THE NATIONAL CONVENTION AS REFLECTED IN THE ARCHIVES PARLEMENTAIRES

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The publication of the great documentary corpus of the Archives Parlementaires, initiated a century and a half ago and still incomplete, has an astounding history. It was in 1862 that the Legislative Body, probably "at the liberal initiative of the Duke of Morny", its president, inaugurated publication of a Recueil complet des débats législatifs et politiques des Chambres françaises de 1800 à 1860, faisant suite à la réimpression de l'ancien « Moniteur » et comprenant grand nombre de documents inédits. Thus began what would become, in 1867, the "second series" of the Archives parlementaires. On that date, Jérôme Mavidal and Émile Laurent, deputy librarians to the Legislative Body were in effect commissioned to carry out a "partial work": to provide an "introduction to Le Moniteur". Le Moniteur, they explained, had the merit of allowing the "eye witnesses" to be heard, "in the presence of interested witnesses from all parties", though it only appeared on 24 November 1789, so what this collection lacks is to have started with the Revolution; because [...] it is in the history of revolutions that it is important not to omit anything that may lead to knowledge of their initial movements, their causes, the symptoms that announced their coming and to initiate us [...] into the generation of these important phenomena.

(1) The formula concerning the role of Morny is from Mavidal and Laurent in their "Foreword" to the first volume, but does not appear in the publication of the Cahiers des États généraux... (Extrait des Archives Parlementaires), volume I, Paris, Paul Dupont, 1868. It obviously disappears from the second edition of 1879. See Armand Brette, "Les cahiers de doléances et les Archives Parlementaires", La Révolution française, volume 47, July-December 1904, p. 5-27.

(2) Volume IX (1st January 1806 to 15 September 1815) has the title Archives Parlementaires de 1787 à 1860. Recueil complet des débats législatifs et politiques des Chambres françaises... under the direction of Messrs. Jules (sic for Jérôme) Mavidal and Émile Laurent, Deuxième série (1800 à 1860), Paris, 1867.
which have at their outset the strength to destroy everything”". In fact, the decision taken by the Legislative Body in 1862 can be explained as much by the desire to provide "the absolutely accurate report of the legislative debates and the definitive text of the laws adopted" in "a more convenient format than Le Moniteur" (in folio), as by the political role of Morny, who was eager to appease internal tensions and encourage patriotic fervour on the eve of the Mexican campaign. However, the reasons behind 1867 are more obscure: Morny died in 1865 and cannot have been the direct “instigator”. On the other hand, since 1863, the Legislative Body had around thirty opponents with strong personalities: Adolphe Thiers, and also the republicans Jules Favre and Émile Ollivier. In the face of threats that were on the horizon, while the Emperor had to hand over the right of interrogation to the deputies, would it not make sense to situate the regime in the trail blazed by the 1789 Revolution? The "Foreword" from our eager librarians bears the stamp of this hope, when they write, in their praise of the system of representation: "It was in a uniform assembly, made up of temporary representatives of the people, that ultimately the most certain means were found of ensuring the prevalence of the public good over private passions, through the very interest of the men who made it up.”

The leading place occupied among 19th century sources by the "Second series" of the Archives Parlementaires is borne out by the work dedicated to the Chamber of deputies in 1837-1839, which combines prosopography, political and "technical" history of the operation of the Assembly and a linguistic study of the debates concerning the 1839 Address. Nonetheless, it should be noted that the series appears to have died out, in a fairly staggering atmosphere of indifference, even before the declaration of the First World War: the last volume, CXXVI (17 June 1839 to 8 July 1839) appeared in 1912 and there was little possibility of the "Second series" extending as far as the initially-set final year of 1860.

However, it is obviously the second wave, which became the "First series (1787 to 1799)" of the Archives Parlementaires de 1787 à 1860, which we wish to discuss, its history eventful and fragmented, but still

(4) The publication of the "Second series" went as far as volume XVII (1st April to 30 December 1816) in 1870. No methodological explanation is given before 1902 and volume CV (7 June 1836 to 4 July 1836), which states in a "note" that the method "is the same as the one indicated by us in the note printed at the start of volume LXI of the first series”.
alive in 2015, a phenomenon sufficiently astounding to be highlighted in scientific institutions. The history is eventful because the publication was created without any real preparation for such breathtakingly dizzying documentation, the pitfalls of which Mavidal and Laurent, librarians but not historians, and strangers to historical research, even of their own period, appear to have overlooked. However, the administrative and political career of Mavidal (1825-1896), took off with the arrival of the Republic and, in 1875, we find him "Head of the office for the issue of laws and reports", knight of the Legion of Honour and editor of the publication of volume VII (5 May to 15 September 1789) of the *Archives Parlementaires*. Émile Laurent (1819-1897), who came to Paris to make his name as a writer, published, under the pseudonyms Georges d’Harmonville and more so Émile Colombey, novels, criticism and literary essays, including, in 1858, *Ninon de Lenclos et sa cour*. The historian was then perhaps visible beneath the publicist, but it was nonetheless unfamiliar with the scientific rigour of a publication from countless sources, which were sometimes difficult to authenticate. The challenge, above all, of starting with the publication of the "cahiers de doléances" was considerable: lacking methodology and without any information about the sources, the authors faced the harshest criticism. However, it must be stated that the collection continued on its way and that after a forty-year break, it reached the one hundred and second volume in 2012, with volumes CIII and CIV under preparation.

