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Bastille Day Dinners in Scotland and Festivals in France: Transnational Relations or Monologues in the 1790s?

Rémy DUTHILLE

- 1 The French Revolution profoundly divided Scottish public opinion; while conservatism and Toryism were very strong under the stewardship of Henry Dundas, reform societies multiplied in 1792, adopting French forms of address and affirming their support to the principles of the Revolution (Harris, *Scotland in the Age of the French Revolution*; Harris, *The Scottish People and the French Revolution*; Brims). This paper wishes to investigate the ways in which some Scots related to French revolutionaries through public dinners held in both countries. The prism of sociability matters because dinners can be considered as illocutionary acts, as actions rather than mere statements of facts. They were supposed to shape political reality, not just comment on it. By the 1790s, formal dinners in Scotland as in England were cast in a mould comprising toasts, songs, and speeches; they were well planned in advance by a committee of croupiers (stewards in England) who decided in what order orators were to talk and what toasts they would give. Though the extant sources leave this process largely invisible, and do not always reveal much about decoration, music or other symbolic elements, reports in newspapers mattered because they gave visibility to dinners and encouraged other groups to imitate or adapt the toasts for their own purposes, as happened with radicals in Scotland in 1792-1793. Dinners played an important role in cementing circles of sociability involving those actually taking part in the dinner, and in stating their principles, loyalties and commitments to the wider community (Duthille). Holding dinners in favour of the French Revolution was by itself a strong statement in Dundasian Scotland; hence the nervous reaction of the authorities, which felt embarrassed and aggrieved yet, at least until the outbreak of war in February 1793, could not forbid such meetings.

- 2 Sociable events involving Scots celebrating the French Revolution took place in both Scotland and France. Bastille Day dinners took place in Scotland on 14 July 1790, 1791 and 1792. In France, Jacobins in seaports – Nantes, Bordeaux, Rouen, Marseille – gave elaborate international festivals in the honour of Scots and other Britons from August 1790 until weeks before the outbreak of the war. The war prevented celebrations in both countries, until, in 1798, the Directory lionized Thomas Muir as a martyr of Pitt’s despotism and hero of liberty.
- 3 While accounts of 1790s Scotland naturally dealt with Scottish events, they did not mention French ones. Confronting both sets of dinners suggests that in both countries, the organisers of dinners tried to relate to the nation across the Channel, but could do so only in symbolic ways. The relation was symbolic in that the foreigners seemed eerily absent from the dinners, either because they were actually not there (as in the case of Scottish dinners), or, when the Scots were present at French festivals, they were treated as figureheads and representatives on which the French organizers projected their own political ideals. Both the Scottish dinners and the French festivals addressed the other nation, sometimes treating foreign guests of honour as representatives of their nation. It is all too easy to consider such sociable manifestations as complacent monologues rather than real dialogues. Yet, this paper wishes to highlight the richness of the representation of the other country, and especially the shift from early cosmopolitan idealism to defiance as war loomed and then broke out. England always loomed between the French and the Scots, the French never conflating the Scots with the English but calling them to resist Pitt’s “English” despotism.
- 4 Asking whether such dinners were monologues or dialogues is no mere rhetorical question. First, there may be no clear answer due to the paucity of sources: a dialogue supposes some form of question and answer, but the sources usually give access to the discourse of one partner only. Thus, city and departmental archives in France document the international festivals given in Bordeaux and other cities, from the point of view of the Jacobin club that organized them, but the responses, if any, of the Scottish and other British and foreign guests are not recorded. Secondly, the question of a dialogue between French revolutionaries and foreign admirers raises the issue to the Revolution’s status: an example to the world that foreign peoples should admire and imitate? To put it another way, was Paris the revolutionary (from 1792, the republican) capital of the world? Or were the French revolutionaries ready to borrow from foreign groups and interact with them on an equal footing?
- 5 Before examining the celebrations more in detail, the social identity of the celebrants must be established. The Bastille Day dinners, held in the main urban centres, involved only a few dozen Scots. In sociological terms, the men who sat down to Whig dinners came from the nobility, gentry and the professions (the urban middling sorts). The Scottish guests in French seaports were a few captains, boatswains or merchants (with perhaps a few sailors in Nantes). The Scottish participants were all men, in both countries. Political dinners were homosocial activities in Scotland (as in England). Women participated in French festivals, many of which included tableaux of family life exalting women’s roles as mothers; women were also expected to attend festivals as spectators. A female club even organized an event in Bordeaux: they invited the Scots, but those Scottish guests were all men on account of their occupations as merchants or seamen. By contrast to French festivals which addressed women and the poor as spectators, and sometimes as actors, the dinners in Scotland involved only males,

drawn mostly, but not only, from the élites. The Scots who celebrated the French Revolution in dinners, then, were not a representative section of the people in terms of gender or sociology.

