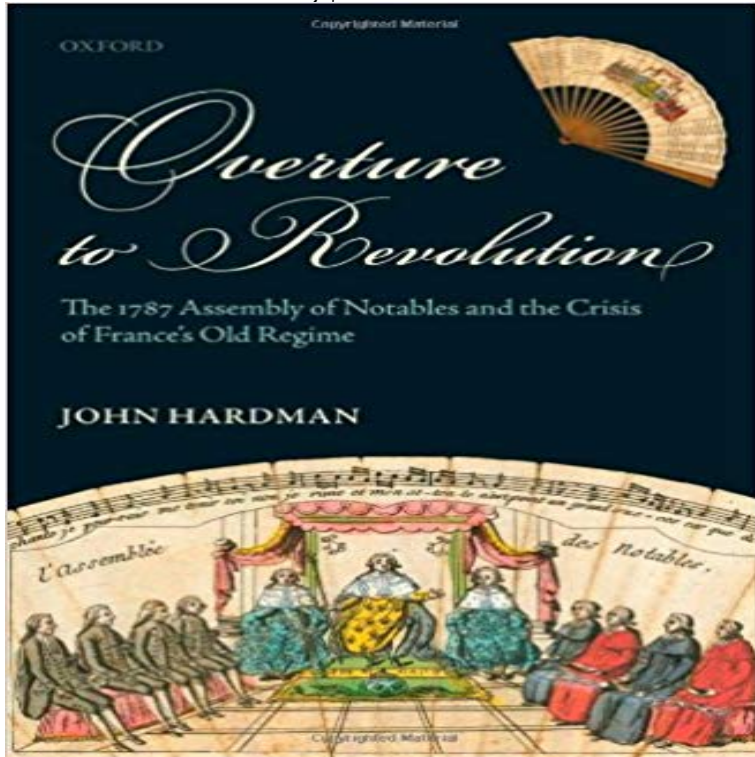


Overture to Revolution: The 1787 Assembly of Notables and the Crisis of France's Old Regime



The Assembly of Notables which met between 22 February and 25 May 1787 was a major turning point in French, even world history: it was the first link in an unbroken chain which led to the French Revolution, which itself formed the template for the modern world. The reform programme which finance minister Calonne, with the full backing of Louis XVI, presented to a hand-picked Assembly of Notables would have transformed France. She would have ended up with a Napoleonic system: equality without liberty. Since that is what she got in the end, after wading through oceans of blood, it might have been better if she had taken the shorter route. Liberty, however, in 1787 was valued more highly than equality and the Notables mercilessly exploited this preference to defeat Calonne and the king. By 1789, equality was back on the agenda and remained there through the vicissitudes of the coming years - but too late for Calonne (who was in exile) or for the king, who never recovered from the blow the Notables had dealt him. In the light of modern scholarship and the latest archival information, John Hardman integrates the various facets of this seminal assembly, which are often considered in isolation (the king, the royal council, the Notables, the role of Necker, and that of public opinion) into a lucid analytical narrative, interspersed with the Notables critique of Calonne's measures as they were successively presented to them.

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