This "constructed" source has therefore stood the test of time, but by obviously evolving greatly throughout its one hundred and fifty years of existence, depending on the methods and demands of both editors and readers, as well as historians, legal experts, political scientists and linguists, all specialising in the history of the French Revolution. This is what we will try to illustrate, by looking only at the period of the National Convention, which is currently covered by volumes LII (22 September to 26 October 1792), published in 1897, to volume CII (2012), which takes us to 12 Frimaire Year III (2 December 1794). In this series, assembled and built by the scientific editors on documents that had been drafted, filtered and

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(7) See Volume 8, *Archives Parlementaires..., première série*, under the direction of M. J. Mavidal and Messrs. É. Laurent and É. Clavel, assistant librarians at the National Assembly, Paris, 1875. And regarding the duties of each of them in the administration of the Chamber of Deputies, see *Almanach national. Annuaire officiel de la République française pour 1876, présenté au Président de la République*, Paris, Berger-Levrault, 1876, p. 96-97.

(8) Mavidal and Laurent appear to ignore the well-known "Camus Collection" of the National Archives, the boxes and records dedicated to the Estates General and brought together in 1790, BÂ 1 to 91 and BIII 1 to 174. See, below, the critique by Armand Brette in 1904.
sorted by those in power, we can nonetheless hear echoes of the debates and combats of the founding assembly of our Republic, as well as one of the best sounding boards of a public opinion that had become truly national.

**The adventures of the *Archives Parlementaires*: a scholarly history kept up to date, from one Universal Exhibition (Paris, 1867) to another (Paris, 2025)?**

Before looking at the history of the National Convention retraced by the *Archives Parlementaires* throughout the fifty-one volumes so far published, we are going to look at this "First series", half of the volumes of which we are going to closely examine and whose ups and downs we must identify because it is the survivor of an extraordinary enterprise of imperial “communication” judiciously pursued by the Republics (the 3rd and then the 5th at least). It was a publication designed for the period "1787-1860", yet we find that twenty-six months of the enterprise (22 September 1792-2 December 1794) cover fifty-one volumes or over 300,000 pages! The scale of the task seems disproportionate, pointless and ultimately lacking in any scientific value: "all of this just for that?" rightly wondered the specialists of the great long-term series or *World Studies*. Certainly, even allowing for the continuation of an outdated presentation (in columns), no one can deny the evolution of the numbering and presentation of footnotes, general typography (elimination of multiple exclamation marks, ancient abbreviations, ampersands and other unnecessary decorative characters affecting the fluidity of reading) and character fonts. For twenty years, the publication of the *Archives Parlementaires* may, for the guardians of public collections, have constituted a "conservatory" of defunct practice of somewhat jingoistic scholarship. It is obviously nothing of the sort to us and hypercriticism will allow us to do justice to a work spanning centuries that clearly does not in any way constitute a uniform series. Indeed, contemporary historians, caught in the trap of the scanner and, we agree, of not very flexible aesthetic trappings, should not in effect transform into "one" source, several differentiated and authenticated phases from sources having as their subject the “legislative and political debates...”, in which the Convention, at present still being processed, had already experienced four “phases”.

(9) We think that the nonetheless highly perceptive American historian of the French Revolution, Timothy Tackett, has not yet noticed this peculiarity. See Timothy TACKETT and Nicolas DÉPLANCHE, "L’idée du ‘complot’ dans l’œuvre de Georges Lefebvre: une remise en cause à partir d’une nouvelle source", *La Révolution française* [Online], Georges Lefebvre, published online on 5...
The "first phase" of the "First series" of the *Archives Parlementaires* is undefined by the founders of the collection: Mavidal and Laurent, on launching their Herculean task, never set any scientific standards or constructed a method for editing texts. A happy time of intellectual libertarianism? It seems rather, unfortunately, to have been a case of ignorance and under-estimating the amount of work involved in publishing the sources. Without being overwhelmed by the first six volumes (1867-1870), which appeared at a rate that was so rapid it was impressive, and also astonished the contemporary editors, let us stop and take a look at volume VIII, published in 1875\(^6\). In an article published in 1904, Armand Brette, a very serious scholar and a member of the "Commission" for the economic history of the French Revolution, recently created at the instigation of Jaurès in 1903, wrote: "The only thing we can keep from this memento is the great haste that prevailed over its birth, and which is manifested most seriously in the singular imperfections of the first volumes, we might even say of all those concerning the Constituent Assembly"\(^11\). Brette therefore emphasised the extent to which the re-transcription of the Constituent Assembly debates was approximate, even inaccurate, like publication of the "cahiers de doléances". "The editors of the *Archives Parlementaires*, he wrote, were no better informed on this matter" and, for lack of being informed about the regulations, confused "printed opinions" and speeches made, thus having substitute deputies standing up and giving speeches when they had no place there. And what can we say about the attribution of 30 June 1789 as the “start of the National Assembly”? There is general agreement that the editing of the volumes of the *Archives Parlementaires* offered little reliability for a period of thirty years. Thus, wrote Pierre