- 6 The first section attempts to flesh out the socio-political analysis of Bastille Day dinners in Scotland. The rest of the article is concerned with the reversed perspective of the French. Section 2 is devoted to the “flag festivals” that honoured Scotsmen and other nationals as representatives of “free nations”, from 1790 to the eve of the war in 1793. The third and final section illustrates the political and propagandistic dimension of such dinners, showing how the French Directory used the image of the martyr Thomas Muir to antagonize Britain and pursue its own diplomatic and ideological goals.

1. Celebrating Bastille Day in Scotland, 1790-1792: “relating” to the French Revolution?

- 7 From 1790 to 1792, Scottish dinners in celebration of the French Revolution were the most conspicuous events in Britain after the London dinners (where the Whig élites gathered), and the ill-fated Birmingham dinner of 14 July 1791, which gave rise to the Priestley riots, the single most violent riot in 1790s Britain. There is evidence of celebrations in 1790 in Dundee, in 1791 in the main Scottish cities: Edinburgh, Glasgow, Dundee again, and Paisley. In 1792, celebrations took place in Edinburgh and East Linton, a decent showing given the chilling effect of the Birmingham riots. Only half a dozen English provincial cities, as well as Dublin and Belfast left traces in the press. The dinners in Scotland became visible because most of them took place in famous, large taverns in the city centres, and because their proceedings were published in newspapers.
- 8 During the summer of 1790, the Whig Club of Dundee celebrated the Glorious Revolution, first sending an address to the French National Assembly on 4 June 1790, and then giving toasts during a dinner held on 27 August (*Caledonian Mercury*, 20 September 1790). For the Dundee Whigs, presided by the MP George Dempster of Dunnichen,¹ the French Revolution was no less than “[t]he triumph of liberty and reason, over despotism, ignorance and superstition”, a “renovation [...] effected without a civil war”. To this outpouring of “sentiments of admiration and delight” (*Caledonian Mercury*, 20 September 1790), Treillard, the President of the National Assembly, answered with a gracious letter on 31 July. In keeping with the dominant mood prevailing in France, he prophesied the abolition of barriers between England and France and the advent of universal brotherhood. The letter also presented Britain as a stable, orderly and prosperous nation, implying that it did not need a revolution. The toasts were loyal, but the company toasted “Great Britain, and its happy Constitution”, before the King and royal family: such a Whig priority of constitution over king was still acceptable, but became highly objectionable from 1792 in the context of mounting loyalism. Whig principles, enshrined in the respect of the Glorious Revolution, were paramount, the third toast paying homage to “the glorious and immortal memory of William the Third.” (*Caledonian Mercury*, 20 September 1790). Another one called for the abolition of all religious tests. The *Edinburgh Advertiser* published a toast against slavery and two radical ones omitted from other papers: “May all Despotisms soon meet with the fate of French despotism”; “Rights of Man, and an equal representation to the people” (Harris, « How Radical a Town? » 190). The 27

August dinner gives more clues about the political outlook of the Dundee Whigs. Though the meeting was not advertised as a French Revolution dinner, it partook of this character to some extent. Treilhard's answer was read out. Some of the toasts referred to the Revolution. Thirdly, and more tellingly, "[t]he Members appeared with the National Cockade." A few toasts concerning France (the National Assembly, "the memory of the demolition of the Bastille" and a few others) and echoing the universalism of the French (peace, the end of conquest wars) coexisted with a more traditional British patriotism centred on imperial victory and economic prosperity ("May the arms of Britain always prevail, when she is forced into a war."). The Dundee Whigs welcomed the French Revolution as a replica of the Glorious Revolution of Britain, in a unionist North British version of the events that elided the protracted Williamite war in Scotland and Jacobite opposition (Kidd).

- 9 On 14 July 1791, celebrations occurred not only in Dundee, but in Edinburgh, Glasgow and Paisley as well. (Brims 76-89) The geographical spread suggests a need for supporters of the French Revolution to make a public stance, despite, or perhaps because of, hardening opposition to revolution and reform in Scotland. The dinners were held by the opposition Whigs, who felt increasingly isolated as Henry Dundas, then managing Scotland to the benefit of the Pitt administration, was increasing his influence little by little. The same ideology, as expressed in toasts, pervaded all four celebrations, with a radical edge in Paisley. The dinners revealed the limits of fellowship with French revolutionaries, in the context of official displeasure and mounting public criticism. The toasts were very similar, though not identical, to those drunk in London a year before. This came from the large degree of integration of the Scottish Whigs in British circles, many of them pledging their loyalty to Fox (MacLeod 79-82). Another reason for such continuity is that the reformers clung to the hope that the French Revolution heralded universal liberty and stability. The events since July 1790, especially Louis XVI's flight to Varennes and its fallout in the form of rising republican sentiment, and violence, as well as Pitt and Dundas's hardening stances dented the hopes of some Scottish Whigs.
- 10 The Dundee Whigs' enthusiasm for the French Revolution was in retreat (*Edinburgh Evening Courant*, 21 July 1791). They honoured the King, royal family, constitution, and William III in good loyal Hanoverian fashion. They also wished for "Stability to the New Constitution of France" and an end to revolutionary ebullience. Two toasts conveyed Whig liberal positions on current issues in Parliament, in the wake of William Wilberforce's antislavery campaigns and the Dissenters' campaigns for the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts. Given the loyalism permeating some toasts, "Rights of Men, and an equal Representation to the People" involved no support to Paine's iconoclastic republicanism, or to democracy. The Dundee Whigs were taking an opposite trajectory: by late 1792, they had deserted the cause of parliamentary reform; the club's chairman helped the authorities to fight Paine's doctrine and the club purged itself of suspected Jacobins (Harris, « How Radical a Town? » 190).
- 11 The *Scots Magazine* noted with satisfaction, given the carnage that occurred in Birmingham, that "no disturbances took place" at Edinburgh and Glasgow.² Expectations of violence were afloat before the 14th of July and, like many government supporters, the Lord Advocate of Scotland, Robert Dundas, took a stern view of French Revolution dinners.³ He had received an invitation to the dinner at the Crown and Anchor in London, and though the invitation mentioned that domestic politics would

