measuring it and its relationship to individual, community, communication and creative life. This study traces the course of the revolutionary calendar, from its cultural origins to its decline and fall. Tracing the parallel stories of the calendar and the literary genius of its creator, Sylvain Maréchal, from the Enlightenment to the Napoleonic era, Sanja Perovic reconsiders the status of the French Revolution as the purported ‘origin’ of modernity, the modern experience of time and the relationship between the imagination and political action.

SANJA PEROVIC is Lecturer in the French Department at King’s College London.

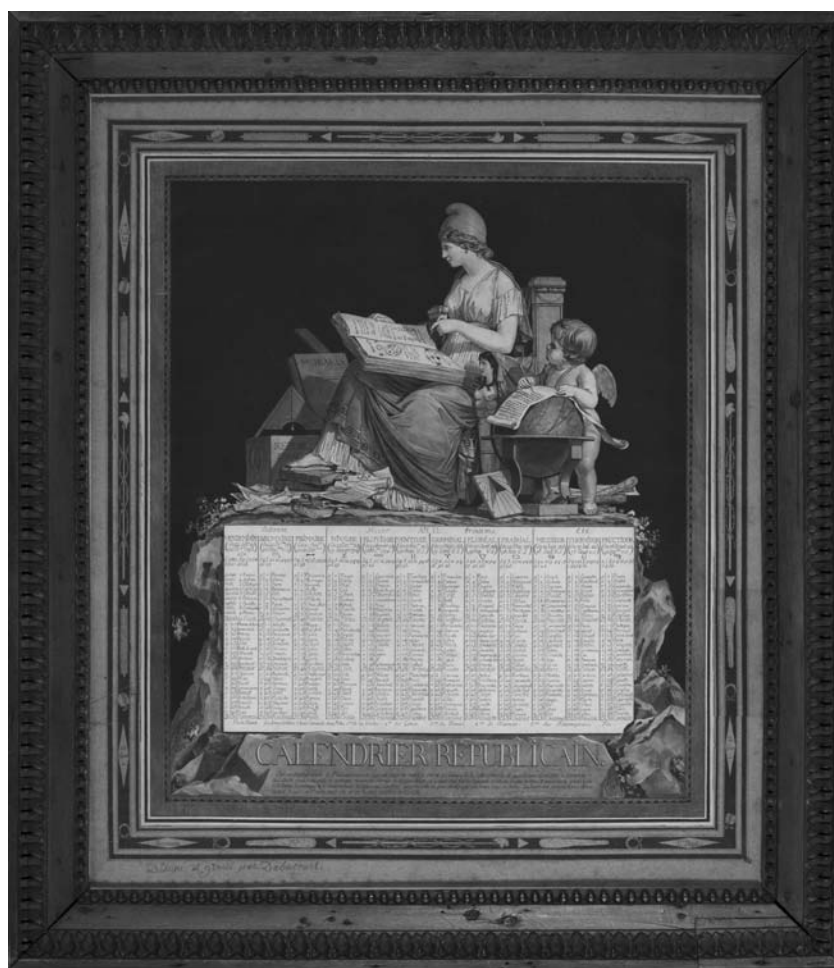
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*King's College London*



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*Chronology of Gregorian  
and Republican Calendars*

	1788
09-Jan	Sylvain Maréchal's <i>Almanach des honnêtes gens</i> burnt by the royal censor
08-Aug	The Etats-généraux are convoked for 1 May
	1789
	1789
05-May	Opening of the Etats-généraux
17-Jun	Le tiers état constitutes itself as a National Assembly
20-Jun	Serment du jeu de paume
14-Jul	Fall of the Bastille
04-Aug	Abolition of feudalism and of certain seigneurial rights
26-Aug	Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen
06-Oct	The king is taken back to Paris
	1790
21-May	Paris is divided into forty-eight sections
14-Jul	Fête de la Fédération
	1791
20-Jun	Flight of the king and his family
21-Jun	The king is arrested at Varennes
13-Sep	Louis XVI approves the revised Constitution
30-Sep	Constituent Assembly dissolved
01-Oct	First session of the Legislative Assembly