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Caron, "the method used by the editors of the *Archives Parlementaires* has been severely criticised; they were reproached above all for arbitrarily combining with the text of official minutes that of reports sent out to various newspapers and thus creating a sort of mosaic that could only be used by historians at the expense of long and painstaking verifications".\(^\text{(12)}\)

It was precisely with the first volume dedicated to the National Convention in 1897 that four editors, released no doubt from the guardianship of the "founders" and counting among their number an archivist-palaeographer, a "real" historian, André Ducom (1861-1923), effectively began the "second phase" of the publication of the "First series" (and therefore the "first phase" of the Convention)\(^\text{(13)}\). The authors introduced a logical (and methodological) order barely perceptible before. As they indicated, they worked with "minutes constantly before their eyes" and gave "a report on the session that was as comprehensive as possible, with the help of *Le Moniteur* and several other newspapers". However, they added, "we are continuing to introduce, in order, indicating the collections from which we have taken them, the reports and speeches in extenso, by order of the National Assembly or by the authors themselves"\(^\text{(14)}\). This is indeed where the problem lies: still without any rigorous method, the series continued to be compiled without any verification of the texts. It was certainly exciting, but without any real relationship to the daily record of the Assembly sessions. One example strikes us as especially illuminating: the session held on Monday 24 June 1793 presented the debate on the adoption of the Declaration of Rights and the Constitution. Chaired by Collot d’Herbois, the session opened at ten o’clock in the morning and closed at half past six in the evening: forty pages were necessary to track the debates and show the texts that were adopted. However, the events of 24 June occupy over three hundred pages of volume LXVII: where did all this padding come from? The editors appended sixty-two "Annexes", pamphlets, opuscules and opinions published by Convention members, including *Les éléments du républicanisme* by Billaud-Varenne which had nothing to do with this occasion\(^\text{(15)}\), drawing, as they said, from the printed documents of the Bibliothèque nationale and, most of all, from the Collection Portiez (a deputy for the Oise) of the Chamber of Deputies. In the end it was

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\(^\text{(13)}\) *Archives Parlementaires*, vol. LII, 22 September 1792 - 26 October 1792, 1897.


\(^\text{(15)}\) *Ibid.*, vol. LXVII, 20 June 1793 to 30 June 1793, 1905. We had also indicated a probable publication of Billaud’s pamphlet around 15 February 1793.
volume LXXII, from 11 August 1793 to 24 August 1793, which marked a methodological turning point and started the “third phase” of the Archives Parlementaires\(^{16}\). Remembering the criticism levied against the publication designed by Mavidal and Laurent, the editors said that they were bringing in "a new method" to meet the "scientific" wishes of historians, by inserting “in large print each of the paragraphs of the minutes”, followed, in smaller print, by: 1 authentic documents that exist either in the libraries or in the National Archives; and 2 the newspaper report that seems to be the most comprehensive. Thus a reasoned hierarchy of the elements constituting a session began to be established, built like a Meccano figure, the basic parts of which would always be the Minutes. This "phase" ended in 1913, with the publication of volume LXXXII: the First World War brought an interruption, but the "break" was to last almost half a century, causing Pierre Caron to write about the collection, when it was not restarted after 1918, that “it is doubtful whether it is ever destined to be so”\(^{17}\).

It is to the indefatigable perseverance of Georges Lefebvre that the Archives Parlementaires owe their rebirth (which he would never witness as he died in 1959): in fact, as he had just retired after the Second World War, this expert in revolutionary studies dedicated most of his time to restructuring and resurrecting the “Jaurès Commission”. Lefebvre knew that he could count on Édouard Herriot, whom he had known since 1921 and with whom he had worked directly for the 150th anniversary of the Revolution: in 1951, he made it a priority objective for the Commission to restart work on the Archives Parlementaires. However, as President Herriot pointed out, the Assembly no longer possessed the human resources that it had at its disposal at the start of the century; Georges Lefebvre, nonetheless, managed in 1957 to get the CNRS to agree to include the resumption of the publication in its five-year research programme and to unlock holiday leave in order to carry out the documentary research\(^{18}\).

In 1961, when volume LXXXIII was published, the approach to the contents of the Collection completely changed and became the work, no longer of librarians and officials from the Chamber of Deputies, but that of historians of the French Revolution and, first and foremost, of Marc Bouloiseau (1907-1999). In 1960, Bouloiseau had issued an ironic opinion about what would become his task as "assistant research professor" at

\(^{(16)}\) Ibid., vol. LXXII, 1907, "Foreword".