not be discussed, he vented his indignation at such proselytizing and tried to prevent the Edinburgh dinner. He had the Lord Provost James Sterling forward the list of guests to him. Stirling tried to reassure him that the dinner was harmless.

- 12 In Edinburgh, the company assembled at Fortune's Tavern, under the chairmanship of Robert Fergusson of Craigdarroch, a country gentleman, advocate and county reformer. Fortune's Tavern "was situated in one of the cramped closes just north of the city guard house on High Street in Edinburgh's Old Town"; it housed meetings of burgh reformers, and Whigs (but the latter chose another more prestigious location to celebrate their Fox dinners from 1811) (Orme 594; Pentland, « Patriotism, Universalism and the Scottish Conventions, 1792-1794 » 341). The report sent to Dundas counted seventy-three guests, including thirteen students, ten advocates and a sprinkling of merchants, shopkeepers, and farmers. The ticket, priced at 2/6d in Edinburgh as well as in Glasgow, excluded the poor.⁴ The report did not include toasts, but the press listed them. As with the 1790 Crown and Anchor dinner, the list started with "The Majesty of the People" and "The Rights of Man", though the loyal toast most probably came first.⁵ There was one direct reminder of revolutionary violence involved in the Storming of the Bastille, which formed the ultimate occasion for the meeting: "Arne, the grenadier, who first mounted the walls of the Bastille." Another daring gesture was toasting Mackintosh, Paine and Priestley. Mackintosh, whose Whiggish *Vindiciae Gallicae* was a much-admired reply to Burke, was safe enough (though Scottish radicals soon adopted it); but Paine and Priestley were already notorious. Reference to Paine and the Bastille, however, came from a general, loose commitment to liberty, certainly not to democracy. There was no talk of the socio-economic consequences that French liberty could entail. Some of those who attended, and certainly the president, held rather conservative views as regarded the balanced constitution guaranteed by men of property, which they deemed a necessity for Britain. In the 1780s, and still in 1792, Fergusson campaigned for the lowering of the country franchise to give the vote to lesser landowners, but he did so to restore the balance of the constitution, and he opposed universal suffrage (Brims 52-53).
- 13 In Glasgow, "a very numerous and respectable body of gentlemen" met at the Tontine Tavern. A guidebook from 1792 describes the latter tavern as the principal "house of public accommodation" of Glasgow, comprising "one of the most elegant and spacious Coffee-rooms in Britain, which, from its proximity to the Exchange, is extremely [sic] convenient for the mercantile part of the community" (Ross 21). The meeting was chaired by a man of property, Colonel Dalrymple of Cleland, and John Millar assisted him as croupier. Dalrymple was an advanced reformer; he was to play a central role in the Friends of the People from 1792. The Scottish Friends of the People, aggregating Foxite Whigs, dissenting ministers and artisans, were closer in social composition and ideology to the London Corresponding Society than to the English Friends of the People, who were patrician Whigs. The King cashiered Dalrymple from the army for his involvement in reform politics (Harris, *The Scottish People and the French Revolution* 97). Millar, who had been Professor of Civil Law since 1761, was accused of leading a democratic faction with the University; George Jardine and Thomas Reid, who belonged to Millar's set, also attended the dinner (Harris, *The Scottish People and the French Revolution* 25). The company toasted the French Revolution before the loyal toast: "May the glorious Revolution be as productive of happiness to the French nation as it now promises to be" (*Edinburgh Evening Courant*, 18 July 1791). The Whigs still saw 1789 as a replica of the Glorious Revolution, not as a rebellion or the advent of democracy. The

toasts also took up the symbolism of light and shade that was so prominent the year before: “May the dawn of liberty on the continent be soon followed by its meridian splendour.” In a more practical strain, toasts included the classic “religious and civil liberty” and “trade and manufactures be unrestrained by the fetters of monopoly”, a sentiment redolent of the principles of Adam Smith, erstwhile Professor at Glasgow University.

