

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.

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THE CALENDAR IN REVOLUTIONARY FRANCE

Perceptions of Time in Literature, Culture, Politics

SANJA PEROVIC

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 États-généraux are convoked for 1 May
	1789
	1789
05-May	Opening of the États-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

	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
18-Aug	Capture of the Tuileries
End of August	Abolition of the last religious orders
	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
	Law on divorce. End of the Legislative Assembly
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
	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

10-Sep	Romme's Report on the Republican Calendar
05-Oct	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
	Year II
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 <i>Le jugement dernier des rois</i>
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
	1794
3-Jan/12 Nivôse	Sylvain Maréchal's <i>La Fête de la Rosière</i> slated for performance
13-14-Jan/23-24 Nivôse	Fabre d'Eglantine arrested for corruption
21-Jan/2 Pluviôse	<i>Le jugement dernier des rois</i> 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 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 <i>Hymnes Décadaires</i>
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 <i>Denys le tyran</i>, with music by Grétry, performed at the Théâtre des Arts (Opéra)
	Year III
Vendémiaire–Nivôse	Renewed discussion on the <i>fêtes décadares</i>
	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 <i>décadi</i>, 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

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	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 <i>décadis</i> 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 <i>décadi</i> as the only official day of rest
30-Aug/13 Fructidor	Organization of the <i>décadi</i> celebrations, including law that marriage can only be celebrated on the <i>décadi</i>
	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 ‘Consulat’
21-Nov /30 Brumaire	Laplace decrees that Republican calendar is maintained

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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	<i>Décadi</i> 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 Nivôse 1803	Death of Sylvain Maréchal
	Year XII
	1804
18-May/28 Floréal	Napoléon declares himself emperor
	Year XIII
2-Dec/11 Frimaire	Coronation
	1805
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
	1806
1-Jan/11 Nivôse	Gregorian calendar restored