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.
THE CALENDAR IN REVOLUTIONARY FRANCE

Perceptions of Time in Literature, Culture, Politics

SANJA PEROVIC

King's College London
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This book began at Stanford University and I wish to express my gratitude to Sepp Gumbrecht, who first encouraged me to embark on this project, for his continuing advice, support and enthusiasm. I also wish to thank Jean-Marie Apostolidès and acknowledge the late Richard Rorty, both of whom provided useful guidance at an early stage of this project. At a crucial point in my thinking on this topic, Thomas Pavel gave me excellent suggestions that I have tried to follow. I would also like to thank Criscillia Benford, Marilynn Desmond, Emma Gilligan, Jan Goldstein, Tamara Griggs, Rebecca Lemon, Ellen McClure, Larry Norman, Catriona Seth, Chenxi Tang, Caroline Warman and the participants of the Early Modern France workshop at the University of Chicago, all of whom have read or commented on parts of the manuscript. I owe a special debt of gratitude to my wonderful colleagues at King’s College London who have made teaching and working such a pleasure, in particular to Simon Gaunt, Nicholas Harrison and Jo Malt for their invaluable advice and generosity. Two anonymous readers for the Press made excellent suggestions for improving the manuscript. Any remaining errors in these pages are, of course, entirely my own. Anne-Célia Feutrie provided much appreciated help in the final stages of editing. Matthew Shaw generously shared his own research on the Republican calendar with me.

A Geballe Dissertation Fellowship at the Stanford Humanities Centre provided financial support in the earlier stages of this project, and I would like to thank King’s College London for help with the cost of illustrations. I would also like to acknowledge the Musée de la Révolution française de Vizille, and especially Annick Le Gall, for a very hospitable stay during my preliminary research on this project.

This book has benefitted from being presented at numerous conferences, in particular the British Society of Eighteenth-Century Studies where the opportunity to present the Haydn Mason lecture helped revise my thinking on the topic. Some of the material in Chapter 1 was published in my
Acknowledgements


Last but hardly least, my deepest thanks go to my parents for everything and more. This book is dedicated with much love to Dimitris, who has lived with it far longer than anyone should, but always with good humour and patience.
**Chronology of Gregorian and Republican Calendars**

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

1792

02-Jan
Legislative Assembly decides that 1 January 1792 is the beginning of Year IV of Liberty. This means that Year III only lasts from July 14 to December 31 1791

10-Aug
Constitution of the revolutionary Commune of Paris
Capture of the Tuileries

18-Aug
Abolition of the last religious orders

End of August
First mention of 10 August as the beginning of Year I of Equality

2/5-Sep
Massacres in the prisons of Paris

20-Sep
French victory at Valmy. Civil registry established

21-Sep
First session of the National Convention. Abolition of the monarchy

22-Sep
Year I of the French Republic

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

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
Chronology of Gregorian and Republican Calendars

10-Sep
Romme’s Report on the Republican Calendar

05-Oct
The Commune votes to publish 2,000 copies of Sylvain Maréchal’s *Almanach des Républicains*. Reverses its decision after the Convention decides to adopt Romme’s first five proposals for a Republican calendar the same day

10-Oct/19 Vendémiaire
Constitution is suspended

16-Oct/25 Vendémiaire
Execution of Marie-Antoinette

18-Oct/27 Vendémiaire
First performance of Sylvain Maréchal’s *Le jugement dernier des rois*

5-Nov/15 Brumaire
Marie-Joseph Chénier demands festivals for the new calendar

10-Nov/20 Brumaire
La Fête de la Raison in Notre-Dame

21-Nov/1 Frimaire
Robespierre attacks atheism in the Jacobin Club

24-Nov/4 Frimaire
Adoption of Fabre d’Eglantine’s nomenclature for calendar

Brumaire/Frimaire
The first churches are closed in and around Paris

3-Jan/12 Nivôse
Sylvain Maréchal’s *La Fête de la Rosière* slated for performance

13–14-Jan/23–24 Nivôse
Fabre d’Eglantine arrested for corruption

21-Jan/2 Pluviôse
*Le jugement dernier des rois replaced at the Théâtre de la République*

21-Mar/1 Germinal
Opening of the trial of the Hébertistes

24-Mar/4 Germinal
Execution of the Hébertistes, including Clootz

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
Chronology of Gregorian and Republican Calendars

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 Robespierists

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

Year III  
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

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  Councils no longer to meet on décadi and will observe all national festivals

Year VI
1798
3-Apr/14 Germinal  Decree insisting on the Republican calendar
4-Aug/17 Thermidor  Re-proclamation of the décadi as the only official day of rest
30-Aug/13 Fructidor  Organization of the décadi celebrations, including law that marriage can only be celebrated on the décadi
Neufchâteau organises a series of national festivals for the year
9-Sep/23 Fructidor  Decree that all public life (fairs, markets etc) be celebrated on the Republican calendar

Year VIII
1799
9-Nov/18 Brumaire  Napoléon becomes commander of the army in Paris
Executive Directory is overthrown and replaced by a ‘Consular’
21-Nov/30 Brumaire  Laplace decrees that Republican calendar is maintained
23-Dec/2 Nivôse

Laplace decrees that only two public festivals remain in the calendar: 14 July and 1 Vendémiaire

1800

26-July/7 Thermidor

Décadî stipulated for civil use only

Year IX
1801

15-July/26 Messidor

Concordat is signed

Year X
1802

8-Apr/28 Germinal

Concordat made public in time for Easter Sunday re-established as the official day of rest for government employees

2-Aug/14 Thermidor

Napoléon named Consul for life

Year XI
1803

18-Jan/28 Pluviôse 1803

Death of Sylvain Maréchal

Year XII
1804

18-May/28 Floréal

Napoléon declares himself emperor

Year XIII
1805

2-Dec/11 Frimaire

Coronation

1806

2-Sep/15 Fructidor

Senate decides to reconsider the restoration of the Gregorian calendar

8-Sep/22 Fructidor

Laplace’s report and the abolition of the Republican calendar

1-Jan/11 Nivôse

Gregorian calendar restored