\(^{(17)}\) Ibid., vol. LXXXII, 30 Primaire Year II to 15 Nivôse Year II (20 December 1793 to 4 January 1794), 1913. Pierre CARON, Manuel pratique..., op. cit., p. 205.

\(^{(18)}\) Christine PEYRARD and Michel VOVELLE (dir.), Héritages..., op. cit., p. 49-51.
"the Sorbonne", as it was known at the time: "Although it has not ended, he wrote, the period of the Collections has clearly been in regression" – since the 1930s – and it was no longer time “to blindly engage creators of collections"19. He could not have expressed himself more clearly, which was confirmed by Marcel Reinhard, director at the time of the Institute for the History of the French Revolution, in the foreword he wrote for the volume: recalling past experience, he specified the objectives of a collection that was now very concerned about serial consistency. The protocol of the publication (which is still in force) was set: the minutes of the Convention, printed in bold letters, were now the backbone of the presentation and the publication of the documents conserved in series C of the Archives nationales supplied the flesh, while retaining the contribution of the assembly debates transmitted by the newspapers. The many annexes, at times without any justification, disappeared, but the heading “Matters not mentioned in the minutes” completely fulfilled their role on the date of the session. Finally, for further ease of reading, these "matters" were numbered and the documents classified20. Nonetheless, in 1978-1980, the publication still presented the regulatory features of the 1960s, which were now called into question by the standardisation undertaken at the École nationale des Chartes: the punctuation or written form of documents that were literally “copied” did not facilitate “smooth” reading of the sources21. In addition, the collection still retained its initial appearance as a "compendium", integrating sources that were related, but exogenous to the principle defined at the time: "The whole of series C, nothing but series C" (since the “not mentioned in the minutes” section comprised both documents from series C and matters effectively unrelated to the minutes for reasons that were obviously political). The "fourth phase" of the First Series, the "third" of the publication concerning the National Convention, which we will call the "Bouloiseau phase" continued with the volumes published under the responsibility of Jean-Claude Perrot, then Philippe Gut, from 1971 to 1978. Furthermore, volume XCII (1980) merely announced changes to the transcriptions that had already been mentioned. However, it

(20) Archives Parlementaires, vol. LXXXIII, 16 Nivôse - 8 Pluviôse Year II (5 to 27 January 1794), Paris, CNRS, 1961, p. VII-IX.
(21) The 1960s indicated the modern departments and not the departments of 1790 or Year II. It was thus that the department of Paris suffered a "double blow": renamed the "department of the Seine" by the editors, it could not be found in 1968! We will say nothing about the revolutionary locations in Tarn-et-Garonne or Meurthe-et-Moselle.
was with volume XCIII (21 Messidor to 12 Thermidor Year II)\(^{(22)}\) that the
"current" phase began. Still concerned about achieving more precision, this
was the “fifth phase” of the *Archives Parlementaires* and the “fourth” of
the publication of the National Convention. It is true that since the 1980s,
the chronological tables and indexes have been developed, for obvious
reasons of document input, but above all the constraints of the sources
have made it necessary to take a different approach to the publication. On
drafting the manuscript of volume XCIII, the editors (Aline Alquier and
Françoise Brunel) found an "anomaly": the minutes of the session held on
2 Thermidor were, without any explanation, signed by two deputies who
were known to be in prison or in hiding at the time, Henry-Larivièr and
Laurenceot, while the four others, Bailly, Delecloy, Villers and Delaunay
(from Angers, in fact “the younger”) had little chance of being elected as
secretaries on that date. Indeed, the session held on 1 Thermidor (in the
evening) mentioned the (logical) renewal of the bureau: Collot was elected
president and Le Vasseur (from the Meurthe), Bar, Portiez, Legendre (from
Paris), André Dumont and Brival secretaries. It was up to the "person
responsible for the publication" to find an explanation and, after fruitless
questions and research, she found in the minutes of 3 Brumaire Year IV, and
therefore on the separation of the Convention, a law stating: “The backlog
of minutes will be drafted by writers from both Councils”. Enthusiastically
but imprudently, it added "in bold" (body of the minutes) “By virtue of
the law of 3 Brumaire Year IV”... Furthermore, this same volume offered
the delicate "construction" of the session held on 9 Thermidor, for which
extraordinary “treatment” was ultimately reserved\(^{(23)}\). It clearly appears that
the "later writers" of these minutes, the first of a long series, were all
deputies from the Council of Five Hundred, all well-known “writers” and
likely to emphasise the issues and weak points of “thermidoriality”, while
“legislative centrality” remained the “central pivot of government”, until
the separation of the National Convention.