- 14 At Paisley, the dinner was no rendezvous for the liberal gentry and men of property as in Edinburgh and Glasgow, but a raucous affair. On the School-hill, “a motto, in large capitals, Universal Liberty” was installed, visible to a numerous assembly, and “a battery of four six pounders was erected and three salutes discharged”. “At every salute a grand cheer was vociferated. Liberty! Liberty! Universal Liberty!” (“Extract from a letter from Paisley, July 14”). Such a ceremony, punctuated by many toasts to French liberty, abolitionism, religious emancipation, and French heroes, suggests that Whiggish, reformist feelings could have a wider audience than the select few assembled in other cities, though it is impossible to determine how far down the social scale they reached, and how deeply they were held.
- 15 All four meetings expressed a commitment to international cooperation and wishes for a spread of liberty worldwide. The Dundee meeting was still committed to a concept of universal liberty, toasting “Emancipation to Spain and the other enslaved nations of Europe” (*Edinburgh Evening Courant*, 21 July 1791). All four meetings toasted Poland, expressing the wish that the recent (3 May) Constitution would solve the problems of a kingdom riddled with an anarchical nobility and dependence on Russia. The Polish constitution was a promising triumph of enlightened liberty. The Glasgow Whigs toasted: “May the British, Irish, American, French, and Polish nations, unite against the enemies of the liberties and rights of men” (*Edinburgh Evening Courant*, 18 July 1791). Those nations were to be honoured by the French Jacobins in Bordeaux and Nantes as the “free nations” of the world: this remarkable political alignment may be explainable by links between merchants of Bordeaux, Nantes, and Glasgow.
- 16 There was pressure brought to bear on reformers, and coming out as an organizer of a Bastille Day dinner came at a cost. Though none in Scotland suffered like Priestley in Birmingham, retribution came in the form of abuse and harassment. A draft letter by Thomas Reid, written within a month after the Glasgow dinner, is revealing. The famous Aberdonian philosopher of Common Sense explained his motives for attending:
- I have been very long perswaded, that a Nation, to be free, needs onely to know the Rights of Man. I have lived to see this Knowledge spread far beyond my most sanguine hopes, and produce glorious Effects. God grant it may spread more and more & that those who taste the Sweets of Liberty may not turn giddy but make a wise and sober Use of it.⁶
- 17 Reid still had some confidence in the course of the Revolution, praising the National Assembly for its magnanimous treatment of Louis XVI after Varennes. However, dramatic events ruled out any rosy optimism. Reid received a threatening anonymous letter and felt obliged to defend his conduct (Reid 224). Despite this pressure, the guests in all Scottish cities got away scot-free. The press could not find any objectionable toast: “no one could be supposed to reflect, in the smallest degree, on the present government of Britain”.⁷ The *Caledonian Mercury* (16 July 1791) also noted the “moderation and propriety”, which consisted in both applauding French emancipation and “the blessings enjoyed by all ranks in these kingdoms, in consequence of our own

glorious constitution.” Celebrating the French Revolution was still acceptable, provided one did not criticize the Pitt administration or the Hanoverian polity.

- 18 The conveners of the Bastille dinners did not want a revolution in Britain. Their subsequent conduct forbids to interpret their support to Paine as adherence to republicanism: nearly all of them stopped their endeavours for reform by 1792 (Brims 87). The analysis of Scottish dinners in 1791 brings out several features of the movement in general. First, there was a strong British dimension: the toast lists suggest a high degree of political integration with England. This may be due to the nature of the ideology displayed on 14 July, which emphasizes universal values and international brotherhood, at the expense of local specificities. It may also have to do with the truncated nature of the evidence, which comprises general toasts also drunk in London and elsewhere in London, but not the speeches, which presumably applied to Scottish men, events and issues. Secondly: a continued strong commitment to the French Revolution was mitigated with wishes for the stability of France, the optimistic days of July 1790 giving way to more sobering reflections. Thirdly: the rise of conservative opinion, even before the wave of popular loyalism, placed reformers on the defensive. Though they could still hold their dinners, they faced a barrage of criticism and intimidation.
- 19 The 14 July 1791 celebrations were overshadowed, however, by the riots that took place in Birmingham and resulted in the destruction of the houses and property of Joseph Priestley and like-minded Dissenters. The riots had a chilling effect, especially in England, where very few celebrations took place in 1792, and then only in the form of unadvertised, private parties. The newspaper coverage abated considerably, but there is enough to state that, in contrast with England, “no less than four different public companies, each of them numerous attended” (*Star*, 18 July 1792) met in Edinburgh. In neighbouring East Linton, toasts were drunk to Fox, the Earl of Lauderdale and other Scottish lords, and various liberal causes, denoting a Whig meeting, apparently without any link to the burgeoning radical movement of the Scottish Friends of the People (*Caledonian Mercury*, 28 July 1792). Bastille Day offered the beleaguered Scottish Whigs an opportunity to make a show of strength and reassert their principles publicly, at the dinner and in the press. French Revolution celebrations had become partisan affairs. Meanwhile, in Belfast, the Volunteers assembled and issued a declaration to the people of Ireland, a very divisive move at the time (Hill 226). A long account of the celebration, complete with speeches, toasts and songs, was published in Edinburgh by the radical bookseller John Thompson, a sure sign of the constant circulations between the two islands at a time of ebullience on both sides (Harris, *The Scottish People and the French Revolution* 80).
- 20 The 1792 celebrations suggest that the reception of the French Revolution varied enormously according to the national contexts of England, Scotland, and Ireland. In Scotland, Whiggism held out against growing loyalism, but the radical Friends of the People were too weak to stage their demonstrations and assume a visible role in the public space. In the first months, the Friends of the People couched their demands of parliamentary reform in the time-hallowed language of constitutionalism and eschewed any revolutionary internationalism (Brims, “Scottish Radicalism and the United Irishmen”, 151-52). A minority of Scots robustly supported the French Revolution. Recent studies of 1790s Scotland have highlighted the role of radicalism and relativized conservatism, at least in 1792 (Pentland, “The French Revolution,

