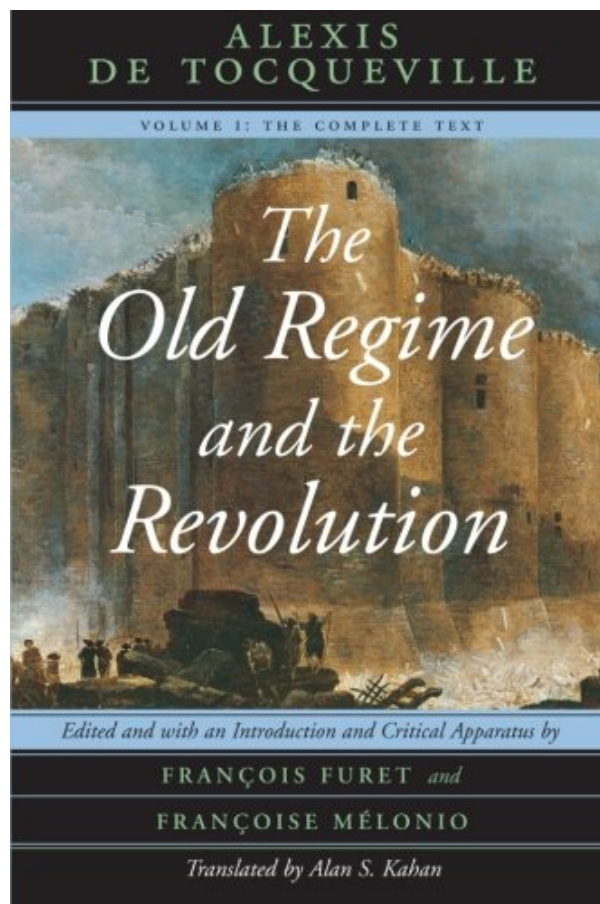
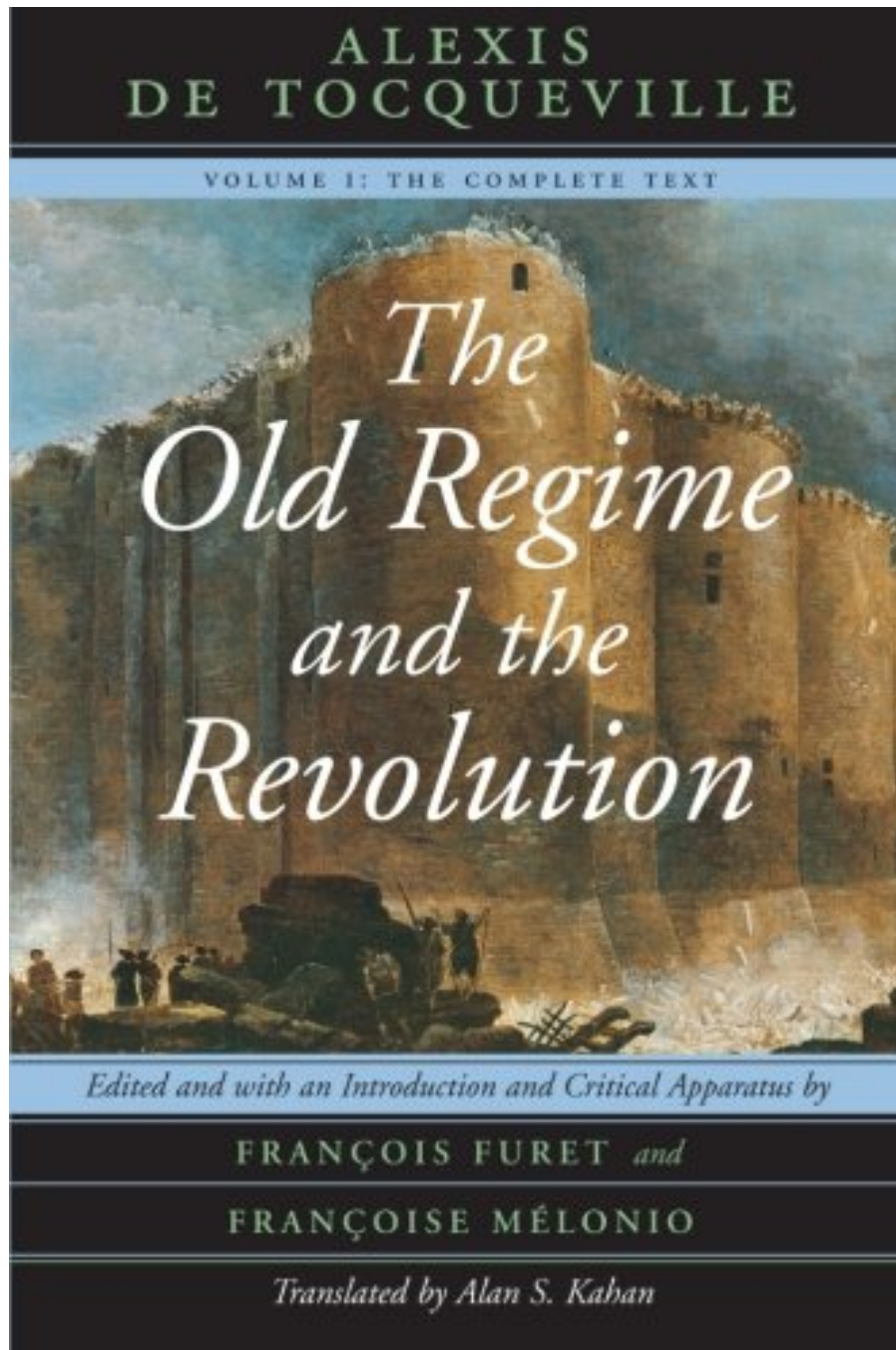