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	1792
02-Jan	<b>Legislative Assembly decides that 1 January 1792 is the beginning of Year IV of Liberty.</b> This means that Year III only lasts from July 14 to December 31 1791
10-Aug	Constitution of the revolutionary Commune of Paris
18-Aug	Capture of the Tuileries
End of August	Abolition of the last religious orders
2/5-Sep	<b>First mention of 10 August as the beginning of Year I of Equality</b>
20-Sep	Massacres in the prisons of Paris
	French victory at Valmy. Civil registry established
	Law on divorce. End of the Legislative Assembly
21-Sep	First session of the National Convention. Abolition of the monarchy
22-Sep	<b>Year I of the French Republic</b>
10-Dec	Opening of Louis XVI's trial
December	Convention demands a report on calendar reform
	1793
21-Jan	Louis XVI is guillotined
31-May	Uprising against the Girondins
02-Jun	A second demonstration against the Convention
	Arrest of the Girondin deputies
13-Jul	Assassination of Marat
27-Jul	Robespierre elected to the Committee of Public Safety
01-Aug	Barère demands Marie-Antoinette's transfer to the Conciergerie and the destruction of the royal tombs at St Denis
10-Aug	David's Festival features a bonfire destroying all the marks of feudalism
05-Sep	Barère demands the 'mise de la Terreur à l'ordre du jour', but this is not implemented

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10-Sep	<b>Romme's Report on the Republican Calendar</b>
05-Oct	<b>The Commune votes to publish 2,000 copies of Sylvain Maréchal's <i>Almanach des Républicains</i>. Reverses its decision after the Convention decides to adopt Romme's first five proposals for a Republican calendar the same day</b>
	Year II
10-Oct/19 Vendémiaire	Constitution is suspended
16-Oct/25 Vendémiaire	Execution of Marie-Antoinette
18-Oct/27 Vendémiaire	<b>First performance of Sylvain Maréchal's <i>Le jugement dernier des rois</i></b>
5-Nov/15 Brumaire	<b>Marie-Joseph Chénier demands festivals for the new calendar</b>
10-Nov/20 Brumaire	<b>La Fête de la Raison in Notre-Dame</b>
21-Nov/1 Frimaire	Robespierre attacks atheism in the Jacobin Club
24-Nov/4 Frimaire	<b>Adoption of Fabre d'Eglantine's nomenclature for calendar</b>
Brumaire/Frimaire	The first churches are closed in and around Paris
	1794
3-Jan/12 Nivôse	<b>Sylvain Maréchal's <i>La Fête de la Rosière</i> slated for performance</b>
13-14-Jan/23-24 Nivôse	Fabre d'Eglantine arrested for corruption
21-Jan/2 Pluviôse	<b><i>Le jugement dernier des rois</i> replaced at the Théâtre de la République</b>
21-Mar/1 Germinal	Opening of the trial of the Hébertistes
24-Mar/4 Germinal	Execution of the Hébertistes, including Cloutz
2-Apr/13 Germinal	Trial of the Dantonists
5-Apr/16 Germinal	Death of Fabre d'Eglantine
13-Apr/24 Germinal	Death of Chaumette
16-Apr/27 Germinal	The Brutus section stops meeting
Germinal and Floréal	Waves of de-Christianization
7-May/18 Floréal	Decree of the Convention recognizing the Supreme Being

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8-Jun/20 Prairial                      **Festival of the Supreme Being  
celebrated on the day of the  
Pentecost. In his plans, Robespierre  
includes Maréchal's 36 *Hymnes  
Décadaires***

27-July/9 Thermidor                      Robespierre and his supporters arrested  
28-July/10 Thermidor                      Execution of Robespierre, Saint-  
Just, Couthon and nineteen other  
Robespierrists