Scottish Radicalism and the “People Who Were Called Jacobins””; Harris, *The Scottish People and the French Revolution*, chap.3).

- 21 While the London dinners could boast French guests of honour in 1790 and 1791, the Scottish dinners were Scottish affairs, nurturing Scottish, not international networks. They invoked the principles of the French Revolution in the absence of the French; they did not build inter-personal, or institutional, relations with France. At least, this is suggested by the silence over Scotland in French sources, such as the *procès-verbaux* of the National Assembly, which indicates that Treilhard’s affable letter to Dundee was not followed by further correspondence. There were clear differences between the Scottish Whigs and the French revolutionaries. The more conservative Scots considered the Revolution as ended with the great liberal proclamations of 1789 and would not envision any socio-economic overhaul, or any real democracy. Their wish for a French-style Glorious Revolution could be maintained with some credibility in 1790, but the Whig group held on through interpersonal links and opposition to Tories, not because of adherence to the Revolution. They invoked the French, who were absent. Given the absence of personal relationships, Treilhard answered in the only style possible: generic, rhetorical, avoiding substantive issues. By 1792, the course of the Revolution, rushing into war and republicanism, could no longer sustain the fiction of a 1688-like restoration of ancient principles, and the Whigs, inevitably, stopped celebrations even before the repression of radicals.

2. The Scots and international festivals in France: partners or figureheads?

- 22 While some Scots celebrated the French Revolution, the French Jacobins, especially in the seaports of Nantes, Bordeaux, Rouen and Marseille, were ready to treat Scots as guests of honour at their *fêtes patriotiques*. Focusing on the cases of Nantes and Bordeaux, this section brings out the Scottish dimension that is often obscured in standard accounts of revolutionary exchange networks (Goodwin; Kennedy, *The Jacobin Clubs in the French Revolution: The First Years*; Kennedy, *The Jacobin Clubs in the French Revolution: The Middle Years*, chap. 12).
- 23 The success of the Festival of the Federation, celebrating the first anniversary of the Storming of the Bastille, encouraged the Club des Amis de la Constitution (better known as the Jacobin Club) in Nantes to organize a festival, in August 1790, for English, Scottish and Irish seamen and merchants. They called the event “fête anglo-française”, but they always distinguished the nationalities of their guests, rather than subsuming them under “Anglais”. The Jacobins had invited the captain and one sailor from each ship, a rather democratic measure given that usually only officers would be invited to naval festivals. (*Fête anglo-française, donnée par la Société des amis de la Constitution à Nantes. Le 23 août 1790.*). The possible presence of Scottish seamen among the British guests cannot be ascertained, in the absence of a guest list to establish it. The festival celebrated amity between Britain and France, suggested that peace and economic competition within a framework of free trade, should replace aggression and war. The French bourgeois in charge of the meeting (merchants, including slavers, and manufacturers) were keen to reassure their English, Scottish and Irish guests of France’s peaceable intentions, to keep business relations and trade going. Two French delegates, Français and Bougon travelled to London, where they met Whig aristocrats

like Lord Stanhope. Though there is no evidence, they may well have met Scots and networked with them. Bougon and Français's report is notable for its awareness of the existence of Scottish reform societies that supported the French constitutional reforms. They held a somewhat romantic view of Scotland, probably inspired by Ossianic readings: "Les rochers même de l'Écosse ont retenti du nom de notre révolution. Le feu sacré de la liberté porté autrefois par les bardes dans ces contrées sauvages, au bruit des exploits des Français, s'est rallumé plus vif et plus ardent" (*Rapport des députés de la Société des Amis de la Constitution* 3).