**Saying and making the *Archives Parlementaires*: the minutes put
through the mill of the Archives nationales**

We should remember that the minutes, as the traditional medium,
present the facts, not in the order in which they occurred but in the order

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\(^{(23)}\) See vol. XCIII, *op. cit.*, p. 372. Regarding these problems, see Françoise BRUNEL,
in which the secretaries and recorders filed the various texts with the bureau of the assembly. A first series of decrees allows us to understand the connections between the various bureaux involved in the writing of the official minutes. The creation of the Committee of Decrees, on 21 November 1789, and the decrees on the organisation of the Archives nationales (between 4 and 7 September 1790) set up a shuttle for drafting the minutes. The appointment of Camus, previously an archivist of the Assembly (14 August 1789) as the head of the Archives nationales - a deputy among deputies - clearly demonstrates the political concern for controlling the public archives. For the Convention, the correspondence section performed some initial sorting before passing on the baton to two civil-servant secretaries, Renvoisé and Aubusson, who analysed the correspondence received on behalf of the president of the assembly and were then responsible for preparing the agenda for the Convention session\textsuperscript{24}, which, in principle, should be reflected in the minutes. We note, obviously, that the mass of addresses, petitions and letters from mere citizens published in the *Archives Parlementaires* is of necessity patchy and artificial, since it only contains the documents kept by the Assembly for reading, entering in the minutes and, more often than not, *honourable mention*. As the documents that were not retained were destroyed by this bureau, it had become a strategic location. Apparently, decrees passed by the Committee of Decrees and Minutes\textsuperscript{25} asked the Committee of Inspectors of the Hall to guard the premises day and night and to stop journalists or anyone from outside the service gaining entry\textsuperscript{26}. Finally, following a session, the documents used were returned to the bureau in order to draft the minutes for the session; they were then to be read out at the next session, approved and signed by the president of the Convention and the elected secretaries\textsuperscript{27}.


\textsuperscript{(25) A committee that changed its name depending on the changes to its duties: Committee of Surveillance of the sending of decrees (21 November 1789-6 July 1790); Committee of Surveillance of the sending of decrees and the collation of decrees (6 July 1790 – 3 September 1791); Committee of Decrees (26 October 1791 – 18 October 1792); Committee of Decrees and Minutes (18 October 1792 – 7 Fructidor Year II); Committee of Decrees, Minutes and Archives (7 Fructidor Year II – 3 Brumaire Year IV).}


\textsuperscript{(27) For the period studied, 42% of the minutes were approved at the next session. The time taken to approve them varied from five days (session held on 17 Thermidor Year II) and over a month (session held on 10 Vendémiaire Year III). See *Archives Parlementaires*, vol. XCIV, p. 362 and vol. C, p. 366.}
After 2 Thermidor, we can therefore see signatures starting to appear on the minutes, which are not those of the president and secretaries in office at the time. The scale of this modification is revealed by a study of the Archives Parlementaires from that date until the end of Frimaire Year III, i.e. for five months\textsuperscript{28} which represent one hundred and fifty-five sessions of the Convention, seventy-two of which have minutes that were re-written (46.5%). This re-writing took place by virtue of three separate laws: the law of 7 Floréal Year III\textsuperscript{29} for thirty-five of them, that of 3 Fructidor Year III\textsuperscript{30} for twelve sessions and finally that of 3 Brumaire Year IV\textsuperscript{31} for twenty-five sets of minutes. For the last reference, there is no need to highlight the fact that this was just before the separation of the National Convention, which means that the minutes of Thermidor Year II were re-written under the Directory.

Writing the minutes – from 2 Thermidor Year II to 30 Frimaire Year III

\begin{figure}
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\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{chart.png}
\caption{Percentage of PV post, PV ok, and PV adoptés from Thermidor II to Frimaire III.}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{28} This concerns volumes XCIII to CII already published and borrows from volumes CIII and CIV, which were being compiled.

\textsuperscript{29} Collection générale des décrets, Paris, Baudouin, vol. 61, dated 7 Floréal Year III.

\textsuperscript{30} Ibid., vol. 65, dated 3 Fructidor Year III.

\textsuperscript{31} Ibid., vol. 67, dated 4 Brumaire Year IV.
PV post: date of drafting by virtue of the laws of Floréal or Fructidor Year III, or Brumaire Year IV.

PV ok: minutes drafted and signed by the president and the secretaries of the session concerned.

PV adopté: minutes approved as mentioned in subsequent sessions.

A first glance at this graph allows us to eliminate the hypothesis of re-writing of the minutes according to what is stated by these different laws, namely that it is a case of taking up the writing of “minutes that could not be signed” (law of 7 Floréal Year III), “delayed sessions” (law of 3 Fructidor Year III) or even “the backlog of minutes” (law of 3 Brumaire Year IV). Brumaire Year III contradicts the terms of these laws because 46.6% of the minutes were approved in the following sessions, which obviously refutes the existence of 96.6% of the subsequent minutes.

While, in Thermidor, 69% of the minutes were re-written according to the law of 3 Brumaire Year IV, 9 and 10 Thermidor pose some questions. The importance of these days has to be taken into account here in terms of political validation by the Convention members themselves: on 21 Fructidor Year II, only the addresses and petitions made on these days were recorded in the minutes, which were read out and approved at a session. As highlighted by the newspaper *Le Sans-culotte*, "writing up minutes is not to everyone’s taste"; thus, Goupilleau (from Fontenay) managed to have two Convention members associated with the writing of the minutes so that “the minutes of this memorable session [can be] a document to go down in history, such that the order of events is no less crucial than accuracy”. Périères, in support of his colleague’s remarks, added that "to make [the minutes] comprehensive, they have to be linked to what happened on the 8th, and continued until the day when the permanence of the session ended".