23-Aug/6 Fructidor                      **Sylvain Maréchal's *Denys le tyran*, with  
music by Grétry, performed at the  
Théâtre des Arts (Opéra)**

Year III  
Vendémiaire–Nivôse                      **Renewed discussion on the *fêtes  
décadaires***

1795  
4-Feb/19 Pluviôse                      Arrest of Babeuf  
7-Apr/18 Germinal                      Introduction of metric system  
20-May/1 Prairial                      Convention invaded by delegation  
demanding bread and the Constitution of  
Year II

31-May/12 Prairial                      Suppression of the Revolutionary Tribunal  
8-June/20 Prairial                      Death of Louis XVII in the Temple  
17-June/29 Prairial                      Suicide of Gilbert Romme  
22-Aug/5 Fructidor                      Constitution of Year III agreed,  
accompanied by the law of two-thirds  
23-Aug/6 Fructidor                      Closure of clubs and popular societies

Year IV  
5-Oct/13 Vendémiaire                      Crushing of the royalist revolt  
25-Oct/3 Brumaire IV                      **Law decreeing that all festivals  
henceforth take place on the *décadi*,  
except two: Foundation of the  
Republic on 1 vendémiaire and  
the fall of Robespierre on 9 and 10  
thermidor**

31 October/9 Brumaire                      Election of the Directory

*Chronology of Gregorian and Republican Calendars* xiii

	1796
30-Mar/10 Germinal	Babeuf sets up the Insurrectionary Committee for his ‘Conspiracy of Equals’
10-May/21 Floréal	Babeuf arrested
	Year V
	1797
January/Nivôse	Establishment of the cult of Theophilanthropy
27-May/8 Prairial	Death of Babeuf and Darthé
4-Sep/18 Fructidor	Coup d’état of 18 Fructidor
15-Sep/29 Fructidor	<b>Councils no longer to meet on <i>décadis</i> and will observe all national festivals</b>
	Year VI
	1798
3-Apr/14 Germinal	<b>Decree insisting on the Republican calendar</b>
4-Aug/17 Thermidor	<b>Re-proclamation of the <i>décadi</i> as the only official day of rest</b>
30-Aug/13 Fructidor	<b>Organization of the <i>décadi</i> celebrations, including law that marriage can only be celebrated on the <i>décadi</i></b>
	<b>Neufchâteau organises a series of national festivals for the year</b>
9-Sep/23 Fructidor	<b>Decree that all public life (fairs, markets etc) be celebrated on the Republican calendar</b>
	Year VIII
	1799
9-Nov/18 Brumaire	Napoléon becomes commander of the army in Paris
	Executive Directory is overthrown and replaced by a ‘Consulat’
21-Nov /30 Brumaire	<b>Laplace decrees that Republican calendar is maintained</b>

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23-Dec/2 Nivôse	<b>Laplace decrees that only two public festivals remain in the calendar: 14 July and 1 Vendémiaire</b>
	1800
26-July/7 Thermidor	<b><i>Décadi</i> stipulated for civil use only</b>
	Year IX
	1801
15-July/26 Messidor	Concordat is signed
	Year X
	1802
8-Apr/28 Germinal	Concordat made public in time for Easter <b>Sunday re-established as the official day of rest for government employees</b>
2-Aug/14 Thermidor	Napoléon named Consul for life
	Year XI
	1803
18-Jan/28 Pluviôse 1803	<b>Death of Sylvain Maréchal</b>
	Year XII
	1804
18-May/28 Floréal	Napoléon declares himself emperor
	Year XIII
2-Dec/11 Frimaire	Coronation
	1805
2-Sep/15 Fructidor	<b>Senate decides to reconsider the restoration of the Gregorian calendar</b>
8-Sep/22 Fructidor	<b>Laplace's report and the abolition of the Republican calendar</b>
	1806
1-Jan/11 Nivôse	<b>Gregorian calendar restored</b>