- 24 The Nantes festival inspired a spate of other festivals, centring on the flags of the four "free nations" – France, Britain, the United States, and Poland – in December 1791 and 1792. The concept had broadened to encompass two new nations and to celebrate global peace and liberty, not just Franco-British reconciliation. This time the organizers, in Bordeaux and other cities, welcomed nationals from those countries and treated them as guests of honour. To limit the demonstration to the case of Bordeaux, there were three "flag" festivals, as the different clubs in town vied for visibility and imitated each other. On 8 December, the Société des Amis de la Constitution of Bordeaux organized their own festival, using an elaborate scenery comprising the French, British, American and Polish flags.⁸ Among the guests of honour, who were allowed to give a speech and toasts were two Scots, from Irvine and Leith, against five Englishmen and eight Irishmen. Such figures were perhaps a consequence of the brisk wine trade to Ireland, and of the vagaries of trade, which meant the Jacobins had to invite those foreigners who happened to be in town at the moment. One M. Sauvage acted as agent and translator of the négociants and captains from the British Isles.⁹ Some eight hundred guests sat down in the refectory of the former Récollets convent. The dinner was punctuated by toasts followed by music, in British style. The toasts started with a homage to the Supreme Being, and grace was said.¹⁰ "The Rights of Man" and "The Sovereignty of the People" headed the list. Many toasts naturally paid homage to the guests, to the American Congress, the Revolution Society and reform societies in Edinburgh, Belfast and Dublin. Other toasts referred to French and English philosophers. The Club du Café national followed suit and gave its own banquet, this time with two guests of honour from each nation, for Scotland "MM. Davidson & Farris, Ecosais" (*Extrait des registres des délibérations du Club National*).
- 25 The sources for those international festivals are all French. It would be very interesting to know the opinion of the Scottish and other foreign guests. The archives in Nantes and Bordeaux, however, contain no trace of any involvement of Scottish seamen in local Jacobin clubs or in revolutionary activities. What the French sources do reveal is the strategies of the Jacobin clubs. The maintenance of diplomatic alliances and amity between the peoples in the pursuit of peace formed the ideological core of the festivals. The Jacobins declared revolutionary principles and friendly attentions to foreigners, with a view that the guests, who were seafaring men and traders with a vast correspondence, would spread them in their home countries. During those festivals, Scots and other Britons were in a position of recipients and they apparently took no part in preparations. The French paid homage to reform societies across the Channel as fraternal organizations, but they certainly thought of influence, diplomacy and power politics.
- 26 By 1791, France clearly refused to follow the British constitutional model: while in 1790, the French could still present the English as their schoolmasters in liberty, they soon

considered that the French Revolution, soon to become the *only* revolution, had outstripped the British revolution of 1688, or even the mid-seventeenth century. Thus, the English no longer represented a model; the guests at Jacobin festivals became “representatives”, as it were, of their nation, and received France’s assurances of good relations, but also, increasingly, threats and warnings in case the British government interfered with French republican liberties. The foreigners – the Britons, but also the Americans and the Poles – were expected to accept the homage thankfully, not to give lessons in political philosophy or constitution-making. The Jacobins carefully distinguished the Scots from the English, possibly because of the theory that France respected all free peoples, possibly also because the French Jacobins wanted to outline that the English must respect the Scots. It is dangerous to read back in 1792-1793 the Directory’s calculations about the possibility of Irish and Scottish rebellion (through the United Irishmen and United Scotsmen) against an oppressive English state.

- 27 The last festivals took place in January 1793, a few weeks before the war broke out between France and Britain on 1 February. By that time the discourse of fraternity had given way to threats; the Jacobins declared that the “people” of Britain was represented by the London Corresponding Society and other radical societies, while Pitt was a usurper and a tyrant who must be unseated by war. The foreigners were sidelined; such banquets represented a further stage in the erasure of the English in the French patriotic discourse (Wahnich 243-310). The word “Anglais”, meaning unnatural foe, became hegemonic and precluded any use of “Écossais” in any patriotic discourse.

3. Thomas Muir in Directory France: the politics of convivial celebration

- 28 The political, possibly manipulative, dimension is more evident in the French republic’s welcome of Thomas Muir, the best known of the “Scottish Martyrs” who were condemned in the 1793 treason trials, an episode widely seen in Britain and in France as an egregious example of Pitt’s “tyranny”. Sentenced to fourteen years of transportation to Botany Bay for his involvement in the Scottish Convention of 1793, Muir managed to regain Europe after an epic travel that started with his escape from the Australian penal colony and led him through the American continent. Muir has been the object of much critical, and popular, attention in the last years, as he exemplified the fight for democracy and liberty, and his varied, adventurous life touched on many aspects of late eighteenth-century life (Leask; Bewley; Pentland, “Radical Returns in an Age of Revolutions”; Auer; Carruthers et Martin).
- 29 Hailed as a martyr in his own lifetime, he was treated with a reception on his arrival in France, in the harbor of Bordeaux in November 1797. This little-known episode is interesting given Bordeaux’s antecedents in organizing festivals for Britons and other “free peoples” at the time of the Jacobins. Perhaps unsurprisingly given the connections between Bordeaux and the United States, the best account of the fête appeared in a paper in Charleston, SC. “The city has witnessed a scene that has excited enthusiasm in every republican breast.” Muir, a “martyr of liberty”, “has in this place received the tribute of esteem and affection due to his virtues and his misfortunes”. The patriotic societies and the local academy honoured him. Emblems and illuminations lent a public character to the dinner. Muir appeared at a balcony, so that crowd assembled in the street could cheer him. Toasts reiterated republican values (the