Fructidor is a more interesting case than that of Thermidor, with 94.2% of minutes signed by Convention members in office and only two days that show re-writing of the minutes. On 12 Fructidor, when, following a speech given by Tallien the day before, Le Cointre (from Versailles) stood...
up on the podium to denounce Billaud-Varenne, Collot d’Herbois and Barère who were on the Committee of Public Safety, and Vadier, Amar, Voulland and David who were on the Committee of General Security, he read out a list of twenty-six accusations that he had compiled against them. However, Le Cointre “had chosen the wrong moment and had not prepared his speech well and was unable to provide any evidence”; “his twenty-six accusations were in fact accusations regarding the weakness [...] of the Convention”\(^{(39)}\). The next day, 13 Fructidor, after a fairly heated discussion, the hearing of the documents proposed by Le Cointre became impossible and the charges were decreed “false and slanderous”, just before the session was closed\(^{(40)}\).

However, it was not enough to have a resumption of the minutes announced to wonder about the gaps and lacunae in an archival source. Thus, 15 Fructidor Year II (1\(^{st}\) September 1794) constitutes the day in the *Archives Parlementaires* when we note the largest number of addresses sent to the Convention entered in the minutes\(^{(41)}\). We find mention of approximately one hundred and fifty classified addresses, which proves that they did indeed pass through the hands of the civil-servant secretaries, but these addresses are not reproduced in the *Archives Parlementaires*, because they cannot be found in series C of the archives!

For Vendémiaire Year III, there are only two sets of re-written minutes: those of 29 Vendémiaire, which marked the start of discussions about the procedure to be taken for the accusation of Carrier and the Convention decree that authorised the three committees that had met to produce a report on the arrested deputies; and those of 30 Vendémiaire, where the paucity of the minutes and the lack of archives from series C do not allow any conclusion to be drawn – and leave us hungry for more...

Brumaire Year III challenges us more strongly on the re-writing of minutes: 96.6% of them have been re-written, mainly due to the law of 7 Floréal Year III. It was firstly from 2 Floréal, the presentation by Merlin (de Douai) on behalf of the three committees that had met regarding a “bill on the forms that can guarantee national representation in the accusations made against its members”\(^{(42)}\), which led to the creation of the Commission of Twenty-one, which was to be responsible for examining the conduct of

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\(^{(40)}\) Archives Parlementaires, vol. XCVI, p. 125.


the representative Carrier. However, it was also the session - and not one of the least important - of 22 Brumaire, with the decree on the closure of the Jacobin Club, which was passed without debate, unanimously save for one vote\(^43\).

Finally, in Frimaire, the Convention embarked upon a sudden restructuring of its political field. After having closed the Jacobin Club and dismantled the network of popular societies, it chose to punish Carrier and reinstate the deputies who had been excluded from July to October 1793 (the “75”). This reinstatement was soon to overthrow alliances and break up the “Thermidorian” camp\(^44\).

This re-writing poses the question of the comings and goings between the various bureaux in charge of the minutes and makes us wonder both about the timescale of these modifications and the issues surrounding the classification of the archives. While the Thermidorian Convention stabilised links between different administrative areas and finally rid itself of the sole supervision of the Committee of Public Safety, we note that the actions undertaken during the final months of its existence were to be the subject of political issues between the institutions that continued their activities after Brumaire Year IV, such as the Archives nationales and the new ministries. The filing of the papers of the committees and the assembly, which began under the Directory, led to the destruction of a substantial portion of the document collection\(^45\) which may be explained by the change of classificatory method (from origin and type to a thematic division per ministry), which does not in any way exclude a political reclassification. And if we try to follow the path of the papers that left the minutes bureau at the end of the Convention in the various reports drafted by the Archives nationales, we can establish a chronological span in which these famous minutes must have been re-written once again: between Brumaire Year IV (November 1796) and the Year VII (1799-1800), principally, and at the latest in Brumaire Year XIII (November 1804)\(^46\).

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\(^{45}\) Martine *Sin Blima-Barru*, *op. cit.*, p. 30 and 55.

\(^{46}\) AN, AB/VI/1: État des Archives nationales au 1er prairial de l’an V (20 May 1797) drafted by Camus; État des Archives de la République française drafted on 1 Prairial Year VII (20 May 1799) by Coru-Sarthe; État des Archives nationales du 30 frimaire an XIII (21 December 1804) drafted for the attention of the new archivist Daunou. Later, the removal of the archives to the Hôtel de Soubise (1809) would be occasion for Daunou to transform the former series E into series C and to concentrate the new classification around the law, reversing the importance of the minutes, which from now on would lack political significance.
Thus, the originality of around half of the minutes of National Convention sessions from Thermidor Year II comes from having been reconstructed by editors from the Councils of the Directory, for whom a good number had an interest in “forgetting” or, at least, presenting the minutes from the point of view of the new political orientation, one where the people legitimised the “revolution” of the Convention that took place in Thermidor Year II. We thus note two main phases of the construction of the speeches according to the presentation of the minutes and the documents appended thereto. On the day after Thermidor, *La Proclamation au peuple français*, was quickly made known in Paris, in the Seine-et-Oise and in the Seine-et-Marne, and then, in concentric waves, the information reached the greater Paris area and its outskirts, followed by the rest of the country, in particular by means of the network of representatives on mission, who were often Montagnards.