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Language Notes

Text: English (translation)

Original Language: French

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The Old Regime and the Revolution is Alexis de Tocqueville's great meditation on the origins and meanings of the French Revolution. One of the most profound and influential studies of this pivotal event, it remains a relevant and stimulating discussion of the problem of preserving individual and political freedom in the modern world. Alan Kahan's translation provides a faithful, readable rendering of Tocqueville's last masterpiece, and includes notes and variants which reveal Tocqueville's sources and include excerpts from his drafts and revisions. The introduction by France's most eminent scholars of Tocqueville and the French Revolution, Françoise Mélonio and the late François Furet, provides a brilliant analysis of the work.

- Sales Rank: #272342 in Books
- Published on: 2015-03-18
- Released on: 2015-03-24
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 9.00" h x 1.20" w x 6.00" l, 1.30 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 459 pages

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#### Most helpful customer reviews

10 of 11 people found the following review helpful.

Tres Tres Bien

By Sara

Tocqueville has always been, and probably always will be, known as the author of "Democracy in America," a wide-ranging and perspicacious study of the early republic. However, it's when he writes about his own France, and its political system that he knows so intimately, that Tocqueville is at his best. Unlike "Democracy," "The Ancient Regime" is neither sprawling, judgmental, nor inaccurate. These are excusable lapses, of course, in a grand work of poignant analysis, but such deficiencies do not mar "The Ancient Regime." This book is succinct, beautifully written, expertly researched, and incredibly original. Because Tocqueville was French and worked in the French government, this work is much more focused, specific, and accurate than "Democracy" (written hastily after a 9-month tour of America in 1830-31). It is simply a brilliant work, the creation of a curious and sometimes eccentric mind.

5 of 7 people found the following review helpful.

the great French observer of America looks at France

By Orrin C. Judd

Alexis de Tocqueville is, of course, the most perceptive observer of American democracy ever to grace our shores, his Democracy in America one of the most important books ever written about democracy in general and the American Republic in specific. Here, in a less read work, he takes on the origins of the French Revolution and the peculiar French form of democracy it brought and proves an equally keen observer of his own country and countrymen.

De Tocqueville makes several vital points about the French Revolution: first, that it built gradually and, given circumstances in France, was inevitable; second, where the American Revolution had as its lodestar the ideal of freedom, the French Revolution was motivated by a passionate hatred of inequality; third, the demise of all institutions other than the monarchy in France made it certain that when Revolution came, it would be violent and unchecked; finally, this combination of factors lead to the bizarre nature of the French Revolution, with no developed institutions to turn to once the King was gone and with no great emphasis placed on freedom, the French people were willing to tolerate the nihilism of the Terror and the authoritarianism of the governments that replaced the monarchy. He does not make the case, but it lies before us, that the American Revolution was fundamentally a positive action, a demand for greater freedom, but the French Revolution was a negative action, a demand that the few not own more than the many.

This book was to be followed by a second volume dealing with the the Revolution itself, but he died before he could continue the work. That is a shame; it would have been interesting to have some more insight from him into the French, it seems unlikely that anyone has ever rendered a better description of his people than the one he offers in his Conclusion:

When I observe France from this angle [their temperament] I find the nation itself far more remarkable than any of the events in its long history. It hardly seems possible that there can ever have existed any other people so full of contrasts and so extreme in all their doings, so much guided by their emotions and so little

by fixed principles, always behaving better, or worse, than one expected of them....Undisciplined by temperament, the Frenchman is always readier to put up with arbitrary rule, however harsh, of an autocrat than with a free, well-ordered government by his fellow citizens, however worthy of respect they be. At one moment he is up in arms against authority and the next we find him serving the powers that be with a zeal such as the most servile races never display.

In the context of this paragraph, we can begin to understand Vichy France and the bureaucratic tyranny of the modern French nation. I say "begin"...

GRADE: B+

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful.

Bad translation

By Jon Elster

I criticized this translation when it appeared ("Tocqueville in English", European Journal of Sociology 1999), listing some 60 gross mistakes reflecting ignorance of French grammar. Some of my criticisms were cited and endorsed by P. N. Furbank in his review in The New York Review of Books, April, 8 1999. Furbank wrote that "It is to be hoped that in any future edition the University of Chicago Press will take account of these and the many other criticisms of the translation that Mr. Elster has made". I have not checked systematically, but the passages I looked up have not been modified. I wonder why.

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