first one was to the French Republic), its martyrs, and its current defenders, from “philosophical writers” to armies, and “the nations in alliance in alliance with the Republic.” Beyond those generic traits, the festival restated the goal of freeing Britain from the monarchy, by military invasion if international revolution could not effect it. The fourth toast was to “Thomas Muir, and all other victims to English despotism” and envisioned their reward in a free Britain. The last toast expressed the wish that the army of England may, under the direction of Bonaparte, “the illustrious deliverer of Italy, “speedily unite the Thames to the Seine” so that “the songs sacred to liberty” could echo “on the rocks of Scotland and Ireland”.¹¹ Muir later read of a banquet given in his honour in Paris. He published an answer expressing his identity as a Scotsman, but also his solidarity with France, Ireland, and struggling countries:

You drank “To the United Irishmen;” and “The Highlanders of Scotland,” who wait only for the French to break their chains.

I assure you, in the name of the Irish and Scotch, that we will break our chains on the heads of our Tyrants. An effort remains to be made by the *Grande Nation*. It is not with the People of England it fights. It is only with a hundred scoundrels. Let them fall, and the Peace of the Universe is established.¹²

- 30 Muir responds “in the name of the Irish and Scotch”, not as a single individual, to toasts raised at a government reception. The exchange functioned as a symbolic *don* and *contre-don* published in the press, with Muir a spokesperson (as a republican and a martyr of Pitt) of the oppressed Scottish people. Muir’s formulation “in the name of the Irish and Scotch” neatly aligns the two countries, thus testifying to the transnational nature of revolutionary republicanism, but this also elides difficulties within the Scottish reform movement. The United Irishmen’s republicanism antagonized the majority of Scottish radicals (let alone the whole Scottish nation), and relations with the Irish had almost split the first convention of Scottish delegates in December 1792.¹³ Published as it was in the French, then the British, press, Muir’s statement read as a challenge to England. It was used by the French for their propagandistic aims, publicizing first, the union of equal sister-republics defiantly opposed to Britain, secondly, the French republic’s readiness to wage war to free oppressed peoples, the Scots and Irish falling in that category as regarded Pitt and his minions. The Bordeaux dinner and Muir’s response were expressions of transnational republicanism appropriated for diplomacy and propaganda in the service of power politics.
- 31 Muir’s reception in Bordeaux is reminiscent of the flag festivals of late 1792 in the defiant affirmation of republican liberty against British monarchical tyranny, and in the affirmation that the oppressed popular societies, like the Scottish Friends of the People, United Scotsmen and United Irishmen, were the true representatives of the people. However, Muir’s welcome centred on one individual and served to heighten his stature, to build up a symbol in opposition to Pitt’s Britain. The French who toasted “[t]he Highlanders of Britain”, thinking they [only waited for a cue to revolt, might have had memories of Jacobitism in mind. The Directory pinned its hopes on Ireland, rather than Scotland, calculating that Erin would be the weakest point in Britain’s defences, ripe for a French invasion, and indeed, as early as August 1798, the French navy invaded an Ireland in open rebellion (Gillen).
- 32 Both Scots and Frenchmen expressed warm zeal and drank enthusiastic toasts to the French Revolution and to the reconciliation of enemy peoples. However different the two sets of celebrations might look like, they shared a sense of unanimity among guests, a sense that guests represented their nation, and that they were effecting an act

of reconciliation and amity with another free people. Bastille Day dinners in Scotland as well as French festivals were displays of unanimity that invoked the other nation in its speeches and toasts. The organizers looked for representatives of the other nation but could not always find it: the French Jacobins invited Scottish seafarers, but Bastille Day dinners in Scotland had no French guests of honour. There was a relation between Scots and Frenchmen on a highly symbolic, elevated, plane. It is easy to criticize the high-flown tone of such events, but perhaps some caution is needed. For one, the sublime is a difficult mode to keep, and there is a step from it to the ridiculous. The Scottish liberal Whigs' rhetoric tried to elevate itself to the occasion; it testifies to the immense hopes pinned in the French Revolution, even among élite men who were far less oppressed than other human groups of their time.