While there appeared to be complete unanimity immediately after Thermidor concerning the conviction of Robespierre, nonetheless after Fructidor, with the reading by Louchet of the address to the *société populaire* of Dijon, denunciations of “moderantism” and the breakdown of political discourse were soon to follow. This was followed by the construction of the meaning of the Thermidorian Reaction and the *Adresse au peuple français* of 18 Vendémiaire that allowed the Convention members to stabilise the hesitations of recent weeks. This address, which was disseminated throughout the country and was the subject of long sessions involving the reading of addresses, made it possible to convince the Convention that it would remain the centre for rallying all good citizens, who were finally rid of the “bloodsuckers”. If we take the graph shown above, we can clearly see that the main breaking point of the period came in Brumaire Year III and not in Thermidor Year II. Thus, Brumaire constructed, around the accusations levied against Carrier and the end of the Jacobins, a representation of the assembly in which the Convention recognised, all the more clearly, that the addresses and petitions received referred to its own discourse. Thus, a Thermidorian discourse was invented related to the same discursive creation of the Terror, the reflection of which in the

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(47) *Archives Parlementaires*, vol. XCVI, p. 283-284.
Archives Parlementaires, shaped upstream, was confirmed retrospectively by the rewriting of the minutes.

The session of 3 Frimaire Year III in the Convention and the nominal vote against Carrier: when the minutes take us for a ride...

In this process of re-writing, certain sessions of the Archives Parlementaires are worth closer scrutiny. The session of 3 Frimaire Year III (23 November 1794), which, as irony would have it, was chaired by the very "terrorist" and very “reactionary” Legendre (from Paris)\(^\text{50}\), constituted a significant session in volume CII and was the conclusion of eleven sessions during which the Carrier case was discussed.

With nineteen items entered in the minutes, which is not many given the nominal vote\(^\text{51}\), the session began as usual with the reading of addresses: all "thanked the National Convention for having enlightened them with the principles contained in the Adresse aux Français, for having constricted the successors of the triumvirs by closing down their lair, for keeping to the agenda regarding republican virtues \[and\] charged it with becoming increasingly worthy, by remaining in place, taming both the enemies within and without, and assured them of the esteem and affection of all good citizens"\(^\text{52}\). While we cannot extricate any geographical order from this list, we can wonder about the order in which these addresses arrived at the assembly’s bureau. Apart from five undated addresses, three were from 16 Brumaire; as for the others, they were dated prior to 10 Brumaire and were already more than three weeks old; one address from the citizens of Lons-Le-Saulnier (Jura), summoned to a general assembly by the representatives on mission Besson, Sevestre, Foucher du Cher and Pelletier, was even dated 8 Vendémiaire Year III! This address glorified the happiness rediscovered by all citizens since the death of the tyrant and emphasised that “this amazing change is the work of the national representation”\(^\text{53}\). If we compare the dates of these addresses, we note in the preceding days addresses that were a lot later in arriving, mainly from the end of Brumaire, in which the enthusiasm for the announcement of the closure of the Jacobin Clubs was increased by the parade of several

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\(^\text{50}\) A session that began at 11 o’clock in the morning and ended between 2:30 and 4:00 (depending on the source) the following day.

\(^\text{51}\) By way of comparison there was an average of thirty-nine cases per day for volume CII.

\(^\text{52}\) Archives Parlementaires, vol. CII p. 63.

\(^\text{53}\) Ibid., p. 69-70.
Parisian sections at the bar on 1 Frimaire\textsuperscript{54}. We thus see an extraordinary demonstration of conformist unanimity. We can therefore legitimately question their order! All the more so as we find in the later readings of addresses prior to the discussion about Carrier, a letter from Goupilleau (from Montaigu) reporting on his mission in the Gard, Hérault, Aveyron and Vaucluse, which concerned the fall-out from the Bédoin case, and also an undated letter from the \textit{Maison commune} in Dijon\textsuperscript{55}, which recalled the horror provoked by the “famous” address of Dijon read out at the session on 19 Fructidor\textsuperscript{56} which denounced the supporters of Carrier as a “sample of Robespierre’s tail”\textsuperscript{57}. The order of the minutes bears witness, through the example of the retraction from Dijon and the accusations made against Maignet, either to the introduction of guidance prior to the vote, or to reorganisation of the minutes that pre-empted the conclusion of the voting.