- 33 Philippe Roger wrote of the “mystified relationship between British radicals and French ‘révolutionnaires’”, because the correspondence and symbolic displays of support evinced growing misunderstandings between ever more radical French revolutionaries and more moderate Englishmen (Roger). In the Scottish case, it is clear that the Scots were more conservative than the French counterparts they invoked in Scotland, and the Jacobins that invited them in French cities. But it could be fairly said that relations never really started. The epistolary exchange between the Dundee Whigs and the president of the National Assembly was short-lived, and the Jacobin clubs corresponded with the London Revolutionary Society and the London Corresponding Society rather than with Scottish clubs (*The Correspondence of the Revolution Society*; Goodwin 122–30, 187, 246). Scotland was probably never a priority for the French, who nevertheless gave Scottish well-wishers words of encouragement and were able to deploy rhetoric about the rocks of Scotland echoing with Bardic liberty (though not about the ‘Auld Alliance’). That Scottish and French dinners sounded like parallel monologues rather than dialogues, however, should not lead to a verdict of total failure. The Scottish Whigs were not the foremost defenders of French revolutionary principles. The Scottish conventions of 1792–1793 were important experiments in democratic practices, despite their suppression and the severe transportation meted out to their leaders. Some Scottish-born radicals engaged in new, revolutionary forms of sociability. The Stirlingshire-born Thomas Hardy founded the London Corresponding Society, which had a long lineage, while Thomas Spence, whose father had arrived in Newcastle from Aberdeen, developed a highly original theory of agrarian democracy, which groups of disciples handed over to the next generations.

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NOTES

1. By 1790, Dempster was inactive in Parliament; he last spoke in 1789 on famine relief for France. He was a landowner and an independent, somewhat restive parliamentarian (Lang).
2. *Scots Magazine*, vol. 53 (July 1791), p. 360.
3. The rest of this paragraph is based on: Brims, p. 76-77; National Records of Scotland [henceforth NRS], RH 2/4/62, fo.321: Robert Dundas to unknown correspondent.
4. Brims, p. 80; *Caledonian Mercury*, 11 July 1791. The full list of guests is at NRS, RH 2/4/62, fo. 346-347.
5. *Caledonian Mercury*, 16 July 1791. See also *Edinburgh Herald*, 15 July 1791.
6. Thomas Reid, Draft letter to unknown recipient, July or August 1791. (Reid 223)
7. The quotation is from *The Historical Register, or, Edinburgh Monthly Intelligencer...*, July 1791, p.37. On that dinner, see also *Whitehall Evening Post*, 21 July 1791; *Public Advertiser*, 22 July 1791.
8. Séances des 30 novembre et 1^{er} décembre 1792, an 3^e de la liberté. *Extrait des registres de la Société des Amis de la Constitution, à Bordeaux*, p.1. AD Gironde, 8 J 366.
9. Registre de la Société des Amis de la Constitution de Bordeaux, A[rchives] D[épartementales] Gironde, 12 L 16.
10. See list of toasts p. 12-16.

11. *City Gazette and Daily Advertiser* (Charleston, SC), 26 February 179; see also *Columbian Magazine* (Savannah, GA), 9 March 1798. The “rocks” are interestingly reminiscent of Bougon and Français’ Ossianesque “rochers”.

12. “Letter of Thomas Muir, a Scotch refugee, to the minister of general police. (Paris, 8 nivôse – Dec. 28)”, *True Briton*, 8 January 1798, translation from *Gazette nationale*, 15 nivôse, an VI (4 January 1798).

13. On 12 December 1792, Muir had presented to the first Scottish convention an address of the United Irishmen, which urged the Scots to remember their nationhood and fight for their rights, even in arms. Muir considered the address constitutional but most delegates refused the nationalism of the Irish (Brims, *The Scottish Democratic Movement in the Age of the French Revolution* 315-17).

ABSTRACTS

In the 1790s, Scotsmen were involved in celebrations of the French Revolution in both Scotland and France. How far did those men, stemming mainly from the elites, manage to relate with the French? The article examines Bastille Day dinners given in Scotland from 1790 to 1792, international festivals organized by the French Jacobins in harbour cities from 1790 to 1792, as well as Thomas Muir’s welcome reception held in Bordeaux in 1797. Though the celebrations look very dissimilar, in each case the question of the foreigner was raised; the guests pledged friendship and peace to the foreigners, but tended to idealize those foreigners as incarnations of nations or revolutionary principles, rather than engage at a personal, concrete level with them.

Pendant les années 1790, des Écossais prirent part à des célébrations de la Révolution française, tant en Ecosse qu’en France. Dans quelle mesure ces hommes, issus pour l’essentiel des élites, parvinrent-ils à nouer des relations avec les Français ? Cet article examine les banquets du 14 juillet organisés en Écosse de 1790 à 1792, puis les fêtes internationales données par les Jacobins français dans des villes portuaires de 1790 à 1792, et enfin, la réception d’accueil à Thomas Muir à son arrivée à Bordeaux en 1797. Ces célébrations peuvent paraître très différentes, mais elles posent toutes la question de l’étranger. Les convives célébraient la paix et l’amitié pour les étrangers, mais ils avaient tendance à idéaliser ces étrangers, à en faire des incarnations de la nation plutôt qu’à nouer des relations concrètes et personnelles avec eux.

INDEX

Mots-clés: Banquets, fêtes révolutionnaires, sociabilité, Révolution française, whiggisme, Thomas Muir

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