In this context, the speech by Carrier\textsuperscript{58}, who developed an essentially political argument\textsuperscript{59} and posed the question of the legitimacy of revolutionary violence and the case made against the Revolution, became inaudible for these “virtuous and upright” Thermidorians. The defence of the ideals of Year II taken on by Carrier failed due to the ongoing construction of a new political orientation and was in fact practically silenced in the minutes and in the press. This gap in the sources thus made us decide to reproduce Carrier’s speech \textit{in-extenso}, leaving aside our standard protocol, which nonetheless leads to new questions about the establishment of the corpus.

Similarly, a problem arises from the re-transcription of the nominal vote, which begs the question: “Are there any grounds for the accusation against the representative Carrier?” While President Legendre (from Paris) clearly stated that the deputies could vote yes or no\textsuperscript{60}, he proclaimed at the end of the voting, which took around 7 hours, that “out of 500 members present, 498 had voted for the decree of accusation unconditionally and 2 with reservations”\textsuperscript{61}. However, a detailed examination of the results shows 497 voters (65% of the Conventionnels), from which we also have

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{54} Ibid., p. 19.
\item \textsuperscript{55} Ibid., p. 73-74 and p. 78-79. The letter from Goupilleau is dated 18 Brumaire.
\item \textsuperscript{56} \textit{Moniteur}, XXI, 691-692; \textit{Archives Parlementaires}, vol. XCVI, p. 283-284.
\item \textsuperscript{57} \textit{Journal de la Montagne}, n° 129.
\item \textsuperscript{58} A speech about which it was difficult for the Committee of Inspectors of the hall to make a decision to print it, see Alain \textsc{Cohen}, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 167-168.
\item \textsuperscript{59} \textit{Archives Parlementaires}, vol. CII, p. 93-99.
\item \textsuperscript{60} Ibid., p. 100.
\item \textsuperscript{61} \textit{Appel nominal des 3 et 4 frimaire, l’an IIIe de la République française une et indivisible, sur cette question : Y-a-t-il lieu à accusation contre le citoyen Carrier, représentant du peuple ? Imprimé par ordre de la Convention nationale, distribué à ses membres et envoyé aux départements et aux armées. A Paris, frimaire an III.}
\end{itemize}
to deduct four voters officially registered in the minutes although they could not be present on the benches of the assembly. Two Convention members, Dabray and Fleury were recorded as absent for unknown reasons, although they had been arrested with the Girondins the year before! Four other deputies sent their vote to the Convention outside the nominal vote (Poultier, Vadier, Ehrmann and Loiseau), but only Ehrmann’s vote was counted, with the specification that “it is not a political illness” that kept him away from the Assembly. The question of the large number of absentees (271 deputies) was raised several times, and the impression of the nominal vote may be interpreted once again as a “check on the troops”, in the manner of the nominal vote of 15-17 June 1793, “to find which representatives of the people are at their post”. It was a question of setting up a disciplinary procedure in a particularly tense political context and meting out punishment by making the votes public.

At the time of the nominal votes against Louis XVI, the Convention, set up as a jury of indictment and judgment, multiplied the categories of voting responses. During the nominal vote of 13 April 1793 (Are there grounds for accusation against Marat?), some deputies refused to vote (Lakanal, Thirion and Cavaignac), while others abstained loudly and intelligibly (Charles Delacroix) or voted “null” (Poultier). However, in the vote against Carrier, we do not find any of these differentiations, nor is there any mention of abstentions. Thus, of all the nominal votes where a question was asked, the vote against Carrier is the only one where no did not exist, even though the unanimity was unreal. In this session, it is the silences, in both the debates and the vote, that allow us to understand the construction of a semantic and political tool in the service of a new union of the people and the Convention.

The publication of the *Archives Parlementaires* does not in any way claim to "restore" the daily sessions of the Convention, nor does it claim, as the 1907 editors wished, to give "in inexact order, the exact minutes of the sessions", and even less so to exhaust the complexity of operation of

(62) Forest and Michet, deputies for Rhône-et-Loire, had been placed under arrest since July 1793 and would only return to the Convention as a result of the decree of 18 Frimaire Year III. Chedaneau, the deputy for Charente-Inférieure and Bouchereau, the deputy for Aisne, voted yes to the nominal vote but in reality they were on mission. See Michel BIARD, *Missionnaires de la République*, Paris, CTHS, 2002, p. 480 and 467.
(63) Procès-Verbal de la Convention Nationale, L, p. 82.
(64) AN, C 327 (2), pl. 1445, p. 2 and 3. Moniteur, XXII, 597.
the assembly. However, the series now claims to be coherent and, with the additions and gaps to be found in an archival source controlled by those in power, seeks to provide valuable snapshots of the changing balance of power in the assembly and national public opinion as a whole, both in what it says and in what it does not say. Of the "tremendous upheaval" of the Revolution, writes Michel Vovelle, it is "a reflection of a particularly rich, even privileged source", that can be found in the addresses and petitions that are “assembled in the volumes of the Archives Parlementaires”\textsuperscript{66}. We could not pay better homage to the work carried out for the last half century to make this patrimonial corpus worthy of the present-day demands of research.

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